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Young Lawyers Division President
2005-2006

“On August 29, 2005, our profession was presented with a tremendous challenge, and the lawyers in this state responded and met that challenge by assisting their fellow Mississippians with legal problems arising out of Hurricane Katrina.”

The Young Lawyers Division

Standing Ready to assist the public after Hurricane Katrina

Pursuant to an agreement between the Young Lawyers Division of the American Bar Association and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) on December 15, 1972, when a disaster occurs in Mississippi, the Young Lawyers Division of The Mississippi Bar is responsible for the delivery of legal services to disaster victims in the counties declared disaster areas by the President of the United States. The goal of this program is to provide legal services to those who need it most at a time when their need is greatest. Generally, the poor and those victimized by disasters are completely vulnerable on issues that arise out of or are exacerbated by the disaster. The YLD program provides access to justice for disaster victims who lack sufficient resources to secure legal services or who may otherwise be denied assistance because of the disaster.

Five months have now passed since Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast. A report on the The Young Lawyers Division's Disaster Legal Assistance Program is certainly due.

The YLD first established a toll-free hotline on September 2, 2005, and when FEMA opened the first Disaster Recovery Center on September 6, 2005, the YLD began sending volunteer attorneys to be on site to answer critical legal questions. FEMA DRC managers repeatedly told volunteer lawyers how unprecedented it was for them to see lawyers actually working at the DRCs providing free legal

advice to hard hit communities. FEMA ultimately opened 34 DRCs in the State of Mississippi. On October 31, 2005, YLD began staffing those DRCs with the greatest need -- Waveland, Gulfport, Biloxi, Ocean Springs and Moss Point. On site assistance at the DRCs concluded on December 15, 2005. The Disaster Legal Assistance hotline was operational through January 31, 2006.

As of December 15, 2005, over 5,800 victims of Hurricane Katrina have received legal assistance through the Young Lawyers Division program. Approximately, 600 attorneys have volunteered to provide pro bono legal assistance -- about 320 of those have gone to a DRC in one of the 47 disaster-declared counties, providing legal assistance face to face; another 285 attorneys have provided legal assistance by telephone. Seventy of those volunteer attorneys are from out-of-state; these lawyers were specially admitted under Mississippi Supreme Court Order dated September 9, 2005, to provide pro bono legal assistance to disaster victims through the Program. The YLD is grateful for the significant contributions of volunteer attorneys from the AARP Legal Foundation, the law firms of Heller Ehrman, Stoel Rives, DLA Piper Rudnick, as well as from individual lawyers like Susan Marmaduke from Harrang and Mark Hackett from Davis Wright Tremaine who spent weeks in Mississippi providing legal assistance at the DRCs.

To prepare the hundreds of volunteer



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lawyers to provide this assistance, the YLD held 5 training sessions -- 3 at the Bar Center, 1 at MC School of Law and 1 at Ole Miss. Several law professors and local attorneys trained the volunteers in the areas of the law on which they would be advising those devastated by the hurricane, such as wrongful eviction, mortgage and insurance issues. Portions of the Disaster Legal Assistance Reference Manual were updated and revised to include additional areas of the law by the University of Mississippi School of Law Civil Legal Clinic. Law students from MC provided a much needed lunch break for several weeks for the legal assistants answering the hotline.

Fifteen members of the Young Lawyers Division served as DRC coordinators -- organizing volunteer lawyers at over 20 DRCs that we staffed. Local lawyers in several disaster-declared counties provided much needed assistance on the ground when the YLD was unable to staff every DRC opened in the state by meeting with the FEMA DRC managers, fielding legal questions and providing information about the hotline.

Considering our bar is relatively small

-- 8,170 active members, with only 6,655 active in state members, 900 of whom practiced on the coast -- I was encouraged daily to see such an overwhelming response of volunteerism from my fellow colleagues. On August 29, 2005, our pro-

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fession was presented with a tremendous challenge, and the lawyers in this state responded and met that challenge by assisting their fellow Mississippians with legal problems arising out of Hurricane Katrina. Thanks to all the lawyers who worked at the DRCs and who are still providing legal assistance through the hotline.

But the YLD has been busy with other projects as well. When high winds from the hurricane ripped off the roof at the Old

Capitol, we quickly coordinated the fall Bar Admissions Ceremony at Thalia Mara Hall where 225 new lawyers were sworn in to the Mississippi Bar. The Nominations Committee presented an outstanding slate of lawyers for YLD Director positions across the state. The Diversity in the Law Committee has interviewed second year law student candidates for the Mississippi Clerkship Interaction Program and is in the process of recruiting law firms to participate. The Bridge the Gap Seminar for new lawyers transitioning from law school to law practice is scheduled for January 20, 2006 at Eagle Ridge Conference Center. The Mock Trial Case Materials went online in November, and the first round of competition starts on February 4, 2006. Sign up now to judge these talented students! Plans are underway for 2006 projects, including conducting telephonic seminars, publishing practice manuals and implementing Lawyer in Every Classroom programs in local schools, such as the We the Jury program -- an interactive lesson for middle and high school students on the history of the American Jury System, including an actual voir dire of the student juries. ■