

A Day in the Life:

PRO BONO ATTORNEYS

The lawyers of Memphis Area Legal Services & The Community Legal Center strive daily to bring access to justice to all citizens of Memphis & Shelby County. The next few pages will highlight some of the best attorneys from these two local agencies, the volunteers who assist them, and the many ways you can get involved.

LINDA WARREN SEELY: Dishing Out Some Legal Justice at MALS

by KEVIN D. BALKWILL

When I was approached to write a short article about a typical day in the life of Linda Warren Seely, my first thought was how I would ever be able to contain such an article into a short piece, and is any day in Linda's life really typical? Linda does so much that I often wonder how in the world she has time to fit everything into her busy schedule. Nevertheless, I resorted to pounding away at the keys on my laptop in an effort to do her the justice she so deserves.

Linda is the director of private attorney involvement with Memphis Area Legal Services and coordinates pro bono projects for attorneys and other legal professionals. She has been instrumental in recruiting private attorneys to handle the overflow of cases that spill over from the ever demanding need for legal representation, which MALS cannot handle on its own.

Linda has built a network of attorneys who regularly volunteer to represent clients in almost every facet of the law. Through the use of the Atticus Finch network, Linda has opened up a pipeline for private attorney involvement by giving attorneys a wide choice in the types of cases they choose to undertake. Linda has a special ability to instill a sense of prestige and honor in the volunteer attorneys who go beyond the call of duty. She really has a great way of making us all feel good about helping out those who are most in need of legal representation.

Linda has been a tremendous part of the initiation and growth of the Saturday Legal Clinics that have been operating for over a year now. These limited advice clinics have reached out to over 600 persons in the Memphis community and the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. Linda's organizational skills have really made volunteering feel like a gift. I can attribute the regular involvement of volunteer attorneys at these clinics to Linda's ability to reach out to the Memphis legal community, spread the relevant information, and give the volunteers plenty to feel good about. The clinic sites have been beautiful and spacious, and if the pro bono work isn't quite enough to feed the soul, many sites have offered coffee, juice, pastries and fruit for the volunteers. There is no doubt that the volunteers have walked away from these experiences with a happy heart and a sense of accomplishment.

Although I have only touched lightly on her work with Memphis Area Legal Services, Linda's work encompasses so many different avenues that one could not truly grasp the multitude of her work without some mention of it here. Linda has been very active with the local and state bar associations. She is currently a member of the board of the



Pictured are Linda Warren Seely of Memphis Area Legal Services, Inc. (center, front) with volunteer attorneys (back row, left to right) Andrea Prater, David Cook, Lisa LaVigne Kelly, Kevin Balkwill, Bruce Ralston, Robert Green and Sam Blaiss at a Saturday Legal Clinic.

Memphis Bar Association and serves on the Access to Justice Committee. Linda exudes confidence and is very influential in getting her point across, but she does this in such a selfless way that one can easily recognize the validity of her statements. In addition to her work with the local bar, Linda is very active with the Tennessee Bar Association, serving as chair of the Juvenile and Children's Law Section, vice chair of the Dispute Resolution Section, and committee member on the Access to Justice Committee.

Linda has also gotten her feet wet in a variety of other organizations including serving as president for the Tennessee Lawyers Association for Women, Pro Bono Advisor to the Memphis Paralegal Association, serving on the Tennessee Bar Association's Board of Governors, Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth, and Teen Court Project of Tennessee.

She was also awarded the TBA President's Award for Outstanding Service and named one of the 50 most influential women in Memphis by Memphis Woman magazine. After all of that, Linda somehow manages to be a wife, a mother, a parishioner, and probably many other things that are sacred only to her.

Whether we accept it or not, we all owe Linda Warren Seely a debt of gratitude. With the negative perceptions of the legal profession we so often see and hear in the media and by those who are not in the know, Linda has provided a beacon of light in her dedication to the indigent and less fortunate members of our community. For those she has touched and provided a benefit, that negative perception becomes positive. It is this shining light that seeks to equal out the injustices and for that we can all be thankful. ♦

IRENE HALLETT, HAYDEN LAIT & TIMOTHY PRICE: Reaching Out Through the CLC

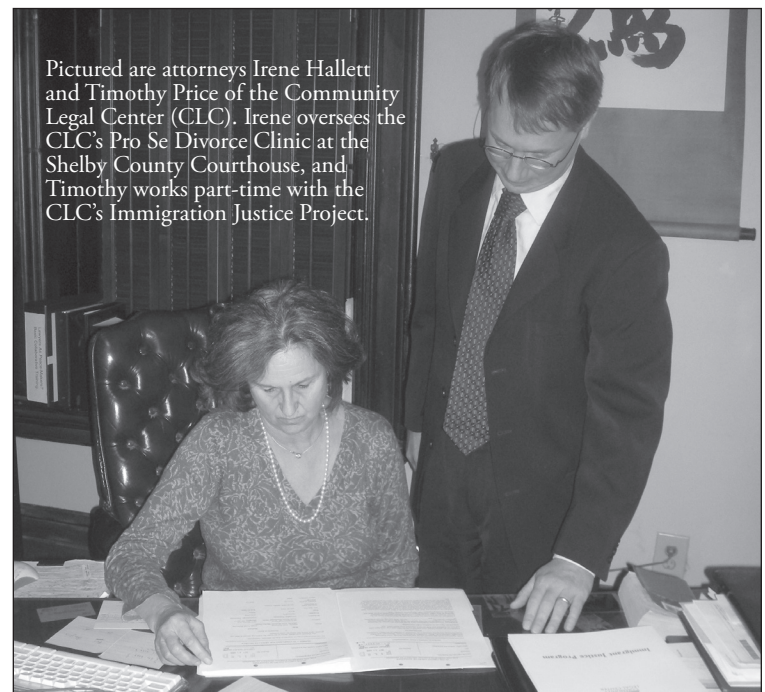
by MEG JONES

Irene Hallett is the staff attorney in the Community Legal Center (CLC) Pro Se Divorce Clinic which is located in the Shelby County Courthouse. The clinic provides assistance with uncontested divorces to families with minor children whose income is below the living wage for Memphis.

Each day at the clinic is a surprise. One day Ms. Hallett walks into the Courthouse and there are people waiting at the door for services. Other days no one is waiting at the door but there are 17 messages on the answering machine. Every day there are people coming to their scheduled appointment, walking into the clinic after being sent down by a judge, or calling to seek legal assistance.

There are two appointments scheduled at 9:30 a.m. each day. On this particular day one client arrives at 9:40 and the other at 10:00. At this first appointment the client is informed about the program, income is verified, and Ms. Hallett explains what the Marital Dissolution Agreement (MDA) is and goes over, in detail, the Parenting Plan (PP). Once child support and visitation are determined, the client drafts the MDA and the PP on one of the Pro Se Clinic computers.

Once the 9:30 a.m. clients are settled at the computer, Ms. Hallett assists the clients who have come for their second or third appointment. Ms. Hallett reviews the client's MDA and PP to assure the documents are notarized, then seats the clients at a computer to complete the complaint. As the morning progresses Ms. Hallett is moving from computer to computer answering client questions, reviewing the documents, correcting the documents, or explaining to the client what corrections are needed. When a client has completed the document(s), Ms. Hallett explains what to do with the documents and how



Pictured are attorneys Irene Hallett and Timothy Price of the Community Legal Center (CLC). Irene oversees the CLC's Pro Se Divorce Clinic at the Shelby County Courthouse, and Timothy works part-time with the CLC's Immigration Justice Project.

to complete the next step in the process. Although the phone is ringing while Ms. Hallett is assisting clients with the documents, those phone calls are picked up by the answering machine and returned after the clients have gone.

As the morning winds down and there are only one or two clients left, a client may turn to her and comment about how busy she is or suggest that she needs some help. She reminds them that we are a not-for-profit clinic and have limited funds. They smile and get back to work but they have started a rapport that continues through the next steps of the process.

The most comprehensive component of CLC's services is