

THE BUSINESS JOURNAL

SERVING THE GREATER TRIAD AREA

Triad Philanthropy

Overwhelmed Legal Aid to get help from N.C. Bar

The Business Journal of the Greater Triad Area - April 6, 2007

by [Todd Cohen](#), Contributing Writer

Three million low-income North Carolinians are eligible for legal services from Legal Aid of North Carolina.

But the Raleigh-based nonprofit law firm, which has a staff of 120 lawyers in 25 offices throughout the state, has the resources to serve only 25,000 clients a year.

And its lawyers are paid a starting salary of \$37,500, compared to \$135,000 at big private firms.

To strengthen legal services and make them more accessible to low-income people, Legal Aid and the North Carolina Bar Association are working to raise money and awareness.

"Those of us in the legal profession have a special responsibility to use our community leadership and civic influence to provide access to justice," says Andrew Spainhour, general counsel at Replacements Ltd. in Greensboro and co-chair of the Triad fund drive for Legal Aid.

Legal Aid of North Carolina in the past has raised only 1 percent of its budget from individual contributions, mainly through mail appeals to lawyers, said George Hausen, the group's executive director.

Now, its offices in the Triad and Triangle aim to expand their fundraising.

The Greensboro office, with 11 attorneys serving 2,500 clients a year in six counties, has set a goal of raising \$100,000 a year in individual contributions, up from \$10,000 last year, said Spainhour.

The Triangle office aims to raise \$1 million over three years.

Other co-chairs of the Triad effort, which already has raised \$53,000, are Janet Ward Black of Ward Black Law in Greensboro; Jim Morgan of Morgan Herring, Morgan, Green, Rosenblutt & Gill in High Point; and Gerard Davidson of Smith Moore in Greensboro.

Black, who on June 30 will become president of the North Carolina Bar Association, said increasing access to legal services for the poor will be her focus at the 14,000-member organization.

Legal Aid is producing a 12-minute video on the statewide need for legal services, and Black said she will ask the association's board to let it be screened at all continuing-education seminars lawyers are required to take each year.

The association also will support legislative proposals to increase funding for legal services to the poor using funds from court costs, and for the North Carolina Legal Education Assistance Foundation to help pay college and law

school debt for lawyers willing to continue working at Legal Aid.

Law school grads can face school debt totaling \$100,000 or more, she said, making it difficult for Legal Aid to retain them at their current pay.

The North Carolina State Bar, which regulates the legal profession, will vote in April to require every lawyer to participate in its program that uses money from lawyers' trust accounts for grants, including support for Legal Aid of North Carolina, Black said.

Starting with annual dues they start paying in June, she said, the association will let members designate an additional payment to benefit Legal Aid through a new endowment fund.

And for an entire day next spring, the association will sponsor an "ask-a-lawyer" program that will let any North Carolina citizen phone lawyers for free legal counsel.

"Our goal," Black says, "is to increase lawyer volunteers by 10 percent a year for the next five years."

Todd Cohen is editor and publisher of the Philanthropy Journal at www.philanthropyjournal.org and a contributor to The Business Journal. He can be reached at (919) 573-4642; send nonprofit news to tcohen@ajf.org or fax it to (919) 573-4666.