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by Kathy Para, The JBA Pro Bono Committee Chairwoman

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Jacksonville Area Legal Aid hosted its 13th Annual Equal Justice Awards reception Jan. 10. The reception honored members of the legal community who have shown a commitment to the community at large by furthering JALA's mission of providing free civil legal services to low-income persons.

The reception was held at The River Club. Mike Freed, president of The Jacksonville Bar Association, served as the master of ceremonies. Hank Coxe, former president of The JBA and The Florida Bar, delivered an empowering speech as the event's keynote speaker.

The accolades included the President's Award winners, given to those who have displayed exemplary assistance to JALA throughout the year.

Also, firms that have had 100 percent of their attorneys contribute to JALA were recognized.

In addition to thanking its financial supporters, JALA also recognized a few of the many who have provided excellent pro bono assistance in the past year.

This was a time to thank all the attorneys for their service, as well as recognize some who have made outstanding contributions.

Among those honored were attorneys William Gallogly, Edward Jackson, Maryanne Yeomans, Emerson Lotzia, Clive Morgan, Refik Eler, Fred Gazaleh, Richard Celler, Debbie Lee-Clark, Keith Johnson and Jessica Dumas.

These individuals dedicated many hours to aiding low-income clients throughout Clay, Duval and Nassau counties. They helped in a variety of ways, including conducting intake with residents of the Sulzbacher Center, assisting patients of the Northeast Florida Medical Legal Partnership following denial of Social Security benefits, aiding low-income seniors with probate and advance directives, representing clients in bankruptcy matters, assisting nonprofit organizations, working to stabilize blighted neighborhoods, and representing clients in family law and consumer matters.

In addition, JALA recognized Florida Coastal School of Law, the 2011 recipient of the Robert J. Beckham Equal Justice Award. This award honors an individual or organization that has done the most to promote the cause of equal justice for low-income people.

"We are honored and humbled to be recognized in this way and we look forward to partnering with JALA to help those in need in Jacksonville for years to come," said Coastal Law Dean Peter Goplerud, also a professor.

JALA extends a deep and sincere "thank you" to all pro bono attorneys for their commendable work throughout 2011. The need is immense and hundreds of pro bono attorneys throughout the Fourth Circuit are helping to meet that need one client at a time.

Attorneys interested in pro bono opportunities in Duval, Clay, Nassau and St. Johns counties are encouraged to contact Kathy Para, kathy.para@jaxlegalaid.org, chairperson of The Jacksonville Bar Association Pro Bono Committee.



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