

PRESS RELEASE

Baker Donelson Recognized for Pro Bono Legal Services Website

March 26, 2012

Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell & Berkowitz, PC has been awarded the Tennessee Bar Association's 2012 Corporate Counsel Pro Bono Law Firm Award in recognition of its role in the development of OnlineTNJustice.org, a website that allows Tennesseans to seek free legal advice from volunteer lawyers.

The award, which was presented on March 24 at the 2012 Corporate Counsel Pro Bono Initiative Gala, recognizes the law firm that best exemplifies extraordinary commitment to access to justice ideals, pro bono service and the Corporate Counsel Covenant of Service. Baker Donelson was previously honored with this award in 2008, making it the only firm thus far to have received this honor twice.

Developed with the financial support and technical expertise of the information technology team in the Memphis office of Baker Donelson, OnlineTNJustice.org was designed to provide an online service for Tennesseans who need civil legal help but are unable to afford a lawyer. It is a virtual walk-in clinic where clients can request brief advice and counsel about a specific civil legal issue from a volunteer lawyer. The lawyers provide information and basic legal advice without any expectation of long-term representation.

George T. "Buck" Lewis, former TBA President and a shareholder in the Memphis office of Baker Donelson, said, "I am extremely proud of our information technology team, led by Chief Information Officer John D. Green, and the work they did to create a website that is the first statewide resource of its type in the country. It is an innovative approach to the delivery of pro bono legal services and could become a model for other states. We've already been contacted by several state bar associations that are interested in developing similar sites to provide another option for low-income clients seeking legal help."

Currently more than 100 low-income Tennesseans are receiving free legal assistance every month through the OnlineTNJustice.org website, a joint project of the Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services and the Tennessee Bar Association.

While Tennessee lawyers have held thousands of legal clinics and helped tens of thousands of fellow residents through traditional pro bono methods, this website was created to eliminate barriers, such as geographic location, work schedule or family obligations, that keep those in need from receiving free legal help. It also was developed to expand pro bono services in rural areas of the state and to provide an alternative source of assistance for legal aid clients who are eligible for services but turned away due to an agency's lack of resources.