

Congressman John Lewis impresses Cleveland crowd

By Elena Manoli

Congressman John Lewis has always had a passion for justice, said Congressman Louis Stokes. Stokes, Lewis' colleague in the House of Representatives and longtime friend, as well as member of The Legal Aid

Society of Cleveland's Board of Directors, regaled attendees at Legal Aid's Annual Report to the Community with tales of Lewis' pursuit for equality in his speech introducing the night's keynote speaker where stories ranged from giving dead chickens on his backyard farm a

proper burial to Lewis' participation in the Freedom Rides of the American Civil Rights Movement.

Lewis addressed over 800 supporters of Legal Aid at the Renaissance Hotel last month, commending Legal Aid for their efforts. Legal Aid is

the law firm for low-income individuals, whose mission is to secure justice and resolve fundamental problems for those who are indigent and vulnerable by providing high quality legal services and working for systemic solutions.

Lewis applauded Legal Aid's staff and local private attorneys who provide

pro bono services as a part of Legal Aid's Volunteer Lawyers program, urging them to never cease helping those in need. He appealed to audience to continue fighting for what they believe is right, and to "continue getting in the way."

He went on, "we're too quiet. Get in the way, get in trouble, necessary trouble, good trouble."

Also on hand to address the crowd were

Legal Aid Executive Director Colleen Cotter and Board President Ilah Adkins. Cotter appealed to the audience for their help, bringing to the surface the impact that Legal Aid has on our community while playing off the night's theme: "It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness."

"Faced with the often overwhelming needs of our clients combined with our limited resources to address those needs, it would be understandable if we found ourselves cursing the darkness. Understandable, yes. But futile. Instead Legal Aid is very much in the candle-lighting business," she said.

Board President Ilah Adkins, a former Legal Aid client, expressed her

thanks for all that Legal Aid has provided her as well as recognized key Legal Aid board and staff members for their special service to the organization. Following the evening's program, Lewis was on hand to sign copies of his book, "Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement."

Upon closing, Lewis urged the crowd to realize and remember that no matter how much we try to point out each other's difference, we are all members of the same community, both locally and globally, and implored the audience to put aside their differences to work for justice and equality: "We all arrived here in different ships, but we are all in the same boat now."

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