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UVA LAWYER

THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA SCHOOL OF LAW

LEARNING BY DOING



Justice = Law + Mercy



In her role as supervising attorney with the housing unit at The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland, **MARIA SMITH '83** advocates for people in disputes that involve basic human needs. Her workload, about two dozen active cases and counting, never ends and was part of the cover story of the July issue of *American Lawyer* magazine, "The Justice Gap: How Big Law is Failing Legal Aid."

Eviction cases are among her most urgent work. Usually the tenant does not have a lawyer. An eviction judgment can result in a person having just seven days to find a new place to live, setting into motion a downward spiral that's difficult to escape. An eviction on a tenant's record reduces her chance

of getting safe and affordable housing and could disqualify her for subsidized housing. Smith's representation can stop such a free fall from happening.

Smith has advocated for people who are marginalized since she graduated from the Law School. She worked for the nonprofit Institute for Child Advocacy and The Legal Aid Society before heading to Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Brazil to work alongside people living in violence and economic oppression. In 1998 she returned to The Legal Aid Society.

Over the years many of Smith's clients have told her that because of her representation they avoided homelessness, which meant they could graduate on time, keep their children out of the foster care system, or continue their cancer treatments.

"In some ways I wish that all policy makers could be homeless for 24 hours to see how awful it is," says Smith. "Even things as simple as where to keep birth certificates, tax returns, and receipts for security deposits or utility bills. A person can't apply for HUD-assisted housing without birth certificates for the entire household. Imagine if someone in the household was born elsewhere."

"At the Law School I sat in the same classroom with some of the most brilliant legal minds in the country. I was impressed that people so intelligent were also so kind. I knew I could not be brilliant, but I could be kind and compassionate, and ultimately that is what mattered most. I still think of Cal Woodard writing on the blackboard, *justice = law + mercy*."

The article in *American Lawyer* notes that while profits are up for many law firms, the most generous ones contribute little more than one-tenth of one percent of their gross revenue to organizations that provide basic legal service to the poor. Pro bono work plays a crucial role in legal aid, but nothing is as important as increased funding.

"I hope more people will be inspired to support their local legal services program," Smith says. "Some people buy homes for \$10 million. Imagine what a difference a \$10 million gift could do for a couple of legal aid programs."

—REBECCA BARNES



CHRISTOPHER S. KNOPEK

received the Joseph P. Milton Professionalism and Civility award from the Florida Chapters American Board of Trial Advocates convention in Fort Lauderdale. He is chief legal officer and general counsel for Laser Spine Institute in Tampa.

ROBERT P. LATHAM is listed in *Best Lawyers 2016* in commercial litigation, First Amendment law, litigation-First Amendment, litigation-intellectual property, litigation-patent, and sports law. He is a partner with Jackson Walker in Dallas and Houston, Tex.



GEOFF LEWIS has been named president of RE/MAX Holdings, Inc. in Denver, Colo. He previously served as executive vice president and chief legal officer.

JEFFREY E. OLEYNIK is listed in *Chambers USA 2015* in antitrust and litigation: general commercial law and has been named

Greensboro, N.C., 2016 lawyer of the year by *Best Lawyers* in bankruptcy and creditor debtor rights/insolvency and reorganization law. He is also listed as an industry leader in *Best Lawyers 2016* in antitrust law, bankruptcy and creditor debtor rights/insolvency, and reorganization law. He is a partner with Brooks, Pierce, McLendon, Humphrey & Leonard.

JOHN M. SHEFTALL is listed in *Georgia Super Lawyers 2015* in estate planning & probate. He is also listed in *Best Lawyers 2016* in litigation-trusts and estates and trusts and estates. He is a partner with Hatcher, Stubbs, Land, Hollis, & Rothschild in Columbus, where he focuses his practice on estate planning and administration and fiduciary litigation.

STEVEN W. SLOAN is listed in *Texas Super Lawyers 2015* in employment & labor and *Best Lawyers 2016* in employment law-management and labor law-management. He is of counsel with Thompson & Knight in Dallas.

CRAIG OWEN WHITE has been reappointed to the Trade Advisory Committee on Africa. He was first appointed to the committee in 2013. White is a partner with Hahn Loeser in Cleveland, Ohio, where he co-chairs the food and beverage and government practice groups. He is a member of the board