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LAET-Knoxville Office Moves to Stair Building

KNOXVILLE – For over 50 years, the lawyers of Legal Aid of East Tennessee (LAET) have been zealously advocating for the rights of Knoxville’s most vulnerable citizens, making sure that they receive fairness in the justice system regardless of how much money they have.

As a non-profit law firm, LAET’s efforts to ensure justice for all are dependent upon funding from a variety of sources. All too often the need far exceeds the available resources. In recognition of this need to provide high-quality legal services to those who otherwise could not afford to hire a lawyer, Lincoln Memorial University (LMU), with the cooperation of the Old City Hall Knoxville Partnership (OCHKP) and the City of Knoxville, has agreed to fully renovate and lease the Stair Building on the campus of LMU’s Duncan School of Law to LAET for \$1 a year.

A lease signing ceremony will take place Monday, August 22, at 2:00 p.m. in front of the Stair Building. Those signing the lease will be Knoxville Mayor Madeline Rogero, LAET Executive Director Sheri Fox, and LMU President B. James Dawson. Each also will speak briefly. Judge Gary Wade, Dean of the Duncan School of Law, will emcee the ceremony and provide additional comments.

“The generosity of LMU and the cooperation of the OCHKP and the City in making this arrangement possible send a clear message that justice for all is a priority in this community,” said LAET’s Executive Director Sheri Fox. “Not only will this generosity help LAET narrow the justice gap, but it also means that our clients and our entire staff will reap the numerous benefits of working in modern, beautifully appointed office space with upgraded technology.”

Judge Gary Wade, Dean of LMU Duncan School of Law, commented, “LMU founded the Duncan School of Law to prepare and educate lawyers to serve rural populations in Appalachia and beyond, while Legal Aid of East Tennessee provides a broad scope of civil legal assistance and advocacy to endangered populations in the 26 counties they serve. At LMU, we truly feel this investment in renovating the Stair Building to make way for LAET is an extension of our mission of service to humanity.”

The Stair Building was originally constructed in the mid-1800s as part of what is now Tennessee School for the Deaf (TSD). During the Civil War, the building was used as a hospital by the Union Army. Following the war, TSD reclaimed the site. The City of Knoxville acquired the building in 1922 when it purchased the TSD campus. TVA renovated the building and used it as office space during the World’s Fair. The Stair Building was most recently the home of Lindsay & Maples Architects but has been vacant for several years.

Following renovations, LAET will move its Knoxville office from its current location on Gay Street to the Summit Hill location. The building will house attorneys, paralegals, administrative and support staff, and LAET’s information technology center.

“The Stair Building and the Duncan School of Law building have a long history of serving East Tennessee, first as a school for hearing impaired and later as the center of Knoxville government,” said LAET’s Sheri Fox. “We are excited that the next chapter of this facility will include LAET’s 51-year legacy of serving the public good.”

Legal Aid of East Tennessee’s mission is to ensure justice for elderly, abused, and low-income people by providing a broad scope of civil legal assistance and advocacy. LAET serves eligible persons in 26 counties through offices in Chattanooga, Cleveland, Knoxville, Johnson City, Maryville, and Morristown.

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