



## GOVERNORS' AWARD PROFILE

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# MARK E. STEPHENS - 2016 RECIPIENT KBA GOVERNORS' AWARD



Each year, the Knoxville Bar Association bestows its highest honor – The Governors' Award – upon an attorney who has distinguished himself/ herself as a role model within the legal community. This award serves as recognition of the distinction and honor an attorney has brought to the legal profession by way of enduring, faithful, and distinguished service. At this year's annual meeting on December 9th, the KBA presented this award to Mark Stephens, Knox County Public Defender.

A 1979 graduate of the University of Tennessee College of Law, Mark began his legal career in private practice before serving as an assistant district attorney. He was elected Public Defender in 1990 and is the only elected Public Defender Knox County has ever had! Under Mark's direction, the Public Defender's Office has achieved national acclaim for its innovative approach to criminal representation and efforts to reduce recidivism.

After representing indigent defendants for a number of years, Mark grew concerned with the many repeat offenders who continually utilize indigent legal services. Recognizing that more could be done for deserving clients than simply addressing their criminal charges, he worked with legal experts at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government to develop a new, more holistic approach to representation that might help individuals avoid committing future crimes.

In 2003, he founded the Community Law Office, a program that has seen tremendous success and brings special pride to our legal community. The Community Law Office aims to help clients break the cycle of criminal behavior by addressing not only their legal issues, but the social issues underlying their behavior. For those willing to receive help, the program provides access to social workers who assist clients with vocational and employment needs, addiction, and health related issues. These social workers help to develop a "life plan" for each participant. Over forty volunteers assist in administering the program, as well as numerous organizations that have formed Community Law Office partnerships, including the Helen Ross McNabb Center, the Boys and Girls Club, and Cherokee Mental Health. The program now serves as a model for public defender offices throughout the country, with public defenders, criminal defense attorneys, and legal scholars often studying the program. This program truly makes our profession proud.



Not surprisingly, Mark's work has brought numerous awards. In 2001, he was presented with the Stephen B. Bright Award by the organization Gideon's Promise. He has twice earned the Robert Richie Award from the Tennessee Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers, once in 2000 and again in 2007. He also received the KBA Law and Liberty Award in 1995 and the University of Tennessee Pro Bono Award in 2001.

He has been active in legal associations. He is presently the chairman of the National Association for Public Defenders and a Board Member of Gideon's Promise, a public defender training center named for the landmark Supreme Court case requiring states to provide counsel for indigent criminal defendants. Mark has also served as President of the Tennessee Public Defenders Conference and presently serves as adjunct faculty member at the University of Tennessee College of Law.

Mark and his wife, Lynette, have three children, Jessica, Elizabeth and Madeline. The presenter stated the Knoxville Bar Association was proud of Mark's work and expressed appreciation on behalf of the Association. Mark is an outstanding member of the Knoxville bar and is deserving of our Association's highest honor.