

SBLC 2012 Gala

Co-Honoree

Shelly Abrams



Shelly Abrams has supported and helped guide SBLC since its earliest years. She joined the SBLC family in 1991 as a volunteer tutor, when her friend Ellen Feldman (then an attorney at Venable) invited Shelly to volunteer with her at SBLC. In the years before SBLC had the funding to hire trained adult education instructors, Shelly became a volunteer classroom teacher and then was approached to join the SBLC Board of Directors. She served as a board member from 1992 – 1996, including as Treasurer in 1993 and President in 1994, as well as Secretary and chair of the Nominating Committee in 1996. Shelly joined the SBLC Advisory Council in 1997, and still serves in that capacity today. She began her volunteer participation while working as a practicing attorney. And later, Shelly became the Executive Director of Special Counsel, a local office of a national temporary and permanent placement agency specializing in the legal industry where she is today.

Beginning as early as 1992, fundraising has been a major focus of Shelly's involvement with SBLC. She has participated in organizing every SBLC fundraising event since its inception. From the South Baltimore Barbeque (SoBoQ) events in the '90s to our first Gala in 2000 (our 10th anniversary) to last year's 20th anniversary celebration, Shelly has served on committees for these events, often chairing one of the sub-committees (wine raffle, food, auction, etc). In 2006, she co-chaired the 15th Anniversary Gala. Shelly was awarded a Mayor's Citation for Volunteer Service in 1997, for the many volunteer hours she contributed to SBLC's success during her six years on the board.

During her term as Board Treasurer, Shelly played an instrumental role in writing the first adult education and family literacy grant request to the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). SBLC was the only community-based organization to receive this important grant in FY 94, even though several other CBOs also had applied. This grant funding was the stabilizing factor which ensured SBLC's survival as a nonprofit organization. With the first MSDE grant, SBLC finally was able to hire permanent full-time staff, as well as part-time adult education instructors and support staff. SBLC was also now in a position to leverage private funding towards the MSDE grant—and this meant sustainability! Because of Shelly's role as a front-line direct service volunteer as well as a board member/officer, she could present both perspectives in the grant proposal. The success with this grant helped ensure that SBLC would not only survive, but continue to thrive and grow.

Shelly's service has included every aspect of the organization including: event organizing, cultivating donors, board development, grant writing, bookkeeping, administrative help, tutoring, even helping with our Ravens parking. She has volunteered thousands of hours of time during the past twenty years and has donated not only money, but many in-kind items as well. One of our longest-term ongoing donors, Shelly has been a member of our Leaders in Literacy society since its creation.

Sonia Socha, Executive Director of SBLC since 1993, values her partnership with Shelly, especially in the difficult and uncertain early years: "I could always rely on Shelly for specific help and also professional guidance and support--all of which are so valuable to an Executive Director. In the younger years of the organization, board members had to be 'hands on' and Shelly was definitely that and more."

Shelly has given generously of her time, talent and resources and has demonstrated tremendous passion toward SBLC over the years. Her enthusiasm has influenced supporters, volunteers, learners, and the many other people she comes in contact with on behalf of SBLC. She has truly been a leader in volunteer service. We at SBLC are honored to have her support.