

SBLC 2012 Gala Co-Honoree



A corporate partnership often begins with individual volunteers. And that is exactly how the South Baltimore Learning Center started its relationship with Venable LLP. Over the years, various attorneys who work at this firm (and in some cases, their spouses) have volunteered with SBLC. With nearly 600 attorneys in offices across the country practicing in all areas of corporate and business law, complex litigation, intellectual property, and regulatory and government affairs, Venable has been named one of America's top 100 law firms. Although this 100-year-old firm is headquartered in Washington D. C., its Baltimore office team has been our primary partnership link.

During the 20 years of SBLC's existence, members of the Venable staff have volunteered their time as tutors and classroom assistants, as well as members of the Board, Advisory Council, and Gala Committees. These special individuals have donated thousands of volunteer hours on behalf of SBLC and our learners. They and their colleagues have also given individual cash donations, supported our fundraising events, and donated in-kind services and items. Three of these individuals have been members of our Leaders in Literacy, a special group of generous donors.

Ellen Feldman, one of SBLC's first Venable volunteers, came to SBLC on the recommendation of her neighbor, Chuck Morton, now a partner at Venable. She describes her SBLC experience: "I started volunteering in early 1990, shortly after I started working at Venable. Because my mother was a reading specialist, I was interested in literacy, and living in Federal Hill, I could make an impact close to home. I got Shelly Abrams to do the literacy training program with me, and then we were assigned to students." In the spirit of "paying it forward," Ellen was honoring Chuck's good deed. Her friend Shelly Abrams also stayed with SBLC and is being recognized tonight as well.

In addition to serving as a tutor, Ellen was one of three Venable attorneys who have been on the SBLC Board of Directors. The firm has also been represented on the Advisory Council since the latter's formation. As directors and advisors through the years, these key players have generously given their advice, professional expertise and support, helping SBLC to thrive and grow.

Over time, all of the Venable/SBLC volunteers became even more invested in our mission and, like Chuck and Ellen, spread the word about their involvement. And through the many connections to these Venable employees, SBLC has expanded its network of donors and volunteers.

From the "individual connection" came the opportunity for SBLC to request funding from the firm's foundation. Beginning in 2003, Venable has donated every year to SBLC, through a combination of grants, contributions and sponsorships totaling more than \$50,000. In addition, the firm has provided substantial in-kind support. Whether hosting the SBLC Advisory Council meetings in their offices, providing lunch to attendees, or welcoming our Leaders in Literacy in 2008 and 2010 to celebrate their major donor event in Venable's elegant corporate lounge, Venable has been very gracious and generous.

Corporate philanthropy through partnerships is a critical component when it comes to supporting the important work of Baltimore's nonprofit organizations. Firms such as Venable LLP demonstrate the comprehensive commitment (volunteers, cash contributions, in-kind support, and on-going investment) that is characteristic of the most valuable corporate partners. What began as an interest in our mission by neighborhood volunteers has evolved into a long-term symbiotic partnership between two organizations committed to helping educationally disadvantaged adults.

We thank Venable LLP for their long-term, generous support of adult literacy and the South Baltimore Learning Center.