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## Touchdown pass to West End Center



*A Georgia law student serving for the summer figured some good, old-fashioned southern football would be good for both the charity and the lawyers slugging it out*

### The center

The center, now in its 30<sup>th</sup> year, teaches children in three main subject areas: social competence, literacy and fitness and nutrition. Its success rates are impressive. For example, among students that have completed two or more years at the center since 2001, 80 percent have graduated from high school. What's more, only 0.3 percent of the females have become pregnant.

But the cash-strapped organization has warned it may have to merge with another non-profit or shut its doors.

"I wanted to give to an organization that is unique to the Roanoke community," says Simpson. "West End serves 140 children here, and they're helping a lot of families below the poverty line. It would be sad to see an organization like that go to waste."

The flag football game seemed a perfect chance for charity. The 16 players and one referee donated \$10 each to participate. Players divided into two teams: Red and Yellow. David Paxton, a partner with Gentry Locke Rakes & Moore, served as referee. He was a member of the Andrew Lewis High School football team in the 1970s that played T.C. Williams in a state championship game. The movie "Remember the Titans" was about that T.C. Williams team. Paxton later played in college.

"David was really good at giving us instructions," says Simpson. "If we didn't have a right, he was quick to blow his whistle."

### 'Fighters'

Among the players was James Creekmore, owner of The Creekmore Law Firm in Daleville and Blacksburg. Creekmore has been a member of the West End Center's board since 1996 and has tutored at the center. Kaye Hale, the center's executive director for 25 years, attended to watch the game. Hale says she welcomes the opportunity for more lawyers and young professionals to get involved with the center.

"Lawyers don't give up," says Hale. "They're fighters."

The Red team made an impressive rally in the second half of the game. But the Yellow team won by the final score of 23-6.

"We pulverized the other team," says Simpson, who played for the Yellow.

Six law firms sponsored the event: Gentry Locke Rakes & Moore; The Creekmore Law Firm PC; Woods Rogers PC; Lichtenstein Fishwick & Johnson PLC; Magee, Foster Goldstein & Sayers PC; and Tax Strategies Inc. Lexis Nexis provided promotional sponsorship.

The scrimmage raised a total of \$665 for the West End Center.

*(Jill Elswick is a Roanoke-based freelance writer.)*

By Jill Elswick

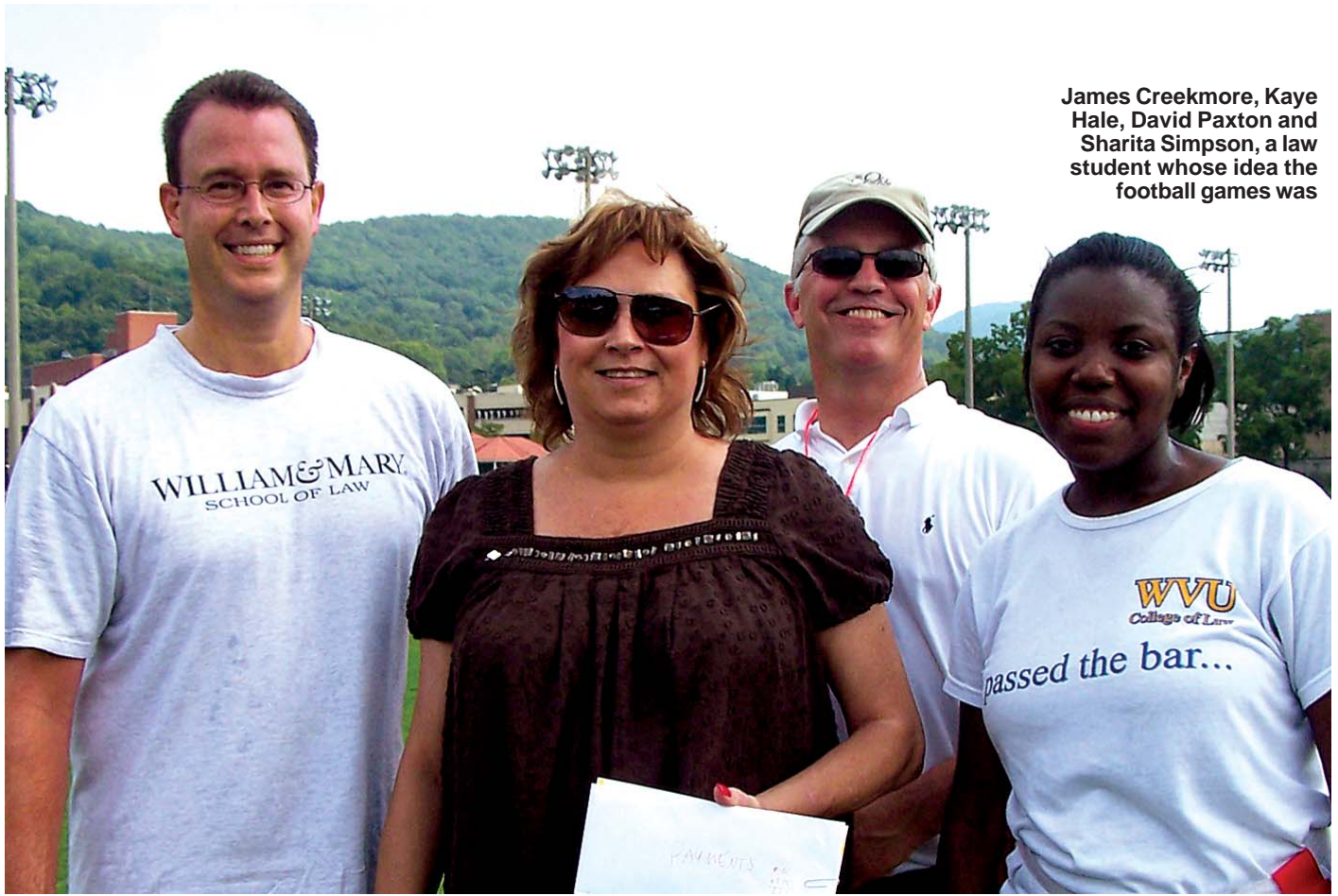
It isn't often that competing law firms get together to share credit for a good cause—while beating each other's brains out for sport. But that's what happened on River's Edge field in Roanoke in late July.

Staff members of several Roanoke Valley law firms came to battle it out for a friendly game of flag football benefiting Roanoke's West End Center for Youth. Many had family in tow on the hot summer day for the event dubbed "Star City Scrimmage."

Sherita Simpson, a third-year law school student and summer associate for Gentry Locke Rakes & Moore in Roanoke, dreamed up the event. An experienced flag football player, Simpson originally had the idea to start a game among other young people working at local law firms.

"I'm from Georgia," says Simpson. "We take football very seriously, including flag football."

Simpson's thought quickly expanded to include employees of any law firm that wanted to play in the flag football game. She also decided the event should be a fundraiser. When she learned about the West End Center for Youth and its current financial challenges, Simpson knew it was the organization she wanted to help.



James Creekmore, Kaye Hale, David Paxton and Sharita Simpson, a law student whose idea the football games was

