Senior Advocate Wins Inaugural NAELA Elder Leadership Award

**Dedication to spurring national senior volunteerism key to Dr. Cole’s victory**

Cleveland, OH (May 3, 2007) – Dr. Elbert C. Cole, an 89-year old Missouri reverend who has spent the past 20 years motivating American senior citizens to join in community improvement efforts, is the recipient of the inaugural National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys (NAELA) Elder Leadership Award.

Dr. Cole accepted the award Thursday, May 3 at the 2007 NAELA Symposium in Cleveland. Cole is the founder of the Shepherd’s Centers of America, an interfaith, nonprofit organization that encourages elder involvement in community service. He was one of four seniors nationwide in the running for the award, which honors elder involvement in state or national issues.

“I’m truly honored to receive the first-ever NAELA Elder Leadership Award,” said Dr. Cole, following the announcement. “This has been a labor of love and I’ve been blessed to see so many seniors now using their life wisdom and skills to make a difference in their communities.”

Other candidates for the Elder Leadership Award, co-sponsored by GRAND Magazine, were 91-year-old Florida volunteer advocate Bess (Budd) Lander Bell, long-time Newsday columnist Saul Friedman and Eugene Lehrmann, a former AARP national president from Wisconsin.

Elder law leaders say the four have been outspoken champions for their respective causes – whether it involve improving the lives of American senior citizens, people with disabilities or children – and have served as an inspiration to their communities. Each was nominated by a NAELA member and had to be 65 or older.

“Elbert Cole embodies the activist spirit we’re hoping to see increase within the nation’s elder community,” said NAELA president Donna Bashaw, an Elder Law attorney based in Laguna...
Hills, CA. “This award is designed to honor seniors who have frequently given back to their community, as well as to promote more volunteerism among the senior ranks.” In 1975, Dr. Cole founded the Shepherd’s Centers of America. In the past two decades, the organization has grown from one center in Kansas City, Mo., to about 75 centers in 21 states serving tens of thousands of older adults. The centers partner with all religious groups and are led by independent boards of trustees, each sharing the common mission to involve seniors in community improvement efforts.

The award ceremony is one of many activities taking place during the symposium, which ends Sunday. Elder law attorneys from across the country will be discussing important topics including the long-term care crisis in America. The event also coincides with National Elder Law Month, when NAELA members nationwide offer special living will days, public seminars, elder law clinics and other activities designed to educate the public.

In addition to watching Dr. Cole accept the award Thursday, symposium attendees also saw a video presentation highlighting his life and work. As part of the honor, a monetary donation was made to the Shepherd’s Centers, his chosen charity.

Representatives of GRAND Magazine – a publication catering to grandparents and retiring Baby Boomers – say they hope the award helps encourage more local senior volunteer activity. “It is a great pleasure to be involved with this award and to recognize the outstanding contributions and accomplishments of Dr. Cole and the other finalists,” said Jonathan Micocci, President of GRAND Magazine. “The commitment these individuals have made to advancing their causes is an inspiration to us all.”

**What is Elder Law?**

Elder Law is a specialized area that involves representing, counseling and assisting seniors, people with disabilities and their families in connection with a variety of legal issues, with a primary emphasis on promoting the highest quality of life for
individuals. Typically, Elder Law addresses the convergence of legal needs with the social, psychological, medical and financial needs of individuals. The Elder Law practitioner handles estate planning and counsels clients about planning for incapacity with health care decision-making documents. The Elder Law attorney also assists clients in planning for possible long-term care needs, including at-home care, assisted living or nursing home care. Locating the appropriate type of care, coordinating public and private resources to finance the cost of care and working to ensure the client’s right to quality care are all part of the Elder Law practice.

About NAELA
Established in 1987, the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys (NAELA) is a non-profit association that assists lawyers, bar organizations and others. Members of NAELA are attorneys who are experienced and trained in working with the legal problems of aging Americans and individuals of all ages with disabilities. The mission of the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys is to establish NAELA members as the premier providers of legal advocacy, guidance and services to enhance the lives of people with special needs and people as they age. NAELA currently has more than 5,000 members across the U.S., Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom. For more information, visit www.naela.org