

What “Bang” Do You Get for Your Buck at the Academy?

by Rebecca J. Britton



Rebecca Britton's Fayetteville civil litigation practice with Hutchens, Senter & Britton, P.A., concentrates on medical negligence, personal injury, wrongful death, civil rights and sexual assault cases. Since joining the Academy in 1992, she has served on the board, as vice president for public education, as host director for the 2005 National High School Mock Trial Championship, and most recently as president-elect. Britton received the Kelly Crabtree Award in 2002 for her work exonerating Lesly Jean, a former Marine who served nine years in prison for a crime he did not commit. She was named a Super Lawyer by Law & Politics magazine and has been listed in Outstanding Women of the 20th Century. Britton is a 1992 graduate of Campbell University School of Law, where she has taught pretrial litigation as an adjunct professor since 1997.

Shortly after this issue of **Trial Briefs** comes out, you will receive your membership renewal and dues notice from the Academy. You may also receive membership renewal and dues notices from other organizations of which you may be a part. No, I'm not writing about a dues increase—we have not had one this year. But I *am* writing about why it is important for you to renew your membership with the Academy; why you might consider an “enhanced” level of membership, if it is feasible for you and/or your firm; and what value you get for your membership and investment in the mission of the Academy.

As members of the Academy, we stand nearly 4,000 strong. Together, we are the second-largest provider of continuing legal education (CLE) in the state. Together, we are a force to be dealt with when it comes to protecting the rights of North Carolinians in the halls of the legislature. Together, we stand as a community of common interest. Considering the many practice areas encompassed within our organization, we are certainly strong as we stand together in each practice area and provide tremendous support to one another. But we are even stronger when all of those practice areas come together and stand as a whole with the common mission of protecting people's rights.

Our strength—in community, advocacy, and education—comes from the commitment each of us makes to support the Academy. This support takes the form of regular and enhanced membership dues, law firm support through the Leaders Forum, and the individual service and time we invest. Each of these aspects of support is important to the existence and mission of the Academy.

Community

One of the tremendous values of Academy membership that I see and use every day lies in our section and division memberships and listservs. More sharing of infor-

mation, experience, insight, and camaraderie is exchanged on our 13 section and three division listservs in one day than most organizations could begin to imagine.

Some members have commented to me that their section and listserv benefit alone makes Academy membership worth the investment. But I submit to you that while this membership benefit is clearly a significant tangible resource that can be seen and used every day, it is really just the tip of the iceberg in terms of what the Academy offers its members.

If you have attended our Annual Convention at Sunset Beach or joined us at Mountain Magic in Asheville, you know the value of these highly-anticipated programs each year. Both conferences take place in resort settings that blend superb education with numerous opportunities to relax and enjoy camaraderie with fellow trial attorneys and legal assistants.

The Academy provides numerous networking opportunities, and they are made possible by your membership, investment, and support. Between statewide meetings, CLE programs, conventions and conferences, section and division meetings, and section and division listservs, Academy members can't help being plugged into our community and strength as an organization.

Legal Education

Our fantastic staff and outstanding and accomplished speakers help the Academy present more than 45 live seminars annually, provide 175 video replays around the state, and offer the convenience of online CLE and simultaneous Webcasting of many of our live programs. In addition, the criminal and civil law masters programs held at our Annual Convention are among the best in the country. We bring you nationally-recognized speakers on issues of importance to your practice. But we did not become the second-largest CLE provid-

er in North Carolina by luck. We reached this level, and will continue to perform at this level, by virtue of the support and investment of our individual members, and through the tremendous work of our talented and committed staff.

Also through your membership and investment, the Academy offers award-winning publications, such as *Trial Briefs*, *Discovery*, *BriefNotes*, and *E-clips*. Our practice manuals are great resources, as well. Current publications include: *North Carolina Prima Facie Tort Manual*; *North Carolina DWI Trial Notebook*; *North Carolina Manual of Complaints*; *North Carolina Annual Survey*; and *North Carolina Personal Injury Liens Manual*. And there are more to come.

Public Education

The Academy, due to your commitment and investment, also offers one of the most successful public education programs in the state for our youth—the Wade Edwards High School Mock Trial Program. It teaches students about our system of justice and trial by jury, while mentoring them to be good citizens and strong public speakers. The Wade Edwards High School Mock Trial Program touches the lives of several hundred high school students in North Carolina every year, with a ripple effect that reaches thousands.

Through your membership, support, and investment, the Academy's Web site offers the means by which members can become involved in their communities on multiple levels, providing speeches, resources, contacts, and direct links to legislators and newspapers, as well as tools to write editorials and address important legislation.

In addition, the Academy maintains and updates a Public Education Brochure Series that covers key areas of interest to the public, including *When a Car Accident Happens*, *Child Support and Custody*, *When a Marriage Fails*, and *Have You Made A Will?* Some of these brochures are now printed in both English and Spanish.

Advocacy

Through our Legal Affairs staff and committee, our members have access to top legal minds in their fields for advice and guidance. While the Academy is well-respected for its *amicus* briefs on critically important issues that have broad impact on

future cases, we also offer our members individualized assistance as a resource and support throughout the appellate process of their cases. Many members have had the benefit of working through their appellate arguments before a moot court panel at the Academy offices, and many have tapped our expert resources to review their appellate briefs.

For your membership and investment in the Academy, you also have the benefit of our team of outstanding lobbyists and staff who work constantly to protect our justice system, citizens' rights, and your practice. Our legislative team, staff, and committees work tirelessly to make sure the Academy stands—and continues to stand—in a position of strength.

Our strength in advocacy also comes from our political action committee. The Academy PAC has grown substantially over the last several years, and it has provided significant support for political candidates who stand up for issues that are important to us, both individually and as an organization. Our members' investment in the PAC is vital to the continued strength of our advocacy.

Facilities

The Academy originated over 40 years ago as an idea. Its infancy was spent in the law offices of people like Charlie Blanchard, Bill Thorp, Gene Phillips and Allen Bailey. Through the investment and commitment of its growing membership, the Academy then developed into an organization large enough to need someone to manage it full time, and Judge Linda McGee took the reins as our first CEO.

As the Academy grew into a thriving association, we needed a building from which to operate. Our membership had a vision of providing a facility that would house our organization and staff, hold meetings and continuing legal education programs, and be available for member use. That vision was fulfilled through the commitment and financial investment of our members.

We are fortunate to have such an excellent facility. The building and parking lot, and the maintenance of our facilities, was made possible by the commitment and investment of our members. Our dues keep our Academy home operating and updated, and will allow it to continue to meet the needs of the membership.

Staff

If you are not at the Academy offices on a regular basis or at the legislature while it is in session, you may not realize the level of commitment and dedication we enjoy as an organization from Dick Taylor, our CEO. Dick's leadership and our dues dollars make our excellent staff possible. When you get a chance, take a look on page 23 of your *2006–2007 Membership Directory*. These individuals, along with the recent additions of Mike McLaughlin as Communications Director and Burton Craige as Legal Affairs Counsel, are the amazing people who keep our Academy running every day. In these individuals, you have a fantastic team working to make your Academy the strongest and most effective organization it can be to champion our mission and move us forward.

Commitment And Strength

One last, but very important, area to consider as you contemplate your investment in our Academy is the commitment and strength of our members. While the Academy's bones consist of our building, our staff, and our programs, its lifeblood is our members. It is only with the support of our members that we will continue to flourish and grow as an organization, accomplishing our goals and meeting the challenges ahead. Think how far we have come. Now think how far we can go!

So when you receive your membership renewal and dues notice and you begin to fill it out, I hope you will remember this overview of the "bang" that you get for your buck at the Academy. Do what you can in light of your circumstances—and in view of the benefits you receive as a member of this great community. The return on your investment is well worth it for you, your practice, your clients, and the individual citizens of North Carolina.

Together, we have created and maintain one of the most successful state trial lawyer organizations in the country. Together, we support each other and impact lives every day. Together, we make a difference. Thank you for your commitment and support, and thank you for your membership. ■