

Giving Thanks For Strength And Commitment

*"Giving thanks for the gifts we have received
and for those we have been able to share."*

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.

This fall I received a very kind letter from Franklin Smith of Elkin. Franklin is an original Academy member who started off with Gene Phillips and Alan Bailey. In his letter, Franklin recalled how, "back at that particular time, we could hold a state wide meeting and expect to get about 10 or 15 people, and a lot of enthusiasm."

That enthusiasm, along with the commitment, service and dedication of our members, has grown this Academy to a nearly 4,000-member force that protects the rights of people in North Carolina every day in the courtrooms of this state and in the halls of the legislature. This *President's Column* is dedicated to Academy members like Franklin Smith, sharing their commitment to serving the public, the profession, and our peers, and making our Academy what it is today.

The strength of our Academy is the strength of the individual members that comprise it. Members across our state are not only committed to serving their clients, but they also give back to their communities, to this profession, to their peers, and to our Academy every day. They are members like Carlos Mahoney and Kerry Sutton in Durham; Carol Huffman Kendrick in Monroe; Darren Dawson in Greenville; Rich Manger in High Point; Kathleen Glancy, Alex Hall, and Andy McVey in Wilmington; Gary Clemmons in New Bern; Lloyd Smith in Windsor; Danny Glover in Elizabeth City; Grady Hunt and Bill Britt in Lumberton; Jones Byrd in Asheville; Gary Jackson, Eddie and Francis Knox, and Bill Powers in Charlotte; Rick and Patti Harper in Sylva; and Frank Goldsmith in Marion. And this list is by no means exhaustive—it only begins to touch the surface of the individual members who are the North Carolina Academy of Trial Lawyers.

Our Academy, through the collective strength and commitment of our members,

and for the first time in the history of our bar, has sought out and brought together the public service attorneys of our state as members of our organization. We are proud to have all Legal Aid Attorneys and Public Defenders join our mission. We are pleased to have them and will service them with educational programs, listserv memberships, and a **Trial Briefs** issue dedicated to poverty law, in addition to offering them the unity and strength of our organization. Our community is stronger for their membership, and we welcome them.

Our Academy, through the collective strength and commitment of its members, has tremendous influence and impact on legislation in this state, which we use to protect the rights of North Carolinians. We are also the first organization to offer education and insight to all legislators, lobbyists, public officials and members on the new ethics laws that have been passed and will be come effective in January 2007, changing the way business is done in government. Our *Ethics in Lobbying: The New Statute* seminar held in October was so popular and in such demand that overflow seating with closed circuit television was required in separate rooms of the Academy offices!

Our Academy, through the collective strength and commitment of our members, is aggressively seeking ways to impact the public perception of lawyers and our system of justice. We have undertaken a research-based communications plan, and we continue to fine tune and enhance that plan. We have provided our members with tools to not only quickly and effectively engage their legislators and news editors, but also to assist them in reaching out to the public in ways that will help turn the tide of negativity that has poisoned our system of justice and our ability to advocate for our clients.

Our Academy, through the collective strength and commitment of its members,

is finding and developing ways for each of us, individually and as an organization, to reach out to the public in a manner that steps out of the stereotype that has been fostered and engrained in their minds. We have begun a series of safety tips and advice columns that will run in community magazines. We are offering talking points and information for our members to use to get out in their communities and speak on various legal issues important to the public. We are developing a plan to enhance our find-a-lawyer program with a “free consult” aspect, which not only provides the public with an Academy member in their community who practices in the area they need, but also with someone who will take a little time to talk with them and determine if he or she can help—and, if not, provide some direction for finding some help.

Our Academy, through the collective strength and commitment of our members, is stepping up to develop and offer a mentoring program to newly licensed attorneys who join us. In servicing our peers, we will help ensure that future leaders in our bar

and our Academy have had the benefit of the experience, insight and support of seasoned members. Our goal is to foster in our new members not only a commitment to their clients, but also a commitment to their communities, their profession, and as they develop in their practices and experience, their peers.

Our Academy, through the collective strength and commitment of our members, continues to offer and expand one of the best public education programs in North Carolina—our Wade Edwards High School Mock Trial Competition. Every year, this competition touches thousands of lives across our state, from student participants, to their friends, family and teachers. Communities see lawyers volunteering their time to work with local high school students or donating their time on a Saturday to serve as judges and jurors to help their children learn about our system of justice. Parents see their children develop a confidence and ability to speak in public that in some cases they never imagined was possible. Students develop an insight into our

system of justice that sharpens their ability to question and consider both sides of issues. We, as an Academy, through this public education program, support and help develop the strength and insight of future leaders in our state.

How far our Academy has come from the brainchild of a few great lawyers committed to serving the public, our profession and our peers, and who were driven to make a difference! The Academy is not only their legacy, but the continuing legacy of every one of us who comprise it. In the words of Allen Bailey: “It is not what we take with us that matters, it is what we leave behind.”

A special thanks to the members of our Academy for their commitment and gifts of time, talent, resources, funding, dedication, inspiration, insight and support. We do make a difference every day through what we as an Academy are able to give back. We have projects, issues, battles, and milestones ahead of us in the coming year, and together, we will continue to make a difference. I wish you all happy holidays and a blessed and wonderful New Year. ■

CALENDAR

JANUARY (2007)

January 11

Workplace Torts & Workers' Comp (VIDEO)
Asheville

January 12

Workplace Torts & Workers' Comp (VIDEO)
Morehead City

January 12

Insurance Law: 2006 Update (VIDEO)
Morganton

January 12

Death Penalty 2007 (LIVE)
Marriott Civic Center Hotel, Durham

January 18

Social Security Practice (VIDEO)
Wilmington

January 19

Professionalism For Workers' Comp Attorneys: Things I Learned In Kindergarten (LIVE)
Downtown Marriott, Winston-Salem

January 19

DWI Seminar: The Motor Vehicle Driver Protection Act (LIVE repeat of December program)
Blockade Runner, Wrightsville Beach

January 19

Social Security Practice (VIDEO)
Charlotte; Jacksonville; Rocky Mount

January 19

Insurance Law: 2006 Update (VIDEO)
Goldsboro

January 19

Workplace Torts & Workers' Comp (VIDEO)
Rocky Mount; Sanford

January 25

Workplace Torts & Workers' Comp (VIDEO)
Winston-Salem

January 26

Social Security Practice (VIDEO)
Asheville; Morehead City; Morganton

January 26

Disbursements 2007 (LIVE)
Downtown Marriott, Winston-Salem

January 26

Workplace Torts & Workers' Comp (VIDEO)
Jacksonville

January 31

Social Security Practice (VIDEO)
Raleigh

FEBRUARY

February 2

Workplace Torts & Workers' Comp (VIDEO)
Goldsboro; Morganton

February 9

Spanish For Lawyers (LIVE)
Academy Headquarters, Raleigh

February 16

Disbursements 2007 (LIVE repeat of January program)
City Hotel, Greenville

February 23

Nursing Home Litigation (LIVE)
Academy Headquarters, Raleigh

MARCH

March 2

Workers' Comp Roundtable (LIVE)
Academy Headquarters, Raleigh

March 14

Ethics For Legal Assistants (LIVE – UPDATED PROGRAM!)
Academy Headquarters, Raleigh

March 16

Meth 101: Defending A Meth Case In North Carolina (LIVE)
Renaissance Hotel, Asheville