



BOARD & STAFF

President: Luke Largess
Vice President: Roger Cook
Secretary: Stella Boswell
Treasurer: Lisa Grafstein

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

Tom Anderson
 Kevin Benedict
 Victor Boone
 Nicole Vandiver Bryan
 Felice Corpening
 Annaliese Dolph
 Steve Epstein
 Ann Setien Gibbs
 Pamela Glean
 Tom Keith
 Julie Kowal
 E. Spencer Parris
 Susan Ryan
 Marian Thompson
 James Williams, Jr.
 Kristen Wooten
 Laura Wrobel

STAFF:

Denise Cumbee Long
Executive Director
 Arlene Summers
Program Director

**NOW IS THE TIME FOR A YEAR
 END TAX-DEDUCTIBLE
 CONTRIBUTION TO NC LEAF!**

As you consider your end of the year giving, please keep NC LEAF in mind. Almost half of the eligible attorneys who applied for NC LEAF assistance in October were turned away because of insufficient funds. Your donation will help us increase the number of young lawyers we are able to serve. They, in turn, will be more likely to stay in public interest jobs that benefit all of North Carolina's citizens. Your support is greatly appreciated!

NEWSLEAF

A PUBLICATION OF THE NORTH CAROLINA LEGAL EDUCATION ASSISTANCE FOUNDATION

MAKING AN IMPACT ONE PERSON AT A TIME

Stella A. Boswell, J.D.

Secretary, NC LEAF Board of Directors

*Past President, North Carolina Association
 of Women Attorneys*

Career Counselor, Duke University School of Law



MY FIRST contact with NC LEAF was when I joined the board of directors as a law school student representative more than a decade ago. At that time, I served as the Treasurer and was well-acquainted with the flow of funds directly through the program's accounts; the money came in and then went right back out again to the public interest lawyers assisted by the program. NC LEAF operated on a shoe-string administrative budget, allowing every penny possible to go toward helping law school graduates pay back their loans in exchange for public service. When I was asked four years ago to be the N.C. Association of Women Attorney's representative on the NC LEAF board, I was thrilled to again be involved with the work of this worthy organization.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

LOW PAY AND HIGH DEBT CHALLENGE LEGAL AID ATTORNEYS

Victor Boone, J.D.

NC LEAF Board of Directors

Managing Attorney

Legal Aid of North Carolina, Raleigh Office



SOME YEARS AGO, I was approached by a private attorney working with a local law firm who queried me about the possibility of working with a legal aid office (i.e., one that provides free legal assistance to low-income persons). Even though he was being compensated well by his firm, he was more interested in the type of public interest work done by legal aid attorneys. He was very sincere and determined to pursue this endeavor, but I reminded him of the number and ages of his young children as well as the salaries paid

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5

insideLEAF

Personal Stories by NC LEAF Participants

New Public Defender's Office Beckons Winston-Salem Native



Camille D. Banks, J.D.
Assistant Public Defender

*Forsyth County Public
Defender's Office*

I HAD WORKED A YEAR and a half in private practice in Winston-Salem when the opening of the Forsyth County Public Defender's Office was announced in the fall of 2002. This was exciting news. Although I was doing well as an associate in a private firm, I saw the Public Defender's Office as an opportunity to gain invaluable trial experience, work alongside seasoned attorneys, and give back to the community where I was born, a community I still love dearly. In accepting a

position at the Public Defender's Office, I had to take a substantial pay cut. Had it not been for NC LEAF, I would not be an Assistant Public Defender (APD) today.

Since becoming an APD, I have represented hundreds of people. I have found the experience to be truly rewarding, and I am grateful for the privilege to work in this capacity. Being an APD has allowed me to combine my college major in social work with the skills that I am developing in the practice of law.

I had competitive grades in school and significant ties to my community such that I could have earned more money in the private legal sector. However, my interest in doing something that I enjoy from day to day largely outweighs my desire for a higher salary.

I have always found joy in public service, and I often found ways to volunteer while in college. Never had I imagined that one day I would make it my career. Indigent persons need and deserve advocates who are dedicated to zealous, quality representation. By the same token, because the majority of attorneys graduate with substantial law school debt, many good lawyers need loan assistance in order to accept positions as public servants. Fortunately, NC LEAF is the force that brings these two interests together. As long as NC LEAF is in existence, the quality of legal services for the public will remain top-notch.

No Regrets For Assistant D.A.



Joseph Hamrick, J.D.
Assistant District Attorney

*29th Prosecutorial District
Hendersonville*

AFTER INTERVIEWING for my current position of Assistant District Attorney, I debated whether I could survive on a prosecutor's salary. Even when District Attorney Jeff Hunt offered me the job and promised that if I came to the 29th District to prosecute I would never regret it, I struggled to decide if I should accept his offer. I knew it would be difficult to

make ends meet, and there were higher salaries available in the private sector. More than three years have now passed since I accepted Jeff Hunt's job offer, and indeed, I do not regret the decision. But, I have been able to stay in this work because of the assistance I receive from LEAF.

Some say that the joy in going to work for the D.A.'s office is the trial experience. As a law student at Wake Forest, I longed to try and prepare cases daily. Although it is fair to say that litigation experience is one benefit of this work, my biggest joy comes from the countless opportunities to help victims and to seek justice daily. With every case I prosecute, I have the opportunity and responsibility to do the right thing for the right reason. In the end, as an Assistant District Attorney, I am never forced to choose between my moral values and the rules of Professional Responsibility.

NC LEAF's financial support gives me the chance to continue to prosecute, consistently help others, pursue justice, and enjoy my job. The number of lives NCLEAF touches by funding one participant grows exponentially. The impact is great. I can never thank LEAF enough for giving me the opportunity to remain in the work I love as an Assistant District Attorney.

Giving Capital Defendants A Fair Trial



Sondra Broughton, J.D.
The Fair Trial Initiative
Durham

I WAS BORN in Selma, Alabama, a hotbed of legal injustice and Jim Crow laws. Shortly after my birth, my mother moved north to Portland, Oregon, and I grew up in the northeast part of town which was predominantly African American. Growing up in northeast Portland as a young black female, I witnessed and experienced much injustice. As a result, I became determined to advocate for those who are disenfranchised. I strongly believe in advocating for the rights of all people, but specifically for those who are powerless to help themselves.

Last year, my daughter and I moved to North Carolina after I accepted a position with the Fair Trial Initiative. The Fair Trial Initiative offers a unique opportunity for new lawyers and law school graduates to assist appointed counsel with capital trials.

The organization was founded to address a widespread crisis in representation of capital defendants at the trial level. Post-conviction investigations continually reveal that too many trials are replete with grossly ineffective assistance of counsel, and the opportunities to address these problems at this phase are limited. Poverty, race, and underfunded counsel are barriers to fair and unbiased trials. Our work at Fair Trial Initiative focuses on providing excellent representation at the trial level where human life itself is at stake.

The Fair Trial Initiative is a private nonprofit organization depending on donations and state resources for funding. Those of us employed there receive modest salaries. As a single mother with a huge law school debt, it would be extremely difficult for me to continue working in my chosen profession without the assistance of NC LEAF. When I moved to North Carolina, I came with the intention of making it my home. I want to stay here and not uproot my daughter. I also want to continue working as an advocate for the disenfranchised. NC LEAF has assisted with making this possible.

New Baby Doesn't Stop Legal Aid Lawyer



Kim McElreth-Ray, J.D.
Legal Aid of North Carolina
Smithfield

WHEN I DECIDED to go to law school, it was with the intent that I would one day practice some type of public interest law. Although I was young, I already had a diverse

work history that included several types of public interest positions. From these experiences I knew that I would not be happy unless I was able to find a career helping less fortunate people.

Upon graduating from Campbell University's Norman Adrian Wiggins School of Law, I joined the staff at Legal Aid of North Carolina, Inc. in Smithfield, North Carolina. Since October 2002, I have worked with Legal Aid as a VOCA (Victims of Crime Act) attorney where I help victims of domestic violence. The overwhelming majority of my cases are protective order hearings and custody cases where domestic violence has been present. It has been my experience that it is more common for batterers to hire attorneys than for victims to

do so. It is important that the victim have good legal representation, especially when the opposing party does. This is even more critical in domestic violence cases where the victim may not always speak up for him or herself because of the way the cycle of violence works. Good counsel for the victim ensures that both sides are heard and all relevant evidence is presented. It levels the playing field. I believe strongly in this principle and am glad that I am able to advocate for victims when they may not be able to advocate for themselves. I thoroughly enjoy my work and cannot see myself working in any other type of legal field; this is, quite simply, where I belong.

Unfortunately, working in public interest law does not provide me with a large salary, although it does provide many other benefits. Without NC LEAF's assistance, my life would be a lot harder. My husband and I just welcomed our first baby. The money that NC LEAF provides helps us out tremendously when it comes to paying for the new expenses associated with Elliot's birth, our bills, and of course, my enormous law school loans. If it were not for the assistance from NC LEAF, I would reluctantly have to reconsider my career choice. Thankfully, I can continue in the work that I love.

WITH APPRECIATION TO OUR 2004 DONORS

BENEFACTORS (\$1,000 AND UP)

Peter S. Gilchrist III

William J. Lowry

N.C. Academy of Trial Lawyers

PATRONS (\$500 TO \$999)

N.C. Conference of District Attorneys

N.C. Association of Public Defenders

SPONSORS (\$250 TO \$499)

David W. Long

CONTRIBUTORS (\$100 TO \$249)

Tom Anderson

Thomas S. Berkau

Brenda B. Becton

Catherine M. El-Khoury

Henry F. Frye

Ann Setien Gibbs

Alician V. Quinlan

Eric S. Stein

Thomas Stern

Robert C. Vaughn

Jennifer Weiss

DONORS (\$50 TO \$99)

G. Rankin Coble, Jr.

Deborah Greenblatt

Michael S. Hamden

John R. Keller

James M. Talley, Jr.

Cindy M. Patton

FRIENDS (LESS THAN \$50)

John T. Barrett

Carol Jones

Ralph Jacobson

CONTRIBUTING LAW SCHOOLS

Campbell University Norman Adrian
Wiggins School of Law

North Carolina Central University
School of Law

University of North Carolina
School of Law

Wake Forest University
School of Law

MAKING AN IMPACT ONE PERSON AT A TIME

continued from page 1

It was clear from my first meeting back on the board that some things have not changed much. NC LEAF's mission is exactly the same—providing forgivable loans to lawyers doing public interest legal work in North Carolina so that they can pay back their law school debts while earning relatively low salaries. The program is still assisting lawyers who are committed to serving North Carolina's citizens. Many of these attorneys simply would not be able to do their chosen work without LEAF's help.

During the past decade, the average debt load from law school has increased substantially. Unfortunately, salaries for legal aid attorneys, district attorneys, public defenders and other public interest attorneys have not gone up much. So, if anything, applicants need our assistance even more than they did ten years ago. Although



NC LEAF's funding has grown, enabling it to serve more lawyers, so has the applicant pool. As always, the board and staff continue to work to ensure that the program is funded despite the uncertainties of the legislative budget process and reliance on private donations during difficult economic times.

The hardest thing about being on the LEAF board remains exactly what it was ten years ago. Just as before, we comb through notebooks full of information on deserving applicants in order to decide whom we can fund. We are always forced to turn down many lawyers who are anxious for our assistance, despite the fact that each one is eligible and deserving of our help. These choices are extremely difficult. We read the heart-felt words of applicants who are dedicated to their clients and passionate about their work. In our last round of applicants, one lawyer wrote that what kept her going despite the seemingly insurmountable hardships her clients faced every day was the realization that "making an impact is achieved one person at a time." In weighing her words, I realized that the impact of NC LEAF is so much greater than just the lawyers we assist. For each attorney who receives NC LEAF funds, there are many needy North Carolina citizens who receive good legal help, not just today but throughout the entire career of that public interest lawyer. NC LEAF benefits more than just its participating attorneys; it touches the lives of thousands.

LOW PAY AND HIGH DEBT

continued from page 1

to legal aid lawyers and advised him to give the matter further thought. I was quite frank in telling him that he could not support his family on what he would be paid. That was not just an opinion. It was a fact. Fortunately for him and unfortunately for us, he took my advice and remained, at least for a while longer, with his firm. My regret was that legal aid would not benefit from his enthusiasm and talent, as he clearly was a very good lawyer.

Although the story varies for each potential candidate for legal aid employment, the bottom line is very much the same: working for legal aid is unaffordable for many who desire to do so. The reason is simple. With substantial law school loans to repay and a starting salary that would be \$33,500 with little likelihood of an increase for the first three years on the job, new lawyers cannot meet their living expenses. Fortunately, there are some whose loans are not in the stratosphere who can benefit significantly

from the NC LEAF program. With LEAF's assistance, young attorneys can balance income and debt and choose work with one of a number of legal aid offices across the state, most of which are branch offices of Legal Aid of North Carolina, Inc. (LANC).

Currently, there are 19 of about 100 legal aid lawyers in North Carolina receiving NC LEAF assistance. That figure represents over a third of the total 53 lawyers to whom NC LEAF is currently providing help. Since the organization's inception, 70 of the 193 lawyers who have received LEAF funds have worked with legal aid offices. Many of the recipients could not have afforded to maintain their employment with those offices without such assistance. Some have not been able to continue their employment for very long even with LEAF's help because of altered circumstances that necessitated a higher income. The Raleigh office of LANC has lost at least three very good lawyers within the past two years for that

reason. Essentially, it is becoming increasingly more difficult, especially for single persons, to work with a legal aid office. Marriage, with a working spouse, has almost become a prerequisite for young attorneys taking a legal aid job without some form of supplemental compensation.

The benefit of NC LEAF to legal aid offices is therefore apparent. This program's continuing viability certainly impacts the degree of success legal aid offices experience in recruiting and retaining highly qualified lawyers. Both recruitment and retention are equally important for providing the services that are so critical in protecting the legal rights of a very vulnerable population. Because of NC LEAF, access to our judicial system is a more meaningful reality because there are not just lawyers, but good lawyers, who can afford to stay around and help save the home of the 70-year-old widow from foreclosure and virtual homelessness. If we are serious about preserving one of the fundamental elements of a true democracy, we should do all we can, including making individual contributions, to ensure that NC LEAF is as strong as we can make it.



DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Denise Cumbee Long

NC LEAF RECEIVES its primary funding from the North Carolina General Assembly. The state appropriation is used exclusively to benefit our participating attorneys. None of it goes to operating costs which are covered by a grant from IOLTA, repayments from attorneys leaving the public interest field, and contributions from the state's law schools, some bar association groups, and individual donors.

Because NC LEAF is held in high regard by many state legislators who see the benefit of our program to all North Carolina citizens, the General Assembly increased LEAF's annual appropriation from \$200,000 to \$271,000 this past year. This is a real achievement in a year of budget deficits and cutbacks. The bad news is that this is still far short of what we need to fund every public interest attorney eligible for loan repayment assistance. In order to help all attorneys currently seeking our assistance, we need at least \$50,000 in additional funds. I hope that private law firms will step up to the plate and help us meet this challenge. Ensuring equal access to justice is the responsibility of the entire North Carolina legal community. Together, we can do it!



North Carolina Legal Education
 Assistance Foundation
 6070-J Six Forks Rd.
 Raleigh, NC 27609-8611
www.ncleaf.org

Non-Profit Org.
 U.S. Postage
 PAID
 Raleigh, NC
 Permit No. 36

NC LEAF is a collaborative effort of law schools and bar organizations in North Carolina including:

- CAMPBELL UNIVERSITY
- NORMAN ADRIAN WIGGINS SCHOOL OF LAW
- DUKE UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW
- N.C. CENTRAL UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW
- UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA SCHOOL OF LAW
- WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW
- LEGAL AID OF NORTH CAROLINA
- N.C. ACADEMY OF TRIAL LAWYERS
- N.C. ASSOCIATION OF BLACK LAWYERS
- N.C. ASSOCIATION OF DEFENSE ATTORNEYS
- N.C. ASSOCIATION OF PUBLIC DEFENDERS
- N.C. ASSOCIATION OF WOMEN ATTORNEYS
- N.C. BAR ASSOCIATION
- N.C. CONFERENCE OF DISTRICT ATTORNEYS
- N.C. GAY AND LESBIAN ATTORNEYS
- N.C. STATE BAR

**MAKE YOUR TAX-DEDUCTIBLE
 DONATION NOW!**

ENCLOSED IS MY CONTRIBUTION TO NC LEAF:

NAMED FIRM SPONSORSHIP (\$2,500) NAME OF FIRM: _____

THIS SPONSORSHIP WILL support one NC LEAF attorney for an entire year of loan repayment assistance. The NC LEAF attorney will be listed as the “(Your Firm) Fellow” in NC LEAF publications. Sponsoring firms will be honored annually at a banquet and a press release will be sent to the local newspapers in the law firm’s home town acknowledging the contribution.

Law Firm or Individual Contribution (*Donors will be listed in NC LEAF newsletters*)

- Benefactor (\$1,000)
- Patron (\$500)
- Sponsor (\$250)
- Contributor (\$100)
- Donor (\$50)
- Friend (\$_____)

NAME _____

LAW FIRM (IF ANY) _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

Please make check payable to NC LEAF and mail to:

NC LEAF Phone: 919-845-6089
 6070-J Six Forks Road Fax: 919-848-9259
 Raleigh, NC 27609-8611 Email: NCLEAF@intrex.net
 Website: www.ncleaf.org

Donations to NC LEAF are tax deductible. Applications for loan repayment assistance are available from the NC LEAF office and may also be downloaded from the website above. Applications are generally distributed in August and are due by early October each year.



HELP US ASSIST

ATTORNEYS WHO

CHOOSE PUBLIC

SERVICE CAREERS