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**APPLICATION PERIOD  
 NOW OPEN FOR 2007-2008  
 NC LEAF FUNDS!**

Applications from eligible public service attorneys working in North Carolina must be received by 1 p.m. on Friday, October 19, 2007. No faxed applications will be accepted. The NC LEAF board of directors will consider all submissions at its annual meeting on November 16, 2007. All applicants will be notified as to their status shortly thereafter. To review eligibility criteria, download forms and apply online, please visit our website:  
[www.ncleaf.org](http://www.ncleaf.org).

# NEWSLEAF

A PUBLICATION OF THE NORTH CAROLINA LEGAL EDUCATION ASSISTANCE FOUNDATION



## NORTH CAROLINA'S NEWEST LAW SCHOOLS ON BOARD WITH NC LEAF: Elon Emphasizes Responsibility to Wider Community

*By Alan Woodlief, associate dean for admissions and administration, Elon University School of Law; NC LEAF board member*

AS A SUPPORTER OF NCLEAF, I was excited for Elon Law School to join in this collaborative effort with North Carolina's other law schools and bar organizations. While Elon and the other law schools strive to keep their costs reasonable, the expense of providing a first-rate legal education continues to increase. As a law school dean of admissions, I am keenly aware that law school students increasingly find it necessary to rely on loans to finance their legal education. Some law school applicants, particularly

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## CHARLOTTE FOCUSES ON EDUCATION FOR DIVERSE STUDENT BODY

*By Denise Spriggs, associate dean for students, Charlotte School of Law; NC LEAF board member*

THE CHARLOTTE SCHOOL of Law opened in August 2006 with a unique mission and an educational model focused on the highest academic standards. The school brings a student-centered orientation to every aspect of the student experience. In addition, our practice-readying model of legal education aims to provide students with both a strong foundation in legal academics, as well as practical lawyering, management, and interpersonal skills necessary for success.

We strongly believe that tomorrow's leaders must interact effectively with a wide variety of people and cultures. A core mission is to provide a high-quality, forward-looking, relevant educational experience for a diverse, traditionally underserved population. Our inclusive environment fosters a demanding, yet supportive educational setting for a diverse community.

As an institution committed to assisting underserved communities, we recognize the need for lawyers to provide good legal representation to those who cannot afford it. Many of our entering students identify a desire to work in the public interest sector. However, what I have seen in my years of working in higher education and law school administration is that many new graduates will often be forced to abandon that career goal and seek employment that will enable them to pay their bills when faced with the reality of high debt after years of law school expense.

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# insideLEAF

## INTRODUCING THE NEW NC LEAF “FELLOWS”

(The attorneys featured here have been named since the publication of our last newsletter.)



**Natasha Adams**  
*North Carolina Academy  
of Trial Lawyers Fellow*

Natasha is a 2001 graduate of North Carolina Central University School of Law where she was Chair of the Moot Court Team her final year. She works as an Assistant Public Defender in Carrboro. She writes that there is often

the perception that money can buy the best defense and that the caseload of a public defender is so large that her clients will not receive good representation. However, she firmly believes that “every person is entitled to effective and zealous representation” and notes that she and her colleagues provide the best defense possible for clients. Natasha also finds job satisfaction in helping clients with mental illnesses and drug addiction receive necessary help and become better individuals who contribute to their communities.



**Lisa Brace**  
*Comerford & Britt Fellow*

Lisa is a 2005 graduate of Wake Forest University Law School and a staff attorney with the Legal Aid Society of Northwest North Carolina in Winston-Salem where she practices family law. Her practice areas include domestic violence, custody, and divorce. She also

conducts clinics for pro se litigants in child custody and divorce matters and serves as a Guardian *Ad Litem* attorney with the Legal Aid Society’s Child Advocacy Project. Lisa enjoys working for LAS because of the direct impact she can make by helping to improve the lives of her clients and their families.



**Stephanie Ceccato**  
*Horack Talley Fellow*

Stephanie is a 2005 graduate of UNC Law School where she graduated with high honors and a member of the Order of the Coif. She now works at Legal Services of the Southern Piedmont in Charlotte. Stephanie left a career in

technology to attend law school because she wanted “to do more good for the world.” She works in the Consumer Protection Unit at Legal Services where she helps clients

avoid foreclosure on their homes or wrongful repossession of their vehicles. She writes that “it is such a wonderful feeling when you help protect a family’s basic necessities of shelter, transportation and financial well-being.”



**Faith Fickling**  
*Hunton & Williams Fellow*

Faith is a 2006 graduate of Syracuse University Law School working with the Pittsboro office of Legal Aid of North Carolina. She was a White House intern during college and has an extensive history of volunteer service through college and law school, including serving with the Peace

Corps in Madagascar. She writes that growing up in a low-income family helped her see how much free or inexpensive legal assistance can help persons with few resources. While serving in Madagascar, Faith realized that some of the same poverty issues of homelessness, illiteracy, lack of health care, and social injustices occurring in that developing country were also happening in the United States, and she decided to attend law school in order to serve in the public interest. She writes that working at Legal Aid of North Carolina (LANC) has been a tremendous learning experience, and she feels she can connect with her clients because she personally knows some of the challenges they face.



**Amanda Reeder**  
*Kirby & Holt Fellow*

Amanda is a 2005 graduate of North Carolina Central University’s School of Law working as a staff attorney with the Smithfield office of Legal Aid of North Carolina, specializing in representing victims of domestic violence in five counties. She assists her clients seeking Domestic Violence

Protective Orders by representing them in District Court. Amanda writes, “I recognize that my clients often have other needs, and I try to help them in other ways as well, such as assisting them in securing housing or child care or reassuring them that they are strong enough to take charge of their lives. My job can be emotionally draining at times, but the effort is incredibly rewarding. I am grateful for the opportunity to help my clients take a step toward a new life.”

## NORTH CAROLINA'S NEWEST LAW SCHOOLS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

those interested in public service positions, may allow concerns about law school debt to dictate their choice of law school. For many students, the debt they accumulate during law school has a profound impact on their career choices upon graduation. Some students who applied hoping to work in the public interest sector find themselves questioning this path and leaning toward higher paying positions.

The loan repayment assistance provided by NCLEAF allows students to pursue their true passion of working in public interest positions. This aid also allows them to remain in these positions longer. These graduates enjoy gratifying work of their choice, and our citizens benefit from their service in district attorney, public defender, and legal aid offices across the state.

One of Elon Law's goals is to create a deep understanding among our law students that the practice of law is strongly linked with a responsibility to participate in our profession and in our communities. The members of Elon Law's charter class brought with them a history of community involvement and a commitment to serving the public. They are already making a difference in our broader community through participation in efforts such as the Innocence Project. From our four potential academic concentrations, we expect that many will select public interest.

Elon Law is pleased that its graduates will have the potential for assistance from NCLEAF and that this assistance will encourage them to pursue work in the public interest. We look forward to a long affiliation with the NC LEAF program.

### Inside Leaf (continued)



**Ashleigh Seiber**  
*Nelson Mullins Fellow*

Ashleigh is a 2003 graduate of the UNC School of Law and works as an Assistant Public Defender in Raleigh. She was in private practice for three years before deciding on a public interest career. Ashleigh writes, "I began at a small firm after law school and found that my favorite

part of all the areas in which I practiced was indigent defense. I felt like I was really making a difference in clients' lives. Once I realized that what I enjoyed most was helping people who can't afford to hire an attorney, it was an easy decision to come work for the Wake County Public Defender's Office after it was created. Indigent defendants need attorneys who will fight for them and who will represent their best interests to the court."

**Katie Fisher**  
*Honored by a generous donation from Marian P. Lowry in memory of her husband, William J. Lowry, a longtime supporter of NC LEAF*



Katie is a graduate of UNC School of Law and works as the supervising attorney for the Mountain Violence Prevention Project at Pisgah Legal Services in Asheville. Katie assists battered immigrant victims in civil and criminal court and helps battered

immigrant women secure immigration related remedies. She writes, "I see women come through our door who have lost just about everything because they have relied on people who have failed them and repeatedly given them the message that their lives are of little meaning. It is my hope that when my work with them is finished, they will have a sense of safety, a renewed sense of self-worth, and the tools to better their lives independent of their abusers."

#### WHO WILL BE YOUR FELLOW?



NC LEAF has a long waiting list of eligible public interest attorneys needing assistance with law school loans. Won't you help us help more of them? Please consider a named sponsorship and contact us soon!

#### DID YOU KNOW?

Since 1991, NC LEAF has provided almost \$2.5 million in loan repayment assistance to 307 public interest attorneys working throughout North Carolina.

NC LEAF has been able to more than triple the number of attorneys assisted on an annual basis from 32 in 2000 to 110 in 2007. However, the demand for NC LEAF assistance continues to grow, and 37 eligible attorneys remained on a waiting list this past year because of lack of funds to bring them into the program.

Of the 110 public interest attorneys assisted by NC LEAF this year, 51 are assistant district attorneys, 32 work with legal services, 22 are assistant public defenders, and 5 work in government or nonprofit positions.

NC LEAF receives the bulk of our funding from the General Assembly. This year, \$500,000 of our \$660,000 budget comes from the state and is used exclusively for loan repayment assistance to participating attorneys. No state funds are currently used for administration or operating expenses.

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(This list also includes individual contributors from December 2006.)

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## DENISE CUMBEE LONG STEPS DOWN AS NC LEAF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

By S. Luke Largess, President, NC LEAF board of directors

**A**FTER SEVEN YEARS as executive director, Denise Cumbie Long announced in late June that she was resigning effective August 3<sup>rd</sup> to take on a new challenge—a two-year position as interim pastor at Binkley Memorial Baptist Church in Chapel Hill. Only the third executive director in our 18-year history, I will truly miss Denise, personally and professionally. Her time with NC LEAF has been a stunning success, taking us far beyond what seemed a daring idea in the summer of 2000.

In 2000, NC LEAF was at a bit of a crossroad. The loan forgiveness program that began as an idea of several law students in the late 1980's had steadily but slowly grown over 11 years to a budget of \$125,000 and 32 active participants. We had garnered some support in the legislature, but remained a non-recurring budget item. The executive director served in a half-time position and spent most of that time administering the program. When the previous executive director Linda Tucker resigned in 2000, the Board decided to expand the job to 30 hours and told candidates for the position that they would be expected to devote that extra time to fundraising. We hoped to somehow find the additional funding to justify the increase in administrative salary and went on to interview six finalists out of a long list of applicants.

We were so impressed with Denise that we almost offered her the job during her interview. She had a law degree from UNC and had worked with local firms a short time before going to divinity school. She and her husband, Doug, had also worked in Mexico with Habitat For Humanity. At the time of her interview, Denise was the director of the battered women's shelter in Franklin County and had strong experience as a manager and fundraiser. Then came the big institutional gulp. It was going to take \$40,000 a year to hire Denise away from her position in Franklin County, almost twice what we then paid the half-time Executive Director. Would we double that expenditure in hopes of making up the difference, or hire a less experienced applicant at less salary? We took the risk and have not looked back.

Denise was energetic, detailed, thoughtful and personable and almost single-handedly expanded NC LEAF beyond what any of us expected when she came to work on August 14, 2000. In the next seven years, the budget grew five-fold to over \$660,000 this year. The number of active participants has grown to 110 young attorneys who are receiving over \$500,000 in assistance annually. Her principal success was in the legislature, where she worked closely with Anne Winner to build relationships inside and outside the General Assembly that secured recurring status in the state budget and remarkable increases in NC LEAF's level of state support compared to where we were seven years ago.

Denise has also taken board members' ideas about other fundraising initiatives and made them real. She cajoled each of the law schools to commit to annual financial support for NC LEAF tied to the amount of loan assistance given to each school's graduates. And in the last two years she has nudged law firms into sponsoring a specific LEAF participant in their community. Both of those initiatives have provided important additional revenue.

She also transformed the application process, creating an internet portal to NC LEAF for applicants to gain information and obtain documents. She broadened NC LEAF's communications efforts. This newsletter was Denise's idea, its format and style her creation. She made detailed



information about the program accessible to the board, presenting packets of easily accessible data on the budget, and she made easy the most daunting of all tasks—collating the information on applicants for the annual selection meeting so that persons deliberately kept anonymous to the board told their appealing life stories and disclosed basic financial information in a way that allowed the board to select the most deserving candidates.

For those who know Denise, her decision to become the interim pastor at Binkley Memorial Baptist is no surprise. She has always kept one foot in the door of ministry while at NC LEAF. She had a second job with the North Carolina Council of Churches promoting social justice issues, and she preached with regularity both at her husband's church and as a visiting preacher at others. She has always been deeply committed to social justice concerns. A few years ago, she traveled to Colombia with a Witness for Peace team to gather information about that country's painful, long-standing civil conflict and this nation's role in it. She returned virtually on fire and traveled to Washington to address the Congress about her concerns. That she moves on to Binkley, a church with a long history of social activism, to try on the role of a pastor is not truly a surprise.

On behalf of everyone connected with NC LEAF, I offer my deepest gratitude to Denise for all she has done in her seven years with us and heartfelt wishes for success and fulfillment as she moves on to this next challenge.

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## CHARLOTTE FOCUSES ON EDUCATION

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

As a new private institution, we are working to establish an endowment fund that will enable us to offer our graduates some educational loan forgiveness when working in public interest jobs. However, until we are in a position to do that, our school's partnership with NC LEAF means that we are helping to make this opportunity available immediately to our first class of graduates. NC LEAF's educational loan repayment assistance program is invaluable to young attorneys in this state who seek out public interest professions. Without NC LEAF, many attorneys would not be able to practice in an area where they are needed and where they can really make a difference. I am therefore proud to represent the Charlotte School of Law on the board of directors of NCLEAF.

