

PROFILE:

Robert L Farmer

1993 Joseph Branch Professionalism Award

The Wake County Bar Association has selected Judge Robert L, Farmer as the 1993 recipient of the Joseph Branch Professionalism Award. The award is presented annually to the practicing attorney in Wake County who “best exhibits the qualities of professionalism.”

Judge Farmer is the Senior Resident Superior Court judge of Wake County and has practiced law in Raleigh since 1960.

Judge Farmer is as devoted to serving his community as he is to professionalism and the practice of Law.

Judge Farmer states, “An element of professionalism is our commitment to our civic affairs. The public must view attorneys as conducting their personal lives in an appropriate manner since the public bases its judgment on personal encounters with attorneys.”

As a member of Hayes Barton United Methodist Church, Judge Farmer is currently serving as a Sunday School teacher. His prior contributions to the church were as Chairman of the Board of Trustees and work with the Raleigh Board of Missions.

Judge Farmer has been active with the Raleigh Jaycees and Kiwanis Club and served as trustee with the United Fund of Raleigh. Other contributions include Salvation Army, Cystic Fibrosis campaign worker, the Raleigh Chamber of Commerce and volunteer for the Olympic Festival.

His civic contributions have also extended into public service. In 1970, Judge Farmer was elected to the N.C. House of Representatives, where he served through his 1976 term. He served on the Governor’s Advocacy Commission for Children and Youth from 1971 and 1973 and sponsored numerous legislation regarding the public school systems.

Professionalism means having a sense of dignity and honor despite the external surroundings and Judge Farmer states: “An attorney does not have to look like Atticus Finch in order to project professionalism, but most certainly he should maintain that sense of commitment to his client’s needs. An element of this commitment is to advise the client of all aspects of the case even if it’s not what the client wants to hear.”

Judge Farmer’s advice to young attorneys in building their career is to be courteous to opposing counsel, regardless of the issues at bar and to present a well-prepared case before the court. “It is obvious to the bench that professionalism encompasses a certain amount of trial preparation. Although a client may not be aware of it, the court will know when an attorney has not done the job. Professionalism refers to the inside rather than the outside,” he says.

With regard to courtroom demeanor, he says, it is most rewarding to see attorneys displaying respect for the process and rising to a level of integrity, Judge Farmer recalls his jury duty not too long ago and maintains that jurors are left with a lasting impression of our professionalism based upon their jury

experience. “The trial attorney in particular is in a position to leave a lasting impression of professionalism, or otherwise, and should, therefore, be especially aware of his responsibilities.”

Judge Farmer is very proud of the contribution his wife and family have made to his career and states, “My wife attends many functions with me and her support enables me to pursue outside activities which have afforded me the honor of this award.”

A program in Wake County known as the Silent Partner Program assigns veteran attorneys to newly-licensed lawyers for a one-year period. Judge Farmer believes that new attorneys should have an opportunity to observe trial procedure prior to appearing in court. He feels that the volunteer program distinctly promotes professionalism and that the county should encourage young lawyers to take advantage of the opportunity of working under the tutelage of an experienced professional prior to appearing before a jury.

Judge Farmer believes that an integral part of professionalism is the contribution to the indigent and Judge Farmer is a strong advocate of pro bono representation for those who cannot afford to pay. “I encourage members of the bar to join those attorneys who make themselves available for representation of the indigent. In the past, when I had occasion to request assistance, there was a professional response to the needs of the community. I was encouraged by my fellow attorneys.”

Robert L. Farmer is justly deserving of the 1993 Joseph Branch Professionalism Award. He embodies the qualities of professionalism in his career as an attorney, legislator, community leader, husband, father and judge.

Judge Robert Farmer acknowledges his peer recognition by saying, “Justice Branch was the kindest, most helpful judge and lawyer I have known. He was truly the gentleman’s judge and his demeanor was consistently personal and down to-earth. I know of no greater honor than to be selected by my peers for an award that represents the manner which Justice Branch maintained in every facet of his life. This award means so much to me because of the respect and admiration I have held for Justice Branch who always was my mentor and my friend.”