



The 1997 Joseph Branch Professionalism Award Recipient: Charles H. Young

By Walter E. Brock, Jr. and R. Michael Strickland

Charles H. Young is the Wake County Bar Association recipient of the Joseph Branch Professionalism Award for 1997. The award this year is especially unique in that it is the first time its recipient has been retired from the practice of law. His selection reflects the lasting and widespread reputation that he established among generations of lawyers in Wake County and throughout the state during his nearly fifty years of law practice. Some individuals cannot live up to their reputations. Others, when examined without the hindrance of self-imposed modesty, outshine even a spotless reputation. Charles Young (known to his friends as "Charlie") is one of those rare individuals whose contributions to the Bar and his community are unparalleled. His character, and his contributions and commitment to family, friends, law partners, the Bar, clients, the helpless and needy, and church cannot be adequately chronicled here. But a brief glimpse at Charlie's career and approach to the practice of law should establish a standard to which we can all aspire, in the fitting tradition of Chief Justice Joseph Branch.

Charlie was born in Raleigh on February 12, 1915. A Duke undergraduate and law graduate, Charlie began the practice of law in Raleigh in 1936 with Carroll Weathers. After Carroll Weathers became Dean of the Wake Forest Law School, and a period of solo practice, Charlie founded the firm of Young Moore and Henderson with Joseph C. Moore, Jr. and B.T. Henderson in 1954. Charlie became of counsel to the firm in 1985.

A list of some of Charlie's leadership positions reflects the high degree of trust and confidence placed in his judgment. He has served as President of the North Carolina

State Bar and President of the Wake County Bar Association. Among the civic boards on which he has served are the Raleigh Jaycees (President), the Raleigh Salvation Army, Edenton Street United Methodist Church, The Methodist Home for Children, and the Methodist Foundation. He was for many years the chairman of the civil service commission for the City of Raleigh policemen and fireman. He held virtually every high office at Edenton Street Methodist, and chaired the committee that planned the 150th anniversary of the church and compiled a voluminous and complete history of the church. Charlie quietly served the citizens and Bar by helping various governors investigate potential judicial appointees throughout the state.

Charlie's reputation among the Bar is reflected in C.K. Brown's and Gerald Bass's comment: "If there ever was a role model for other attorneys, Charlie would fit this perfectly. He maintained the highest ethical standards, was always a gentleman, was courteous and professional to everyone that he dealt with, and his reputation among his fellow attorneys was impeccable." Longtime friend, law partner, and admirer B.T. Henderson says of Charles, as he affectionately calls him, "He is the epitome of professionalism among bar members. As a result he was frequently called upon privately for counsel and advice by lawyers throughout the state with regard to ethical dilemmas. He would spend whatever time was necessary to give other lawyers the advice they needed."

As much as Charlie is admired for his integrity and judgment, he is as equally appreciated for his perfectionism, keen intellect and legal skill. A base title done by Charlie and his former law partner Carroll

Weathers became known as a "weatherized title." WCBA President Bonnie Weyher, who is proud to have worked as an associate with Charlie for several years, tells of the Kessinger-esque fear of turning in a work product to Charlie the perfectionist when he would ask her, "is this the very best you can do?" It required a lot of work and a great deal of self-confidence to answer that question "yes." She (and everybody else who worked with Charlie) always took it back for more work after Charlie's gentle critique. Charlie's expectations of those around him has a way of raising the level of their work. Charlie has always treated even the youngest attorneys in the bar as fellow lawyers. In his own firm, when young associates have worked for Charlie, they never carried his briefcase and he would proudly introduce them as his partners. It was a privilege and honor for Charlie Young to introduce you as his partner.

Charlie's adherence to the ethics of the law practice has been unbending — following the teaching of Carroll Weathers, "if you have to ask if something is ethical, you should probably not do it." Charlie has instilled these teachings into the young lawyers fortunate enough to practice with him. Charlie was never into marketing — Charlie's idea of "marketing" was to do a good job for a client and they would come back. His clients always came back.

Charlie was an innovator in law office technology, when few lawyers had even heard of that subject. Attacking the problem of law office technology in the same manner that he approached legal problems, Charlie started at "ground zero" and learned exactly

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how that watch was built so that he would know not only that it worked, but also why it worked. He has seen that his firm utilized the latest products in word and data processing and networking. Many of Charlie's approved computerized legal forms are still in use. The firm's former office at 2700 Wycliff Road won an architectural design award. Charlie helped develop a computerized time and billing system that eventually evolved into Legal Eagle and Legal Eagle II, until recently one of the most widely used programs for medium and large law firms in the area (Charlie dubbed the program "legal sparrow"). But Charlie has never let anyone — staff or lawyer — blame a problem on a "computer error." Charlie let it be known from the beginning that a "computer error" could almost always be traced to a "human" — and while he has always traced a problem to its source — he has done it with compassion and grace.

Charlie has never made a decision that

avored himself over another. If you are splitting up a piece of candy with Charlie, you don't even have to look — you know you will always get the biggest piece. When the first lawyer pregnancy occurred in the firm (that was Bonnie Weyher), he had the lawyer draw up a firm pregnancy policy and then complained when she provided for a leave period that was too short. Charlie has taken the concept of "fair play" to a level where few can stand — and he does it without any thought of tribute or reward. The newest associate in Charlie's firm could take any "shot" at Charlie he or she desired — without fear of losing their job. However, return fire was swift and certain, and Charlie is one of the best there is at returning fire without doing permanent damage to a young lawyer. He loves humor and reserves his best for the pompous and pretentious.

The Joseph Branch Professionalism Award is named for one of the most distinguished members of the North Carolina Bar. Were Justice Branch with us today, he would

count himself honored if he were to receive a professionalism award named after Charles Young. Our congratulations go out to Charlie and Martha, his wife and lifelong best friend and dyed in the wool "co-Blue Devil." It is a proud moment for everyone who has had the honor and privilege to practice law in the same firm or Bar as Charlie.