



2007 Joseph Branch Professionalism Award Recipient

J. Allen Adams

By E.D. Gaskins, Jr.

Each year, the Joseph Branch Professionalism Award is presented to a member of the Wake County Bar Association whose ethics, integrity, and service to clients, the community and the Bar mirror the high standards set by the late Joseph Branch, former Chief Justice of the N.C. Supreme Court.

This year's recipient, J. Allen ("Al") Adams, began practicing law in Wake County when the local bar consisted of fewer than 200 lawyers. Al was one the bar's most gregarious and friendly members, and was particularly eager to help young lawyers understand the culture of courtesy, competence, and professionalism for which the Wake County Bar was then known. Wake County is now home to more than 4,000 lawyers. Al Adams is still one of our more gregarious and friendly members, and he is still a shining example of the courtesy, competence, and professionalism for which the Wake County Bar continues to be known.

In the 1960s, '70s and '80s Al was a partner in the Raleigh firm of Sanford, Cannon, Adams & McCullough. Al insisted that the firm pay each attorney's membership dues for the Wake County Bar Association, the North Carolina Bar Association and the American Bar Association. He explained that these were key organizations in advancing the interests of the profession and of the public and thus it was the professional responsibility of every lawyer to participate in them. He put his time and energy where his mouth was by chairing the North Carolina Bar Association's Committee for Legislative and Law Reform and the Dispute Resolution Task Force.

I learned shortly after joining the firm as a novice attorney that Al requires very little

sleep and that he is a very quick study.

One of the first cases I tried with Al was in Cabarrus County. I was concerned that Al had not adequately prepared for trial as we headed off to Cabarrus County early Sunday afternoon to begin a jury trial the next day. I drove. He read. By the time we got there, he knew *everything* in the file. At some point in the early hours of the morning (after I had fallen asleep), he finished the preparation of his opening statement and the direct and cross-examination of all the witnesses, and the closing argument. He was totally prepared and performed superbly.

As good a trial lawyer as he was, Al actually tried very few cases because he was even better at settling them. His warm personality and natural inclination to be everybody's friend led to that result. Al has always said that a settlement that brings finality is usually better than a jury verdict that is subject to the delay and uncertainty of an appeal. His honesty, candor, and genuine friendliness have been significant assets throughout his career and came to the forefront during his service as a legislator representing Wake County for a decade. A fellow lawyer who served with him opined that Al may have been the most effective legislator ever to serve the people of Wake County.

Not surprisingly, at the conclusion of his legislative service, Al's focus changed from litigation to lobbying and in 1990 he became a partner in Parker, Poe, Adams and Bernstein when his firm merged with a Charlotte firm. Al is not your typical lobbyist. He's known for candor, knowledge, and persistence packaged as a genuine and engaging friend. Thus, he has been ranked by the NC Center for Public Policy Research as one of the State's most effective lobbyists.

Al has served his county as an active duty officer in the United States Navy. He continued to do so for many years in the Naval Reserve, retiring recently with the rank of captain.

His service to the community has been exemplary, serving on diverse boards including the Opera Company of North Carolina, the Wake Technical Community College Foundation, the Martin Luther King Resource Center, the Raleigh Civil Service Commission, the NC Child Advocacy Institute Board of Associates, and the North Carolina Symphony Board of Trustees, among others. He has chaired the USS North Carolina Battleship Commission and the Wake County Public Library Board. He has been a particularly effective advocate for his alma mater, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, both during his tenure in the General Assembly and as an unpaid lobbyist thereafter. Al has also served as Chairman of the University's Board of Visitors and a member of the UNC General Alumni Association.

Most of all, Al has been a friend and mentor to many young lawyers. His energy, enthusiasm, and enjoyment of life, have inspired many. He and his beloved wife, Betty, are delightful companions and terrific hosts under any circumstances. His unflinching candor with and respect for those working with him as well as those opposed to him have exemplified his professional career.

The Professionalism Award Committee is thus pleased to add Al Adams' name to those from the Wake County Bar who have been selected to receive its highest honor in recognition of a career of integrity, competence and civility.