



KEITH B. NORMAN

## Models of Professionalism

The first ever Professionalism Consortium was held in February at Cumberland School of Law. The consortium was developed by the Chief Justice's Commission on Professionalism. Former state bar president and commission member **Douglas McElvy** chaired the planning committee for the program. The commission was created by former Chief Justice **Drayton Nabers** at the suggestion of the Alabama State Bar and has been embraced by **Chief Justice Sue Bell Cobb**.

The consortium was attended by more than 150 leaders of the legal profession, including federal and state court judges, law school deans and professors, local bar presidents, representatives of various specialty bars, members of the Alabama State Bar Board of Commissioners, and others involved with the legal profession. The half-day event featured a panel discussion entitled "Triage of Professionalism Issues in the Law: Problems, Issues and Visions," moderated by **John Carroll**, dean of the Cumberland Law School. The panelists included **Carol R. Andrews**, professor of law, the University of Alabama School of Law; **Honorable Randall L. Cole**, presiding judge, 9<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit; **John N. Leach**, Helmsing, Leach, Herlong, Newman & Rouse, Mobile; and **Thomas J. Methvin**, Beasley, Allen, Crow, Methvin, Portis & Miles, Montgomery. Panel topics included: 1. A View from the Bench: Problems Prior to Getting into the Courtroom and at Trial; 2. A Snapshot of the Professionalism Concerns that Led to the Formation of the 1887 *Alabama Code of Professional Ethics*; 3. Principles of Professionalism: Complaints Frequently Made Against Judges and How to Improve Professionalism in the Judiciary; 4. A View from the Trenches—Acts of Unprofessional Behavior and Its Impact on the Profession; 5. Setting a Tone by Your Values: What Qualities Do Law Firms Value? What Does Your Firm Do to Promote Professionalism?; and 6. Public

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Service and Pro Bono: How Should Lawyers/Judges Contribute to the Community? The interactive panel discussion generated extensive and frank discussions among a broad segment of the bench, bar and law schools. During the consortium, retired law school Professor **Charles Gamble** received the Chief Justice's Professionalism Award. The award's first recipient, former Governor **Albert Brewer**, helped make the presentation.

It has been said that professionalism is "caught" and not "taught." Based on my personal experience, I believe that professionalism can be "caught" and "taught." Growing up in Opelika, I had the good fortune to know most of the community's lawyers. There were four lawyers, in particular, whose legal acumen, public service and professionalism were admired not only in Opelika but across the state. These four were a major influence on me and largely responsible for my choosing to become a lawyer. They are **Yetta Samford, C.C. "Bo" Torbert, Jacob Walker, Jr.** and the late **Roberts Brown**. I am proud that they have been friends since I was a young boy and that each has been an inspiration and a model of professionalism to emulate. Although they might not be considered mentors in the formal sense, I certainly "caught" the importance of professionalism by observing how they conducted every aspect of their lives.

The consortium engendered much discussion concerning mentoring as an ingredient of professionalism. I believe that mentoring affords the opportunity to "teach" professionalism especially when I reflect on my own experience as a young lawyer and the mentoring I received from several of my law partners, namely **Maury Smith, John Bowman** and the late **Frank Hawthorne, Sr.** Each of these lawyers, in his own way, taught me a great deal about the practice of law and how to conduct myself professionally as a lawyer. Unfortunately, many of today's young lawyers do not have access to experienced lawyers who can mentor them. In this regard, **Pam Bucy**, Alabama School of Law professor and bar commissioner, chairs the state bar's Task Force on Mentoring. Professor Bucy and

the members of her task force have worked diligently the last two years on a pilot for a statewide mentoring program. The task force will continue to refine the program so that it can, with the help of the bar's experienced lawyers, provide young lawyers with this most necessary form of professional training.

The consortium was a seminal event for the wellbeing and improvement of the legal profession in Alabama and an important catalyst for the Chief Justice's Commission on Professionalism. The commission's new executive director is retired Circuit Judge **Harold Crow**. Under Judge Crow's leadership, we can expect great things from the commission and on the professionalism front. I am delighted that Judge Crow will continue to serve the profession in such a meaningful and important way.

In 2001, then state bar President **Sam Rumore** introduced the Alabama State Bar Pledge of Professionalism (on page 166 of this issue). The pledge was the work of **Pat Graves** of Huntsville, and adapted from the Birmingham Pledge authored by Birmingham lawyer **Jim Rotch**. Jim graciously gave his permission for us to copy the Birmingham Pledge. At the time, about 200 Alabama lawyers chose to adopt the Professionalism Pledge. Because its provisions are as relevant today as in 2000, perhaps it's a good time to reinstitute the Alabama State Bar Pledge of Professionalism and encourage one another to sign and, more importantly, live it. ▲▼▲

## Education Debt Update

There were 381 applicants for the February 2008 bar examination. Of this number, 25 percent had education debt averaging \$65,649.