

Chief Justice Sue Bell Cobb, former Governor Albert Brewer and Commission on Professionalism member Ernestine Sapp enjoy a moment with Charles Gamble, former law school dean and professor. Gamble is the recipient of the first Chief Justice's Professionalism Award.



Lawyers and Judges Work to Encourage Professionalism

Led by Chief Justice Sue Bell Cobb and Montgomery attorney Douglas McElvy, the Chief Justice's Commission on Professionalism invited leaders in the legal profession to attend a Professionalism Consortium in February at Cumberland School of Law in Birmingham. The meeting was entitled a "consortium" (Latin for a partnership) because it was created as a joint effort by the Alabama State Bar and the commission. This conference, the first of its kind in Alabama, was designed to pull together leaders in the law to ensure that attorneys and judges across the state are held to the highest level of professionalism. Law school deans, presidents of legal societies and local bar associations, as well as select leaders from the judiciary and practitioners, were invited to identify common professionalism concerns and to create a plan for addressing those concerns. In fact, Dean John Carroll of Cumberland

was credited with first envisioning the plan to create the consortium and offered the law school as the host venue.

At the consortium, Chief Justice Cobb introduced Judge Harold Crow as the first director of the commission. Judge Crow is the past president of the Alabama Circuit Judges Association and highly respected as a former judge and leader among the legal community. The commission's goal is to develop strategies to address professionalism issues among the legal community and to assure Alabama citizens that the Alabama Supreme Court will take necessary steps to confirm that attorneys and judges understand the responsibility that they have to the citizens they serve.

McElvy, the commission's chair and a former state bar president, said, "Upon admission to the bar, an attorney takes an oath to serve in a professional manner. Most Alabama attorneys are conscientious and courteous in their dealings with

their peers, clients, court personnel and the public; nonetheless, it is the goal of Chief Justice Cobb and the commission to promote the highest standards of professionalism." Chief Justice Cobb added, "This commission was first established by former Chief Justice Drayton Nabers and I am very excited that he has agreed to work with me, Judge Crow and the outstanding members of this commission, to ensure that our good lawyers and judges are held to the standards that the public would expect of them."

The commission, comprised of about 25 attorneys and judges in leadership roles throughout the state, will meet soon to determine what steps will be taken to address the concerns addressed at the consortium. One program under consideration is an intervention-type approach to deal "hands on" with unprofessional conduct by attorneys or judges. Alabama State Bar President Sam Crosby of Daphne explained, "I believe that in the near future, Alabama will become the second state in the country to implement an initiative that has been successful in North Carolina in improving professionalism and bolstering public confidence in the legal system. The initiative addresses unprofessional conduct by a lawyer or a judge that does not rise to the level of a violation of the *Alabama Code of Professional Responsibility* or the *Canons of Judicial Ethics*." Another suggestion was to combat problem areas through education. Currently, Alabama attorneys are required to take at least 12 hours of continuing legal education annually, one hour of which must address issues in ethics or professionalism. Chief Justice Cobb suggested, "We need mandatory continuing legal education in Alabama for all our judges—not just for attorneys." Mobile Bar President Ian Gaston added, "Professionalism starts at the top. It is imperative that courts start on time, that judges treat lawyers and all parties with respect and that all rules of court are enforced."

Many attendees offered the commission proposals to consider. Judge Randall Cole, recipient of the Judicial Award of Merit, brought special attention to the state bar's

Pledge of Professionalism and the *Lawyer's Creed*. Judge Cole urged the Alabama Supreme Court to "consider adopting similar standards for judges in the state." Other suggestions included adoption of standards of professional conduct for judges, expansion of the state bar's mentoring program to include more role models for solo practitioners, promoting the growth of local chapters of Inns of Court, and encouraging participation in *pro bono* legal services and the Volunteer Lawyers Program.

The commission also used the meeting as a time to recognize that most attorneys do strive to act professionally in their calling and to pay tribute to one lawyer in particular for his lifetime commitment to improving the public perception of attorneys. Charles Gamble, former dean and professor at the University of Alabama School of Law who also taught at Cumberland and is perhaps best known for

his publications on legal evidence, was presented the Chief Justice's Professionalism Award. The award was presented by Chief Justice Cobb, former Governor Albert Brewer and commission member Ernestine Sapp. Chief Justice Cobb said, "I have known Dean Gamble for many years, and he is the epitome of everything that is good about our profession."

Staff members of the state bar serve on the commission and played a vital role in the planning of the program. Keith Norman, executive director of the state bar, attended the program along with many of the attorneys who serve on the bar's policymaking body, its Board of Bar Commissioners. Norman summarized the events of the day saying, "I think we have given the commission good information with which to work. It was a pleasure to see Dean Gamble rewarded for his outstanding commitment to the bench and bar." ▲▼▲

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