



MARK WHITE



The Raleigh twins, Sarah and Tripp, prove that when it comes to having fun at the annual meeting, age doesn't matter.

Thoughts from the New Guy

There's a steep learning curve once you begin your term as the Alabama State Bar president. Although our immediate past President Sam Crosby and I had a wonderful working relationship last year, I didn't fully appreciate just how much I had to learn. One of my early lessons was that your first "President's Page" is due before you are even installed as president. Nothing makes one feel less presidential and powerful than hearing the "sweet voice of charity" Margaret Murphy ask, "Where's your page? It is late and why the delay since you have zero frame of reference?" President-elect Tom Methvin is now officially on notice for next year.

Murphy and the rest of our ASB staff, who join me on the front cover of this issue of *The Alabama Lawyer*, work hard for our bar and its members 365 days a year. They usually are in the background doing the work that guarantees our bar remains professional, respected and organized. In asking the ASB staff to do me the honor of standing with me in this photo, I hoped to recognize the good people who have helped me throughout my career. We all need to remember they are the ASB's most valuable asset.

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Leon Ashford, Charles Gamble, ASB President J. Mark White, Supreme Court Chief Justice Sue Bell Cobb, Associate Supreme Court Justice J. Gorman Houston, Jr. and Judge U.W. Clemon share a moment in Sandestin.

If you did not attend the state bar meeting at Sandestin, you made a big mistake. As you have probably heard from your friends and colleagues, it was a great time of learning and fellowship for our state's lawyers. Once again, the ASB staff put together a terrific schedule of events for our bar members and their families. The four days of the annual meeting beautifully showcased their skills and dedication. Ranging from plenary sessions addressing topics that affect all members of our bar to specific discussions addressed to niche practice areas and interests, there were opportunities for all of our lawyer attendees to learn from the best. Receiving CLE credit for learning from the likes of Justice Gorman Houston, Danny Sheridan, Judge U.W. Clemon, Helen Alford, Chief Justice Sue Bell Cobb, and Millard Fuller (note: I only picked out enough to get your attention) was just an added bonus. We celebrated those who have best embodied our pro bono goals at the Bench & Bar Luncheon and reminisced with former classmates at the various school reunion activities. The Volunteer Lawyers Program reception was particularly well-attended. It was a highlight of the convention that I hope will translate into increased participation in VLP activities by our bar members. Our smallest meeting attendees enjoyed ice cream, a carnival night with their families, fireworks and, of course, the promotional items from our vendors and sponsors. Those who attended Saturday's Jazz Brunch were treated



Attending the annual meeting is serious business as registrants sought to have their vendor cards filled for that chance to win some really nifty door prizes. Special thanks to all of the 2008 exhibitors and their generous donations.

to Sam Crosby's stylings on the harmonica and Chief Justice Cobb and Judge Annetta Verin singing with the Birmingham Jazz Heritage Band. It was a state bar meeting to remember. You had better go ahead and block your calendar to attend next year's meeting, which will be held at Alabama's beautiful Grand Hotel July 15-18, 2009. We have a "handshake agreement" with the judges that they are going to make every effort to prevent dockets from conflicting with your attendance.



There's only one state supreme court chief justice who can carry a tune—Hon. Sue Bell Cobb. The chief justice and Judge Annetta Verin combined for a duet of "This Little Light of Mine" during President Mark White's Jazz Brunch Reception. The fabulous Birmingham Jazz Heritage Band provided its unique 'Nawlins sound.



State Bar Vice President Alicia F. Bennett and family are getting ready for some fun!

Between now and next July, we have some work to do. As I shared with you at the state bar meeting, there are several areas where I think your wisdom and work are needed in the next year. First, we must increase resources to improve access to justice for the poor in our state. In the last election cycle, \$17 million dollars were spent on Alabama's judicial campaigns. In the same year, \$7 million dollars were spent providing Alabama's poor access to our system of justice. We simply cannot allow our system to



ESPN's Danny Sheridan and Chief Justice Cobb are undoubtedly conferring about which SEC team will be crowned BCS Champions.



President-elect Tom Methvin, President J. Mark White and Immediate Past President Sam Crosby take on their new roles as the 2008 annual meeting comes to a close.

operate one way for people who can afford an attorney and another for people who cannot. Dedicated members of our bar labored to achieve mandatory IOLTA last year, efforts that have raised Alabama from 52nd place in this country in providing resources for access to justice. However, our neighbors and fellow citizens still deserve better. We must do more. For example, we must insist that banks pay fair and competitive interest rates on IOLTA accounts. Anything less is, quite literally, robbing the poor.

Next, we must continue to address issues in our state's indigent defense system. Despite the hard work of members of our bar, most notably Sam Crosby and Chief Justice Cobb, the amount of time it took to forge a bill to address these issues resulted in a shortage of time in the legislative session to achieve its enactment. Chief Justice Cobb has made it a legislative priority for next year, and I have pledged to her that I will do all that I can to see that it is passed into law. In both access to justice and adequate funding for our indigent defense system, we are dealing with ensuring that the "least of these" among us are given fair access to justice.

Third, we must work together, both bench and bar, to continue to improve civility and professionalism and restore pride in our profession. One way to ensure our younger members understand what it really means to be a lawyer, and quite frankly to remind more "seasoned" members of those same

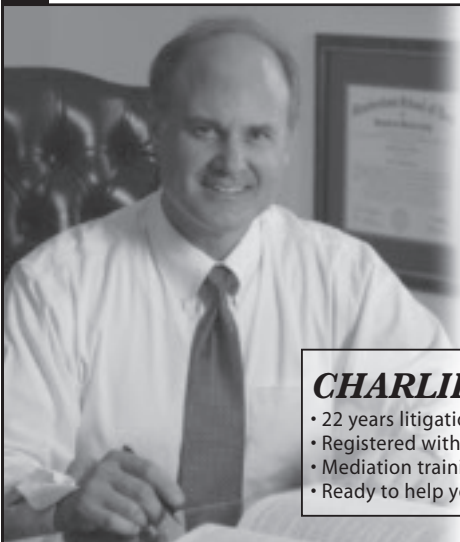
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obligations, is to participate in one of the mentoring opportunities offered by our state bar and various local bar associations. I look forward to the pilot programs that will be implemented by Chief Justice Cobb's Task Force on Professionalism, which is working under Judge Harold Crowe's able leadership. Being involved in these mentoring and professionalism projects and programs not only will make you a better lawyer, it will make you a better person.

Finally, we must work to improve Alabama's system for the selection of its judiciary and our state's reputation for justice. In the words of former Supreme Court Justice O'Connor, "We put cash in the courtrooms, and it's just wrong." The numbers are painful—according to a recent study by the National Center for State Courts, over 75 percent of the public believe that there is a correlation between campaign contributions and judicial decisions. Worse yet, 49 percent of trial judges in this country share the same feeling. I don't know what's worse: a judge being corrupted by partisan politics or a fair and impartial judge being wrongly perceived as corrupted by

partisan politics. We all know that a solution is going to require our bar to display selfless devotion to finding a solution. Chief Justice Cobb and I have pledged that we will work in concert to address the problems associated with the partisan election of judges. We will embark on a course designed to take us to a point where every citizen enjoys not only the reality, but also the confidence and perception that they are dealing with a fair and impartial system of justice. I look forward to sharing with you the details of this effort in the very near future.

As we begin this year together, I welcome and solicit your ideas, complaints and opinions about all of these matters. Please understand that when you bring me a problem, I will ask you for your ideas as to a solution. We have all heard countless times, "Why doesn't the bar do something about this?" YOU are the bar, and I will insist that your question be, "Why aren't WE doing something about this?" It's going to be a busy year for the Alabama State Bar and, with your cooperation, hard work and enthusiasm, we can make it a great one. Buckle up. ▲▼▲



Client problems? . . .

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