



## A Perspective on the Alabama State Bar's 2009 Leadership Forum—Class 5

By Lisa Darnley Cooper

*“Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.”*

*John Wesley (founder of Methodism, 1703-1791)*

In the interest of full disclosure, as a Methodist I am a little partial to John Wesley. But John Wesley's rule perfectly sums up what the Alabama State Bar's Leadership Forum is all about: it is the ultimate training ground for those interested in service to our profession, service to our bar and service to our communities and state.

The Leadership Forum is not a typical “Leadership 101” class. The essential principles of effective leadership are certainly covered, but Class 5 was not presented with a list of leadership techniques to master or even a list of the most significant qualities or characteristics of great leaders. Instead, with the central themes of servant leadership and our state bar's motto (“Lawyers Render Service”) guiding our five sessions, members of Class 5 were challenged by some of the most accomplished leaders

in our state and guest lecturers, simply stated. . . to serve.

### Do All the Good You Can

For each month between January and May, members of Class 5 traveled to various cities across Alabama to hear from demonstrated servant leaders, and we learned that there were countless opportunities to serve and “do good” in Alabama. The topic of each session was different, of course, but the underlying directive from each presenter was the same. That is, true leadership is servant leadership. As Robert K. Greenleaf explains in his 1970 essay entitled *The Servant as Leader*, servant leadership starts from the sincere motivation to serve others *first* and, only then, followed by the conscious choice to aspire to lead. In other words, great leadership is the natural consequence of the primary desire to serve others.

### COMMENTS FROM CLASS 5 ALUMNI (Continued)

#### Audrey O. Strawbridge

This program has provided me with the opportunity to meet with attorneys from all spectrums of diversification. The various speakers who were gracious enough to spend their time all had one common characteristic: servant leaders. This forum has taught me that Alabama is full of potential and the potential is being realized through servant leaders who work tirelessly to see Alabama achieve.

#### Brian P. Strength

The Leadership Forum helps the state bar connect to members in places other than Mobile, Montgomery, Huntsville and Birmingham, and any program of the state bar which does that deserves particular consideration. It is a good incubator for future bar commissioners. It also occurred to me that the state bar gets a benefit from all of the speakers interacting with emerging bar leaders.

#### J. Robert Turnipseed

I have met some wonderful people during this program, not only members of my class but also those who have come before and those community leaders who spoke to us. I learned that Alabama is a state full of amazing opportunities, but also difficult challenges that we, as natural leaders of our respective communities, have an obligation to engage. I am grateful for being afforded the opportunity to be involved in this program, and I truly hope I can continue to apply the lessons learned in the future.

#### R. Hays Webb

We are surrounded by smart and thoughtful lawyers, each hoping to serve their community and our state. We have been introduced to current and future leaders and exposed to ideas regarding and examples of leadership in situations which exemplify the highest standards of our profession. The various speakers, particularly those covering education and the Black Belt, provided excellent examples of leadership skills and qualities at work. Our classes reinforced Alabama's continual need for new leaders at every level who exhibit these same qualities.

#### Chad E. Woodruff

The sheer educational experience of the Leadership Forum has been the most surprising aspect to me. The forum has provided an extremely broad brush on so many pressing and important issues facing our state, including economic development, poverty and educational opportunities, just to name a few. Educating, networking, [visiting] historical sites—it has been a very rewarding time for me.



# ALABAMA STATE BAR LEADERSHIP FORUM



Class 5 began to explore the concept of servant leadership in January when we met for an overnight retreat at the Marriott Renaissance Ross Bridge in Hoover for an orientation session on “Fundamentals of Leadership and Professionalism.” Class members got the opportunity to get to know one another, and we also enjoyed a first-class lineup of presenters. One of the many highlights was an interactive “leadership boot camp” with Allison Black Cornelius, founder of BLACKboard Consulting Company. Cornelius has a tremendous gift for motivating her audience to lead at the absolute highest possible level. In fact, she is one of those people who can make you feel completely at ease, while she is challenging you beyond your limits. Class 5 also enjoyed a presentation by Dr. Wayne Flynt, professor emeritus, Auburn University. Prior to orientation, we read several chapters of Dr. Flynt’s latest historical work, *Alabama in the Twentieth Century*. If you want to get passionate about reforming Alabama’s antiquated, ineffective and discriminatory 1901 Constitution, read this book and

hear Flynt speak. His passion about bringing Alabama’s constitutional framework *into* the 21<sup>st</sup> century is contagious.

In February, we traveled to the state bar in Montgomery for a session entitled “Leadership through Education,” where the panel included a “Who’s Who” of education in our state. This session was particularly inspiring, because while the education system in Alabama certainly has its challenges, such as the state education budget (see previous reference to ineffective state constitution), there has been significant progress over the last several years. We were able to see the progress first-hand by touring E.D. Nixon Elementary School. In 2008, E.D. Nixon received the Torchbearer Award which recognizes high-poverty public schools that have overcome the odds to become high-performing schools. After the tour of the school, I ate lunch with Dr. Regina Thompson, former principal of the school. As I listened to her talk about the struggles and triumphs at E.D. Nixon, I remember thinking of the familiar Margaret Mead quotation: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful,

committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

Our third session was held in Selma and focused on Alabama’s Black Belt. Often called the state’s “Third World,” the Black Belt is plagued by poverty, high unemployment rates, high rates of unwed mothers, illiteracy, and so on, but the momentum to change that was palpable at this session. We also had the honor of visiting the Brown Chapel AME Church, headquarters for the voting rights movement and the starting point for the Selma-to-Montgomery marches that lead to the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. It was amazing to hear firsthand accounts of this period of our state and nation’s history from Jamie Wallace, a reporter for the *Selma Times Journal* in the 1960s.

In April, we traveled back to Montgomery for a session focused on “The Legislative Process and Economic Development.” The morning session was held at the state capitol, where we met Governor Bob Riley, Lt. Governor Jim Folsom, Jr. and Speaker of the House Seth Hammett, just to name a few. The second part of the session involved a tour

## Alabama State Bar Leadership Forum Applicant Demographics 2005-2009

	Class 5 (2009)			Class 4 (2008)			Class 3 (2007)			Class 2 (2006)			Class 1 (2005)		
	Applications	Class	Alternates	Applications	Class	Alternates	Applications	Class	Alternates	Applications	Class	Alternates	Applications	Class	Alternates
<b>Number of Applicants</b>	75	30	4	78	30	4	72	30	4	71	30	4	42	30	4
<b>Male</b>	52	19	2	51	20	4	52	20	3	52	20		25	16	
<b>Female</b>	23	11	2	27	10	0	20	10	1	19	10		17	14	
<b>Black</b>	4	3	0	7	5	0		2	1	6	6		2	2	
<b>City:</b>															
<b>Birmingham</b>	31	8	3	34	13	4	33	13		34	12		18	14	
<b>Huntsville</b>	2	1	0	2	2		6	2		4	1		4	3	
<b>Mobile</b>	7	4	0	7	2		6	2		6	2		5	2	
<b>Montgomery</b>	9	6	0	13	5		6	2		8	3		6	5	
<b>Tuscaloosa</b>	2	2	0	5	1		5	3		2	1		4	4	
<b>Other</b>	24	9	1	17	7		16	8		17	11		5	2	



of the Hyundai Motor Manufacturing plant, and discussions about the “nuts and bolts” of economic and workforce development.

In May, Balch & Bingham hosted an “Access to Justice” workshop in Birmingham which included discussions about the Volunteer Lawyer programs in Alabama, truth in sentencing and the many issues facing Hispanics in Alabama. At this session, presentations by Jon C. Goldfarb, counsel for Lilly Ledbetter, and G. Douglas Jones, the former United States Attorney who successfully prosecuted two former Ku Klux Klansmen for the murder of the four young girls killed in the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing, reminded us that the work we do as lawyers is, above all else, a public service.

## By All the Means and All the Ways You Can

One of the goals of the Leadership Forum is to form a pool of lawyers from which the Alabama State Bar, state and local governmental entities, local bar associations and community organizations can draw upon for leadership and service. As lawyers, we have the means and a unique set of skills and abilities to serve and lead our communities. Take, for example, just a few of the topics covered in the 2009 Leadership Forum. By our training and education, lawyers are uniquely qualified to effectuate constitutional reform or to serve in the state legislature (yet few do). Through *pro bono* efforts, we can also serve the disadvantaged or persons of limited means, thereby promoting the public interest, in ways no other profession can.

In fact, inspired by the Leadership Forum’s charge for servant leadership and by the examples of selfless leadership of

the many guest lecturers and panelists, Class 5 is planning a *pro bono* class project for the Black Belt community. Class 5 will certainly use what we learned through the Leadership Forum in our local communities, but we are also intent on a collective project that will hopefully reach beyond where we live and practice. With the help of the state bar’s Volunteer Lawyers Program, Class 5 members will conduct three *pro bono* clinics, one each in Demopolis, Selma and Tuskegee, this fall and winter. If you would like to help out, we would welcome your involvement. At a minimum, we request that every lawyer sign up for the Volunteer Lawyers Program at the ASB and your local VLP office, if you have not already done so.

## In All the Places You Can, at All the Times You Can, to All the People You Can

One of the greatest characteristics of the Leadership Forum is the diversity of the class members, and Class 5 is no exception. Class 5 members reside in cities and towns all over the state of Alabama, including Birmingham, Cullman, Eufaula, Fort Payne, Gadsden, Huntsville, Lincoln, Mobile, Montgomery, Opelika, Talladega, Tuscaloosa, Tuskegee, and Vernon. Every type of law practice is represented, including solo practitioners; civil and criminal practices in small, medium and big firms; plaintiffs’ and defense attorneys; in-house counsel; government lawyers; a district attorney; a court administrator; a former circuit court judge; and lawyers employed by legislative agencies. Even prior to the Leadership Forum, members of Class 5 were extremely busy donating their time and energy to a host of organizations, such as Big Brothers-Big Sisters, the

Muscular Dystrophy Association, United Cerebral Palsy, the NAACP, the Boy Scouts of America, The Inns of Court, several Rotary and Kiwanis clubs, and historical preservation societies. Many members of Class 5 take time to tutor children and teach Sunday school. Almost every member is involved in our state bar and their local bar association at various levels. It is actually quite humbling to be included in such a group.

With the leadership skills the forum helps cultivate and the connections we have made with each other and with the state bar, I have no doubt that because of our Leadership Forum experience, members of Class 5 will be the future leaders of our state bar and positively impact people in every corner of our state.

## As Long as You Ever Can

Alumni of the Leadership Forum include a state legislator, district attorneys, bar commissioners, judges, and presidents of local bar associations, and numerous other local and state leaders. In fact, if you consider the level of community and state bar involvement of the members of Leadership Forum classes 1-4, it is clear that graduation from the forum is truly a commencement of a commitment to leadership and service in Alabama. I look forward to seeing the future fruits of Class 5’s commitment to “do good” in our state. ▲▲▲



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