

MECKLENBURG BAR NEWS



FROM THE MECKLENBURG BAR ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT

Mecklenburg Bar Association Nears Year Two Milestone with Record Growth and Renewed Commitment



By Sarah Motley Stone, MBA President

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The Mecklenburg Bar Association is approaching its second birthday! Our second year as an independent, voluntary organization has been marked with both unexpected challenges and exciting engagement. Membership for the 2025-26 year will exceed our projections, with over 2,400 members. Our Sections remain the heartbeat of our organization: the 15 Sections have collectively held over 85 in-person meetings, including business meetings and socials—and have sponsored over 25 live CLEs. The December holiday party broke records—over 190 members and guests in attendance at Discovery Place.

In the midst of these successful stay-the-course activities, the Mecklenburg Bar Association was presented with the same uncertainties and challenges facing so many of our organizations, employers, clients, and colleagues. In a rapidly evolving landscape for diversity, equity, and inclusion, the MBA, like many of your organizations, has felt the pressures of these shifts. We have been grappling with many of the same questions and have undertaken a thorough evaluation of the structure, status, and future of our DE&I Initiatives and their funding. The Board remains committed to eliminating biases, barriers, and prejudices within the legal profession. As the Mecklenburg Bar’s Special Committee on Diversity wrote over 20 years ago: *The legal profession can more effectively address societal and individual needs with varied perspectives, experience, knowledge, and understanding by people involved in the practice of law.* We are proud to continue our programming, which includes the Mentorship Alliance, Lunch with a Lawyer, the IDLP Conference, the MBA + CPCC Summer Camp: Law Launchpad, and the Charlotte Legal Clerkship Program, which kicks off its 20th year this May.

Yet these challenges have not stymied the Bar, as we continue to seek opportunities to provide our members with valuable opportunities to *Connect, Lead, and Serve*. Following the annual courthouse lunch, the MBA and the 26th Judicial District are planning a first-ever *Summer School CLE Series: A District Court Primer for Current and Future Trial Lawyers*, a series of eight CLEs directed towards District Court practitioners, moderated by our local judges, on topics including Criminal, Juvenile, Family, Civil, the Clerk’s Office, Domestic Violation, Child Support, and Immigration.

In addition, as noted in my opening speech and newsletter, I have found grounding in our oath of office and the Preamble to the North Carolina Rules of Professional Conduct, which direct us to “further the public’s understanding of and confidence in the rule of law and the justice system.”

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DIANE'S DELI

By Meredith Barnette,
MBA Communications Committee Chair

It's Never Too Late: Finding Your Way to the Law

For many non-traditional lawyers, the path to the profession is less a sharp pivot than a gradual merging of long-held interests and evolving professional experiences. I recently had the pleasure of speaking with a couple of colleagues that either attended law school, or finally took the bar exam, later in life. Jason Stoogenke, a local television reporter, went to law school right after college but didn't take the bar exam until age 50; Nam Douglass, a local immigration attorney, went to law school after more than 10 years working in economic development. Both had careers that flourished, yet the underlying interest in law persisted.

The decision to attend law school initially for both was because of genuine interest and aspiration. Stoogenke credits a strong academic performance, leadership experience, and an enjoyment of argument-driven coursework for making law school a logical next step after college. Douglass had always thought about going to law school, and her work with attorneys in the nonprofit sector reminded her that legal skills provide the ability to diagnose problems, understand decisions, and find solutions to affect positive change. She was at a point in her life where a consulting project was winding down, and the next step was up in the air. Importantly, the law was viewed as a versatile degree capable of opening a wide range of doors.

Obviously, both Stoogenke and Douglass agree that entering the legal profession later, whether its law school or taking the bar, does have its unique challenges. For Stoogenke, the experience of preparing for the bar exam decades after law school gave him a sincere appreciation for those returning to academia after being out of practice for so long. Balancing full-time employment with an intensive study schedule required exceptional discipline, highlighting the difficulty of re-engaging with academic study later in life. For Douglass, going to law school while also being a mother to two young children required discipline as well, however one of

the most significant adjustments was the shift in professional identity—from a confident and established member of the workforce to an uncomfortable beginner. At the same time, maturity and professional experience proved advantageous for both, reinforcing habits of resilience, time management, and focus that are critical to success.

Having career experience, especially in the fields that Stoogenke and Douglass pursued, brought distinct advantages. For Douglass, years spent facilitating trainings, leading focus groups, and managing community meetings translated into confidence in class participation and diffused any fear. Her previous life provided a broad foundational knowledge of different work environments and organizational cultures, as well as experience with a wide variety of audiences, all helpful in understanding varying client perspectives. For Stoogenke, core competencies developed in the newsroom—namely, the ability to work under pressure, synthesize complex information, communicate effectively, and craft compelling narratives—translate directly into legal analysis. He also points out the correlation of listening: the investigative demands of journalism mirror the fact-gathering and evidentiary evaluation central to legal work. These overlapping skills illustrate how prior professional experience, even outside the law, can provide a meaningful foundation for the legal profession. The appreciation for other attorneys, their work, and their perspectives is an added bonus to entering the profession with the maturity and wisdom of age.

For many, the entry into the legal profession need not follow a linear timeline. As Douglass says, the path forward may be a bit more of a curve, but the key is to keep moving ahead. Whether returning to sit for the bar after decades or embarking on legal education in mid-life, the combination of life experience, professional discipline, and renewed purpose can be a powerful asset. Already having the opportunity to know



Jason Stoogenke



Nam Douglass

how you learn best, what your weaknesses and challenges are, what environments you work best in, and how the real world operates, is a skill that traditional students don't necessarily have. While the transition may require adjusting personal expectations and adapting to new intellectual demands, it also offers the opportunity to draw on a depth of perspective that is often unavailable earlier in life. **TT**

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Register Today for the Annual Meeting

UPCOMING EVENTS

Don't miss out on the 2026 Mecklenburg Bar Association (MBA) and 26th Judicial District (JD) Bar Annual Meeting. Members will vote on the following:

- Approval of the 2025 26th JD Bar Annual Meeting Minutes
- New officers and members-at-large for the 26th JD Executive Board and new officers and Board members for the MBA

You'll also witness the swearing-in of Mesha Sloss as President of the Mecklenburg Bar Association and Graham Billings as President of the 26th Judicial District Bar.

To register and view meeting information, including a draft of the 2026-27 budget for the 26th JD Bar, visit MeckBar.org/annual-meeting-2026. Registration closes on May 13 for those who plan to eat lunch before the meeting.

You must attend the Annual Meeting in person to vote. Voting is open to 26th JD Bar members only for the 26th JD Board business. Voting is open to Level I, II and III MBA members for the MBA business. The Annual Meeting is free of charge for all 26th JD Bar and MBA members; however, you must register in advance if you plan to eat. Proof of registration will be required to go through the food lines. Guests are \$10 per person.

Wednesday, May 20, 2026

- 11 a.m. – 12 p.m.
Lunch will be served in the 1st Floor Café area in the Parr Center
- 12 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.
Annual Meeting in the Theater on the Lower Level of the Parr Center

Location: 1201 Elizabeth Avenue, Charlotte, 28204

Questions? Email events@meckbar.org.

The 26th JD Bar Nominating Committee met on March 17 to consider the slate of nominees for the 26th JD Bar Executive Board. Thomas Powers, as Past President of the 26th JD Bar, served as Nominating Committee Chair.

The MBA Nominating Committee met on March 23 to consider the slate of nominees for the Mecklenburg Bar Association Officer and Board of Directors positions. Courtney Ballard, as Past President of the MBA, served as Nominating Committee Chair.

The following people have been nominated and will be presented for election at the Annual Meeting on May 20. Additional nominations may be made from the floor at that time.

26th Judicial District Executive Board Nominations Officers

One-year term

Jason St. Aubin, President-Elect

Gabrielle Kelly, Secretary

David Sherman, Treasurer

Members-at-Large

Two-year term

Sarah Beth Cain

Clay Campbell

Jessica Dixon

Anthony Monaghan

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FRIDAY, MAY 1

LAW DAY AND RULE OF LAW OATH RECOMMITMENT CEREMONY

12:30 p.m.

Charles R. Jonas Federal Building
401 W. Trade St, Charlotte

All members of the 26th Judicial District Bar and Mecklenburg Bar Association are invited to this ceremony on May 1, 2026, to reaffirm their oaths as attorneys uphold the rule of law and judicial independence. This event will be held on the lawn of the Federal Courthouse. The retaking of the Attorney's Oath, which all lawyers pledge upon admission to the bar, symbolizes the legal profession's commitment to the Constitution, safeguarding individual rights, and ensuring access to impartial justice for all.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 6

SPRING SWEARING-IN CEREMONIES

10:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m.

Charles R. Jonas Federal Building
401 W. Trade St, Charlotte

The 26th JD Bar Swearing-In Ceremony offers admittees the chance to be sworn in with their peers in front of a judge from both State and Federal Court.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 20

26TH JD BAR/MECKLENBURG BAR ASSOCIATION ANNUAL MEETING

12:00 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.

Parr Center Theater at Central Piedmont Community College

Boxed lunch begins at 11 a.m. in the 1st floor dining area (*must RSVP in advance for food*)

Members will vote on the new officers and members-at-large for the 26th Judicial District Bar Executive Board and the officers and Board members for the Mecklenburg Bar Association Board of Directors. They will also witness the swearing-in of 2026-27 MBA President Mesha Sloss and 26th JD Bar President Graham Billings.

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MCMILLAN FELLOWSHIP DINNER HONORS SERVICE, DIVERSITY & JUSTICE

On February 19, 2026, the 29th Annual Hon. James B. McMillan Fellowship Dinner was held at the Grande Bohemian. Guests celebrated the 2026 Julius Chambers Diversity Champion Award recipient, recognized the service of the John B. McMillan Distinguished Service Award recipient, learned about the significance of the Fourth Amendment in reasonable search and seizure, and honored the legacy of the Hon. James McMillan, for whom the event is named.

The Mecklenburg Bar Foundation's (MBF's) McMillan Fellowship Committee administers and raises money for the McMillan Fellowship program, which awards stipends each year to promising law school students pursuing careers in public service work for nonprofit and government agencies in Mecklenburg County.

Established in 1995 as a separate fund of the MBF, the Hon. James B. McMillan Fellowship Fund seeks to support justice and innovation within our local legal system and to encourage law students who might be interested in a career in public interest law in Mecklenburg County. To date, over 140 Fellows have worked at such agencies as the City of Charlotte, International House, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the U.S. District Court, the Mecklenburg County Public Defender's Office, the U.S. Attorney's Office, the Mecklenburg County District Attorney's Office, the Mecklenburg Trial Court Administrator's Office and Federal Defenders of Western North Carolina.

Daniel Spiegel (UNC School of Government, Assistant Professor of Public Law and Government) led a panel of experts discussing the role of the Fourth Amendment in shaping criminal justice on a local, state and federal level throughout the nation's history. The Hon. Donald Cureton, Jr. (Mecklenburg County Superior Court) and



From left: Hon. Donald Cureton, Jr., Claire Rauscher and Daniel Spiegel

Claire Rauscher (Womble Bond Dickinson (US) LLP) remarked on the practices that legal counsel and the judiciary can apply to ensure the rule of law and order.

The event included the 19th Annual Julius Chambers Diversity Champion Award presentation. Suzi Canali introduced the recipient, Kelly Durden, who shared insights about the value of being a unique voice in every room they enter. For more on Kelly, read her profile on page 10 of the March/April 2026 edition of the *Mecklenburg Bar News*.

Additionally, attendees joined in the celebration of John B. McMillan Distinguished Service Award recipient, Randel Phillips (Moore & Van Allen PLLC), presented by North Carolina State Bar leaders David Allen and Kevin Williams.

This year's event would not be possible without the dedication of the Hon. James B. McMillan Fellowship Committee, the Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee and our sponsors.

Hon. James B. McMillan Fellowship Committee: Amy Howard (*Chair*), Mandana Vidwan & Lacey Duskin (*Co-Vice Chairs*),

Kelly Carroll*, Jessica Dixon, Kenya Glover, John Gresham*, M. Glenn Huether, Charles Johnson, Emma Kutteh, Hon. Alyssa Levine, Maria Long*, Anthony Monaghan, Davita Morgan, Martha Odom*, Ray Owens*, Sonya Pfeiffer, Randel Phillips* & Eli Timberg

**ex officio*

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YLD Honors JoLisa Drayton Rouse with Young Lawyer of the Year Award

By Patrick Macher, YLD Chair

The Mecklenburg Bar Association's Young Lawyers Division proudly honored JoLisa Drayton Rouse as the recipient of the Young Lawyer of the Year Award, presented at the annual Law & Society Gala on April 17. This prestigious recognition celebrates a young attorney who exemplifies excellence in the practice of law, leadership within the profession, and a deep and sustained commitment to service. JoLisa's selection reflects not only her professional accomplishments, but also her longstanding dedication to advocating for others.

A native of North Charleston, South Carolina, JoLisa graduated *Cum Laude* from the University of South Carolina before earning her Juris Doctor, also *Cum Laude*, from North Carolina Central University School of Law. JoLisa began her legal career as an Assistant Public Defender in Gaston County, where she represented juveniles and indigent clients in both district and superior courts. She now serves as a Guardian ad Litem Attorney Advocate in Mecklenburg County, where she champions the best interests of children in foster care, working to secure permanence while addressing their medical, educational, and emotional needs. Her leadership extends beyond individual advocacy, including service as Chair of the MBA's Juvenile Law Section, participation on key juvenile court committees, and mentorship of aspiring attorneys.



JoLisa's recognition at the Law & Society Gala not only celebrates her achievements to date but also affirms her enduring impact as a leader, advocate, and role model within the legal profession and beyond. Congratulations to JoLisa, the YLD is grateful for your commitment and dedication to our community and the legal profession.

YLD Annual Meeting: Registration is now open for the YLD's Annual Meeting on June 18, 2026, at Noble Smoke at the Freedom Drive location. YLD members and guests are invited as we recap a successful year for the YLD and transition into the next term of leadership. Register at: MeckBar.org/YLD-AnnualMeeting-2026.

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BLI Class of 2026 with Dave Newell, Facilitator

BAR LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE CELEBRATES CLASS OF 2026 AT GRADUATION


The Bar Leadership Institute Class of 2026 celebrated their graduation in April with a dinner and reception at Olde Mecklenburg Brewery. During the reception, class members reflected on their experiences, shared lessons learned, and recognized the relationships built throughout the program.

Thank you to BLI Committee Chair Chrissy Clarke-Peckham, Vice Chair Hon. Rex Marvel, the committee members in attendance, BLI facilitator Dave Newell, and all of the special guests, family, and friends who joined in celebrating this outstanding class.

The class launched its experience in January with the annual Kickoff Dinner, followed by an interactive retreat facilitated by Dave Newell of Evolve Consulting. In the weeks that followed, participants took part in a series of engaging sessions designed

to explore leadership, service, and the role of the bar. Highlights included a Charlotte bus tour led by local historian Dr. Tom Hanchett, as well as individualized coaching sessions that offered personalized guidance and perspective.

Leaders from the 26th Judicial District Bar, the Mecklenburg Bar Association, and the Mecklenburg Bar Foundation look forward to seeing these graduates step into future leadership opportunities and continue their involvement within the bar and the broader community.

Applications for the BLI Class of 2027 will open in September. For more information, visit MeckBar.org/BLI. 



Head back to the classroom for our new CLE series:

SUMMER SCHOOL: A DISTRICT COURT PRIMER SERIES FOR CURRENT AND FUTURE TRIAL LAWYERS

Each session will focus on a different area of the court—offering insight into procedures, strategy, and the unwritten rules that can make a difference in the courtroom. Sessions are from 12:00 - 2:00 p.m. at the Mecklenburg County Courthouse.

June 9 Criminal Court

June 10 Juvenile Court

June 11 Family Court

June 16 Civil Court

June 18 Practicing Before the Clerk

June 30 DV Court

July 1 Child Support Court

Register now at MeckBar.org/calendar







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Service to your Bar strengthens your community, builds your résumé, and offers meaningful connections. Volunteers with the 26th Judicial District Bar, Mecklenburg Bar Association, and Mecklenburg Bar Foundation committees, sections and divisions bolster the innovative services and programs that support you, our members, and the residents of Mecklenburg County.

Time spent volunteering on a 26th JD Bar, MBA, or MBF board, committee, or section counts toward your responsibilities under Rule 6.1 of the North Carolina Rules of Professional Conduct.

Committee volunteers typically serve up to three-year terms, beginning July 1. If you are interested in serving, visit MeckBar.org/Committees. The deadline for submitting your Committee Interest Form at MeckBar.org/Committees is May 31. For questions email GetInvolved@meckbar.org. 

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CELEBRATING SERVICE AND LEADERSHIP AT THE 2026 LAW & SOCIETY GALA

On April 17, members of the Mecklenburg County legal community gathered for a memorable evening at The Revelry North End in Charlotte for the 2026 Law & Society Gala. Hosted in support of the Mecklenburg Bar Foundation, the event celebrated the vital role of the legal profession in strengthening our community while honoring individuals whose service and leadership make a lasting impact.

The evening offered a vibrant mix of connection and celebration, bringing together attorneys, judges, and community leaders in a setting that reflected both the spirit of the profession and the importance of giving back. Throughout the night, attendees had the opportunity to reconnect with colleagues, build new relationships, and recognize the outstanding contributions of their peers.

Guiding the program as co-emcees were Mecklenburg Bar Foundation President Michael Harman, 26th Judicial District Bar President R. Lee Robertson, Jr., and Mecklenburg Bar Association President-Elect Mesha Sloss.

RECOGNIZING EXCELLENCE IN OUR LEGAL COMMUNITY

A highlight of the evening was the recognition of this year's distinguished honorees, individuals and organizations

whose dedication to professionalism, service, and justice continues to elevate the legal community:

- Ayscue Professionalism Award and Judicial Recognition – Hon. Louis A. Trosch, Jr.
- Judicial Recognition - Hon. Tyyawdi Hands
- YLD Young Lawyer of the Year Award – JoLisa Drayton Rouse, 26th Judicial District Guardian ad Litem Program
- MBA Pro Bono Award: Outstanding Individual Attorney – D. Blaine Sanders, Robinson Bradshaw
- MBA Pro Bono Award: Outstanding Collaborative Project – Operation Charlotte's Web Response
- Retirement Recognition – Lisa Armanini, Mecklenburg Bar Association

The Mecklenburg Bar Foundation and Mecklenburg Bar Association extend their sincere appreciation to the sponsors whose generosity made the evening possible. Their continued support plays a critical role in advancing the Foundation's mission and expanding its impact in the community.

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To relive the evening and see all the special moments, stay tuned for the official photo gallery, coming soon to [Facebook.com/MeckBarAssociation](https://www.facebook.com/MeckBarAssociation). 



MEMBERSHIP INVOICING FOR 2026-27

The invoice process for the 2026-27 mandatory 26th JD Bar and voluntary Mecklenburg Bar Association membership fees, section/division dues, and access cards has begun. Paper invoices are no longer sent by U.S. Mail and haven't been for the past several years.

Be sure that your information is up-to-date in your member record by logging into your MyMeckBar account on MeckBar.org. **On or around July 1, you will receive both an email and a postcard with instructions on how to make your payment(s).**

Update Your Contact Information

N.C.G.S. 84-16, 84-18.1 and 84-34 require you to inform your State and District Bar when your contact information changes. You may log into your account on MeckBar.org to confirm and/or edit your current email address and mailing address or e-mail Member Records Coordinator Jill Wiggins at jwiggins@meckbar.org with any changes.

Firm Billing

Firm administrators wishing to make a single payment for all members should contact Member Records Coordinator Jill Wiggins at jwiggins@meckbar.org by June 1 to receive consolidated firm invoices for both the 26th Judicial District Bar and the Mecklenburg Bar Association. If you are unsure whether your firm is participating in firm billing, contact your firm administrator. Payments are due by July 31. [TIP](#)



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Access to Justice Breakfast Raises Critical Support and Momentum for Civil Legal Aid in Charlotte

By Kelly Lynn, Chief Philanthropy Officer, Charlotte Center for Legal Advocacy

The 2026 Access to Justice Breakfast was more than a successful fundraising event—it was a powerful demonstration of what is possible when the legal community comes together in support of equal justice. With more than 450 attorneys, judges, business leaders, and community members in attendance, this year’s Breakfast highlighted both the urgency of the moment and the collective commitment to ensuring that everyone in Mecklenburg County has access to legal help when it matters most.

Thanks to the extraordinary generosity of sponsors and individual donors, the event raised an impressive \$865,000 to support civil legal services in our community. These funds will directly impact thousands of individuals and families navigating critical legal issues related to housing, health care, immigration, and financial stability—areas where the stakes are high and the consequences of going without representation can be life-altering.

McGuireWoods once again led the way for 41 total sponsors as the presenting sponsor. In fact, with an ask to “double down” in light of the current funding environment, 17 sponsors chose to increase or double down their sponsorships, and 15 new sponsors decided to sign up this year.

This year’s program struck a thoughtful balance between insight and inspiration. Attendees heard a candid look at the evolving landscape of nonprofit legal funding, including the growing gap

between need and available resources. As demand for services continues to rise, organizations like Charlotte Center for Legal Advocacy and Legal Aid of North Carolina are being called upon to do more with less. The Breakfast served as both a reality check and a rallying cry, underscoring the essential role that private support plays in sustaining access to justice.

At the same time, the event created space for connection, reflection, and even a bit of levity. A touch of humor helped lighten the morning while reinforcing a deeper message: that while the challenges are serious, the community’s shared dedication remains strong. The energy in the room was unmistakable—a sense of purpose fueled by the understanding that the legal profession has a unique and vital role to play in advancing justice.

The Mecklenburg Bar has long been a steadfast partner in this work, and the strong turnout at this year’s Breakfast reflected that ongoing commitment. From law firms and corporate legal departments to individual practitioners, the legal community continues to lead by example—investing not only financial resources, but also time, expertise, and advocacy.

Events like the Access to Justice Breakfast are critical not only for the funds they raise, but also for the awareness they build. Civil legal aid often operates behind the scenes, yet its impact is profound. It can mean the difference between a family staying in

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THE HIDDEN COSTS OF UNUSED TECH IN LAW FIRMS

By Camille Stell, Vice President
of Risk & Practice Management,
Lawyers Mutual



Small law firms are investing in technology at an unprecedented pace. Practice management systems, document automation tools, client portals, e-discovery platforms, the list continues to grow. Yet in many firms, a surprising amount of this technology sits unused or underutilized. The industry has a name for it - shelfware.

At first glance, shelfware may seem like a minor inefficiency - an occasional wasted subscription or an abandoned feature. But the reality is unused technology carries hidden costs that can quietly erode profitability, hinder productivity, and even increase a firm's risk exposure.

The Financial Drain You Don't See

The most obvious cost of shelfware is financial. Firms pay for licenses, subscriptions, upgrades, and support agreements that are never fully used. But the true financial impact goes beyond the monthly invoice.

When a firm invests in technology but fails to implement it effectively, it loses the return on that investment. That might include time savings that never materialize, efficiencies that go unrealized, or revenue opportunities that are missed.

Many firms purchase new solutions without fully evaluating what they already have. The result is duplication - multiple platforms performing similar functions, none of them fully adopted. Instead of streamlining operations, the technology stack becomes fragmented and expensive.

Productivity Lost in the Gaps

Unused technology doesn't just waste money - it creates friction.

When systems are only partially implemented, staff are often

forced to rely on workarounds. Information may be stored in multiple places, processes may be inconsistent, and workflows may depend on individual habits rather than firm-wide standards. This lack of cohesion slows everything down.

Even more problematic, partial adoption can lead to confusion. Team members may not know which system to use, where to find information, or how tasks are supposed to be completed. This uncertainty increases the likelihood of errors and reduces overall productivity.

The Risk Exposure You Didn't Anticipate

Perhaps the most overlooked cost of shelfware is risk.

Many legal technology tools are designed not just for convenience, but for compliance and risk management. When these tools are not used properly - or not used at all - firms may unknowingly expose themselves to liability.

Consider client communication tools, conflict-checking systems, or deadline tracking features. If these are implemented inconsistently, critical information can fall through the cracks. Missed deadlines, incomplete conflict checks, or inadequate documentation can all lead to malpractice claims.

There is also the issue of data security. Unused or poorly managed systems may still contain sensitive client information. If those systems are not regularly updated, monitored, or properly secured, they can become vulnerabilities.

The Human Factor Behind Shelfware

Why does shelfware happen? In most cases, it is not a technology problem - it is a people and process problem.

Continued on next page



HIDDEN COSTS Continued from previous page

Firms often purchase technology with the best intentions but underestimate the effort required for implementation. Training is minimal, adoption is inconsistent, and accountability is unclear. Without a clear plan, even the best tools can sit idle.

There can also be resistance to change. Attorneys and staff may be comfortable with existing workflows, even if they are inefficient. Without strong leadership and clear expectations, new technology struggles to gain traction.

Additionally, many small firms lack a designated “owner” for their technology. When no one is responsible for ensuring that systems are used effectively, adoption becomes optional - and optional quickly becomes neglected.

From Shelfware to Strategic Advantage

The good news is that shelfware is a solvable problem. With intentional effort, firms can turn underutilized technology into a meaningful competitive advantage.

The first step is awareness. Firms should periodically audit their technology stack. What tools are in place? Which features are actually being used?

Next, firms should focus on implementation - not just acquisition. Every new tool should come with a plan for onboarding, training, and integration into daily workflows.

Training is critical. One-time training sessions are rarely sufficient. Ongoing education and practical demonstrations help ensure that attorneys and staff understand not just how to use the technology, but why it matters.

A Practical Starting Point

For firms looking to address shelfware, start small. Choose one system - ideally one that is already in place but underutilized - and focus on maximizing its value.


Ask simple questions:

- Are we using the core features of this system?
- Are there tasks we are still doing manually that this system could handle?
- Does everyone know how to use it consistently?

By improving utilization of even one tool, firms can begin to see immediate benefits in efficiency, consistency, and risk reduction.

Conclusion: Use What You Already Have

In an environment where new technology is constantly being marketed to law firms, it is easy to assume that the solution is to buy more. But often, the real opportunity lies in using what you already have - more effectively.

Camille Stell is the Vice President of Risk & Practice Management for Lawyers Mutual and the co-author of the book, RESPECT – An Insight to Attorney Compensation Plans available from Amazon. Continue this conversation by contacting Camille at camille@lawyersmutualinc.com or 800.662.8843. 

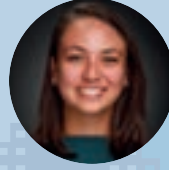
CHARLOTTE LEGAL CLERKSHIP PROGRAM CLASS OF 2026



Myles Heath
Howard Law
Parker Poe + Duke Energy



Margaret Newton
UNC Law
Mayer Brown + Nuveen



Amber Skinner
UNC Law
Womble + ACC



Dahvier Alston
NCCU Law
Poyner Spruill + Continental Tire



Sowmya Viswanathan
Vanderbilt Law
Mayer Brown + Wells Fargo



Amanda Losey
UNC Law
Mayer Brown + Equitable



Abigail Oldham
UNC Law
Troutman Pepper Locke +
Bank of America



Priscilla Elvin
Yale Law
Alston & Bird + Honeywell



Josie Lewis
UVA Law
Troutman Pepper Locke + Lending Tree



Ryan Pritchett
Harvard Law
Robinson Bradshaw + Bank of America




MeckBar.org/CLCP



Thomas Altmann
Wake Forest Law
Bradley + Brighthouse Financial

MECKLENBURG BAR ASSOCIATION WELCOMES 11 CLERKS TO CLCP PROGRAM THIS SUMMER

The Charlotte Legal Clerkship Program (CLCP) celebrates 20 years of welcoming a cohort of first-year law students to Charlotte for a 10-week clerkship program split between a law firm and corporate in-house department. A full summer of interning experience, local and federal courthouse visits, mentorship, and social events are planned for around the city. Join us as we celebrate the program's impact and the accomplishments of our CLCP alumni. Check out the MeckBar Calendar for more details. Contact Kaila Johnson Belton (kbelton@meckbar.org) for more information. 

Mecklenburg Bar Association Celebrates 20 Years of Increasing Diversity in the Legal Profession Conference



The Mecklenburg Bar Association was thrilled to host the 20th annual Increasing Diversity in the Legal Profession Conference on Saturday, March 21, 2026, in partnership with UNC Charlotte Student Legal Services, Inc. at The Dubois Center. The conference welcomed more than 50 students from middle school through graduate school plus several families and community members. Attendees at the conference heard from a selection of attorneys and judges on the following topics:

“Diverse Careers in Law: Exploring Unique Perspectives and Passions” featured Jason Stoogenke, Andrea Leslie-Fite, Dena King, Larissa Mañón, Lambert Guinn, and was moderated by Rochelle Mayfield.

“Shaping Tomorrow’s Legal Leaders: Insights From the Bench” was an exclusive judges’ panel which featured Judge Aretha Blake, Judge Faith Fickling-Alvarez, Chief Judge Albert Diaz, Judge C. Renee Little, Judge Keith Smith, Judge Cecilia Oseguera, and was moderated by Judge Rickye McKoy-Mitchell.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Continued from page 3

THURSDAY, JUNE 18


YOUNG LAWYERS DIVISION ANNUAL MEETING

6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.

Noble Smoke

2216 Freedom Drive, Charlotte

Vote on the slate of officers for 2026-27 and help to honor the YLD Young Lawyer of the Year, JoLisa Drayton Rouse. FREE for YLD members; \$30/person for non-YLD members. Food will be provided and each guest receives two drink tickets.

Find all of these events by scanning the QR code to visit the MeckBar Events Calendar. 



Owner Retiring. Office Condo for Sale in Cotswold.

Monument signage on S. Sharon Amity. Private offices, Efficient floor plan, located directly across from the Cotswold Village shops. Excellent office parking. Retail and restaurants convenient walking distance. 6000 SF, or option to purchase 2 smaller condo units. Beautiful Law Firm furniture can convey with sale. **Email jerry@millerlawcharlotte.com.**

MCMILLAN FELLOWSHIP

Continued from page 4

Hon. Cecilia Oseguera
Randel and Emily Phillips
Plumides, Romano & Johnson, PC
Rawls, Scheer, Clary & Mingo

PROGRAM SUPPORTERS:


Amy Howard
Emme Kutteh
Kelli Lee
Hon. Alyssa Levine
Diane Price
F. Lee Weaver



MBA PRESIDENT ARTICLE

Continued from page 1


To further our commitment to the rule of law, we are engaging with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Library to expand our joint programming and examining the structure of the Lawyer Referral Service to ensure that the community has access to the resources necessary. On May 1, the Bar was pleased to host a Law Day & Rule of Law Oath Recommitment Ceremony on the lawn of the Federal Courthouse. This special ceremony included brief remarks from Judge Albert Diaz, Judge Carla Archie and the opportunity to renew your oath and commitment to the Constitution and the rule of law.

Serving as President this year has been a true privilege. We are fortunate to have a small but mighty professional staff who have adeptly navigated the Bar through bifurcation and pivoted to our membership-driven, voluntary model, with all of its uncertainty and opportunity. Please tell them “thank you” next time you see them. Without Leah, Meghan, Michelle, Shelby, Kaila, Jill, Les, Shannon and recently retired, Lisa, we would not have so much to celebrate. As we approach the summer and the start of a new year for the Bar, please, come join a section, help plan and teach at a CLE, enjoy a social—we are so excited about what lies ahead and how we can continue to provide a meaningful benefit to the lawyers in Mecklenburg County. 

DIVERSITY CONFERENCE

Continued from previous page

“Trivia Game: Getting To & Through Law School” featured an interactive game that included a panel involving Amber Creft, Brittany Mullen, Kristian Ellis, and was moderated by JoLisa Drayton Rouse.

Over 20 MBA attorney volunteers gathered and interacted with participants throughout the day answering questions and sharing stories. Participants received journals with materials to take notes, and everyone departed with MBA goodies to commemorate the day. Thank you to all who participated and made the conference an outstanding success! 

ANNUAL MEETING

Continued from page 3


Mecklenburg Bar Association Officer & Board of Directors Nominations

Officers, One-year term
Ross Fulton, President-Elect
Larissa Mañón, Secretary
Caleb Holloway, Treasurer

Board of Directors - Class of 2029


Three-year term
Suzi Canali
Ben Chesson
Hilary Fankhauser
Michael Martinez
Leslie Pedernales
Sarah Sykes

Young Lawyers Division – Chair

One-year term
Michael Peretz 

AGENCY SPOTLIGHT

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their home or facing foreclosure/eviction, a senior accessing critical health benefits, or an immigrant securing lawful status and stability. By bringing these stories and issues to the forefront, the Breakfast helps ensure that access to justice remains a visible and urgent priority. 

Call for Newsletter Article Ideas & Authors


If you have a suggestion for an article and/or would be willing to author the article, please contact MBA Associate Executive Director Meghan Tinkham (mtinkham@meckbar.org) or MBA Communications Chair Meredith Barnette (meredith.barnette@garfinkelimmigration.com).



EDITORIAL POLICY AND DISCLAIMER

This is a joint policy of the 26th Judicial District Bar (the 26th), the Mecklenburg Bar Association (MBA), and the Mecklenburg Bar Foundation (MBF). The MBA accepts editorial material of general legal interest to its members and members of the 26th for inclusion in the *Mecklenburg Bar News*, MeckBar.org, Bar Blasts and related methods of communication. The implicit purposes of the *Mecklenburg Bar News*, MeckBar.org, Bar Blasts and related methods of communication are to provide notices to the membership of the 26th required by law or in the organizational bylaws, to educate members of the MBA on topics related to the MBA, MBF, and practice of law, and to maintain shared communication among the local legal community. The MBA Communications Committee, Executive Director and/or the MBA Executive Committee reserve the right to accept, reject or edit all material. The Executive Director is the editor of all communications.

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2025-26 Communications Committee:
Meredith Barnette (Chair), Mikaela Hoover (Vice Chair), Nick D’Auria, Susan Hall, Jasmine R. Little, Ashley Oldfield, Jessica Plummer, Diane Price, Jesse Sharp, Edward Woodall, and Meghan Tinkham (Staff Liaison). 

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YOUR BAR.

YOUR BENCH.

The Mecklenburg Bar Association (MBA) is **YOUR** local Bar.

Events. Committees. CLE.
Sections. Networking.
It's all here.

Renew or Join the MBA starting May 1, 2026, to make the most of your extended-year benefits through June 30, 2027.

YOUR COMMUNITY.