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We're Back! See You In June At The 2022 NCBA Annual Meeting

May 17, 2022

I was standing along the back wall of the ballroom at the Biltmore in June 2019, watching the morning business session of the Annual Meeting wrap up. Friends and acquaintances, many of whom I knew primarily from prior Annual Meetings, would occasionally pass by on their way in or out and we would be able to exchange a handshake and a quick, whispering catch-up. It felt very familiar, the comfortable and casual camaraderie that imbues the Annual Meeting. Little did any of us know that we would not be back together again for three years.

I think I have been to every Annual Meeting since 2007. I didn't grow up in North Carolina, but many of the lawyers whom I have been fortunate to meet in my career did; some of those who had parents who were lawyers have told me of going to Annual Meetings their entire lives. "I grew up at Annual Meetings" is something I've heard more than once. Indeed, like so many of us, I have my own memories of my kids at various ages in the pool at the Grove Park, or walking to restaurants along the Riverwalk in the Wilmington heat. Annual Meetings have always been special for being together, and for reuniting with colleagues and their families whom you might see only that one time of year.

The Annual Meeting was on track for 2020, too. It was to return to my home of Charlotte, its first return visit since Kearns Davis was inaugurated and gave his president's speech in the lobby of the NASCAR Hall of Fame in 2016. The theme of the 2020 Charlotte Annual Meeting was going to be the "leadership in a time of change." And as it turned out, 2020 was the year I was nominated as president-elect.

Of course, we all know what happened in March 2020. Just three months before the Charlotte event, which was in the final stages of planning, the world shut down. Charlotte was not going to happen. But an Annual Meeting had to, according to our bylaws. To their everlasting credit, then-president LeAnn Nease Brown, Jason Hensley, the Board, and the staff moved heaven and earth and emergency bylaws to put together and pull off a virtual Annual Meeting in three months.

The membership graciously voted me in as president-elect via buttons on their computer screens. I gave my brief president-elect's speech over Zoom in a COVID beard (in a manner of speaking – it had technically started at Christmas; it wasn't really much of a beard either). To handle the requisite Bar business and produce the video for broadcast, we packed the large Bar Center auditorium with a total of ten people, the maximum that could be in any one room at that time under the governor's emergency executive order. The ten people included Chief Justice Beasley, who swore in Mark Holt as president from a distance of six feet. We all pretty much kept 30 feet apart, wore masks, and wiped down surfaces between speakers.

Although we never dreamed we would need to reprise the 2020 virtual format in 2021, COVID had other ideas and we came back and did the Annual Meeting virtually again last year. Once again, the Bar staff was excellent in putting it all together, making sure the important programming got done, and generating a quality product for the members. And our membership gamely showed up (virtually), with numbers I found truly impressive. Thank you. And I hope that by the time I gave my president's speech last year, I was better at actually looking into the Zoom camera and not up at the empty seats in the auditorium at which I had become accustomed to looking over the years.

I recite all this history essentially to lead up to this one point: "We're back." (I had contemplated having this entire Annual Meeting column consist only of those two words, reminiscent of Michael Jordan's press conference upon his return to the Bulls in 1995. After much contemplation, however, I concluded that there are some (many) things that Michael Jordan can do that I can't.)

Yes, our Annual Meeting is returning to a "live" and in-person event this year, to be held June 23-24 in Winston-Salem. I am so looking forward to seeing everyone, and I hope our location is central enough to enable many of you to come. And what a meeting we have planned. We've changed the format a bit, streamlined and condensed it, in an effort to make it both impactful and efficient while retaining the character and favorite features that make the Annual Meeting special.

We'll start on Thursday afternoon with a welcome reception, which this year will include a celebration of the 20th anniversary of Legal Aid of North Carolina. Our history and relationship with LANC, as well as the other legal service providers, is long and deep, and we are excited to be able to share this very special occasion with our friends at LANC. That will be followed by the traditional law school receptions, which we are thrilled are returning to be with us. Thursday evening will bring our 7th annual Legal Legends of Color awards ceremony, put on by our Minorities in the Profession Committee; for those of you fortunate enough to have attended it in recent years, you know what a special event this is.

Friday will be packed. We will begin Friday morning with our substantive programming, which this year will focus on the very important topics of judicial independence, perceptions of the judiciary and the profession, and judicial selection. We are working hard on putting together a premier-quality sequence of presentations and discussion panels, with some names you will likely recognize, to discuss these topics that have become so important in the current environment. We are also working with a third-party polling entity to generate statewide data to supplement our discussion. While we will apply to have these important discussions qualify for CLE credit, these programs are not "just CLE" – I view them as our keynote, showcase type of presentation for the

year, much as we would view a national keynote speaker, and I strongly encourage all of you to attend.

In between this sequence of panels, we will have our Annual Meeting luncheon at midday. There, we will conduct our annual Business of the Bar session, including the nomination and election of next year's president-elect. Lunch will be provided and is included in your standard cost of registration for the Annual Meeting – no additional cost incurred in attending – so we hope everyone will join and come meet our new officers and directors.

Following conclusion of the final panel of our keynote program after the luncheon, you will have a couple hours Friday afternoon to visit our sponsors, network, visit, see Winston-Salem, or just relax. Then come join us in the evening for the President's Reception, followed by our capstone event this year – a combined ceremony during which we will have our annual awards dinner and, to finish the evening, will install our next president, Clayton Morgan. I have been privileged to work with Clayton over the past year while he has served as president-elect, and the Bar Association will be in very good hands when he accepts the gavel. I am so grateful that he will be able to begin his term by speaking to and with all of you, in person, as we are gathered together on Friday night.

That is what I believe the Annual Meeting should be. Being together. We are lawyers and we do what lawyers do during the year, including being adverse to each other at times. But the Annual Meeting gives us a couple of days each year to come together as a profession, as colleagues, to get to know each other and the families, and to carry out our common mission as a Bar Association. I hope to see you there.

Jon Heyl serves as president of the North Carolina Bar Association and the North Carolina Bar Foundation.

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