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THE LEGAL

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Celebrating 30 Years of Legal Professionalism in Georgia

“[T]he effort for professionalism requires constant striving; we cannot expect an easy or quick result.”

—Excerpt from remarks at the 1988 Consultation on Professionalism and the Practice of Law given by 1974–75 State Bar of Georgia President Cubbedge Snow Jr.

BY KARLISE Y. GRIER

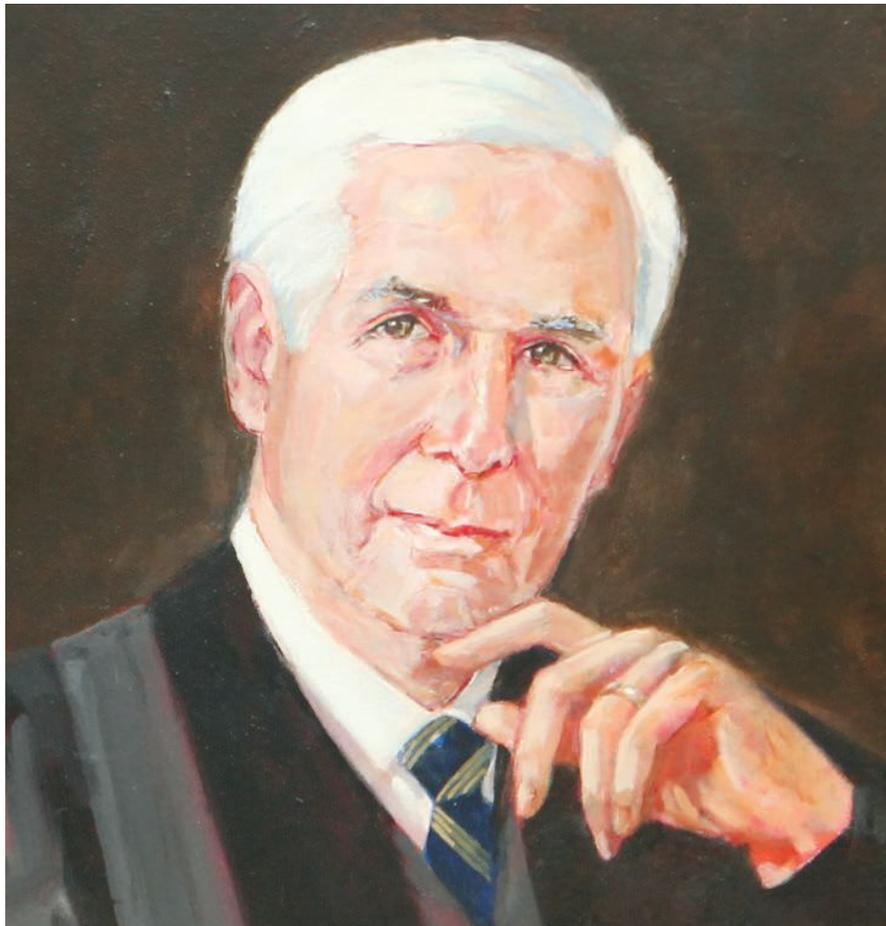


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Chief Justice Thomas O. Marshall (1920-2003).

On March 31, 1988, former Chief Justice Thomas O. Marshall convened a Consultation on Professionalism and the Practice of Law. James T. Laney, the former president of Emory University, hosted the consultation. Thirty-five lawyers and judges attended the 1988 consultation and joined the discussion. Some of the recommendations that resulted from the consultation included: 1) the idea of a Center for the Study of Professionalism; 2) the appointment of a Special Counselor for Professionalism to act in an ongoing capacity as advisor and liaison with the Bar, and in particular with the Committee on Professionalism, to increase efforts to improve both the mettle and image of Georgia’s lawyers; and 3) the suggestion to improve the level of civility among practicing lawyers at repetitive seminars for which mandatory continuing legal education credit would be given. State Bar of Georgia Past President Cubbedge Snow Jr. summarized his recommendations for next steps after the consultation as follows:

I think that it is important that there be real encouragement for firms throughout the state to take more of an interest

in seeing that the younger lawyers do become more and more aware, not just of the technical ethical rules, but of the rules of professionalism. . . . My second thought would be that we might want to consider, through some sort of appropriate institution, the development of the Code of Professionalism. One would think that it not inappropriate for the Supreme Court itself to consider issuing such a [code], provided it was clearly pointed out that this was in the nature of aspirational goals.

In part, as a result of the 1988 Consultation on Professionalism, the Supreme Court of Georgia issued an order on Feb. 1, 1989, which stated: “In recognition of the need for emphasis upon and encouragement of professionalism in the law practice, the Court hereby creates The Chief Justice’s Commission on Professionalism.” The Supreme Court of Georgia also issued the following charge:

The Commission’s primary charge shall be to enhance professionalism among Georgia’s lawyers. In carrying out its charge, the Commission shall provide ongoing attention and assistance to the task of ensuring that the practice of law remains a high calling, enlisted in the service of client and public good.

One of the commission’s first tasks after its creation was the promulgation of a professionalism statement. After several years of work by the commission, the Supreme Court of Georgia entered an order on Oct. 9, 1992, adopting A Lawyers Creed and the Aspirational Statement on Professionalism, setting forth aspirational ideals that addressed an attorneys’ relationships with clients, opposing parties and counsel, the courts, colleagues, the profession and the public.

According to former Executive Director Avarita Hanson, the commission was responsible for spearheading several new initiatives after engaging in a series of convocations with the bench and the bar to discern professionalism issues. Some of the State Bar of Georgia programs that



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(Left to right) Vice Chief Judge Carla Wong McMillian, Court of Appeals of Georgia; Associate Dean A. James Elliott, Emory University School of Law; and Chief Justice Harold D. Melton, Supreme Court of Georgia, speak on a panel at the Convocation on Professionalism.

Chief Justice’s Commission on Professionalism’s Suicide Awareness Program

TUESDAY, APRIL 28 | 2 – 5 P.M.

3 CLE HOURS, INCLUDING 1 PROFESSIONALISM HOUR
LIVE AT THE BAR CENTER IN ATLANTA | VIA SATELLITE
AT THE SAVANNAH AND TIFTON OFFICES
(ADDITIONAL SATELLITE LOCATIONS TBA)



Sally Yates

Make plans now to attend the Suicide Awareness Program, moderated by Sally Quillian Yates. The commission will highlight one of the aspirational ideals from A Lawyer’s Creed, “To my colleagues in the practice of law, I offer concern for your welfare.” Spurred by that ideal, the program will bring together a panel of lawyers and judges whose desire is to educate, inform and provide resources for all members of the profession. The live program will be broadcast to various satellite viewing locations throughout the state to encourage lawyers and judges to come together as one community and gain a better understanding of one of the great challenges currently faced by Georgia lawyers and judges.

If you are thinking of hurting yourself, or if you are concerned that someone you know may be suicidal, contact the Bar’s Lawyer Assistance Program confidential hotline at 800-327-9631. #UseYour6. Learn more by contacting CJCP at kygrier@cjcpga.org, or by visiting cjcpga.org/suicide-awareness-program. •



(Left to right) A. James Elliott and Susan Cahoon, participants in the 1988 Consultation on Professionalism, return for the 2019 Convocation on Professionalism.

resulted from the commission's work include the formation of the Women and Minorities in the Profession Committee (now known as the Committee to Promote Inclusion in the Profession), and the Law Practice Management Program. According to Hanson, "Over the years, the commission has worked with the State Bar to establish other programs that support professionalism ideals, including the Consumer Assistance Program and the Diversity Program."

In 1993, under then-President Paul Kilpatrick, the State Bar's Committee on Professionalism partnered with the commission in establishing the first Law School Orientation on Professionalism Program for incoming law students, held at every Georgia law school. Now in its 27th year, the orientations engage volunteer practicing attorneys, judges and law professors with law students in small group discussions of hypothetical contemporary professionalism and ethical situations. In 1999, the commission established the Justice Robert Benham Awards for Community Service to recognize members of the bench and

bar who have combined a professional career with voluntary participation in community organizations, government-sponsored activities, youth programs, religious activities or other humanitarian work outside of their professional practice or judicial duties.

On Dec. 13, 2019, the Chief Justice's Commission on Professionalism celebrated the commission's anniversary with the 2019 Convocation: Professionalism Then (1988) and Now (2019). Chief Justice Harold D. Melton welcomed the approximately 150 lawyers and judges who attended the convocation, which was chaired by Vice Chief Judge Carla Wong McMillian, Court of Appeals of Georgia, and Associate Dean A. James Elliott, Emory University School of Law. During the convocation, speakers and participants reflected on how the legal profession has changed over the past 30 years and explored how those changes impacted legal professionalism. Elliott and Susan Cahoon, two of the individuals who participated in the 1988 Consultation on Professionalism, also participated in the 2019



Thomas G. Sampson speaks on a panel during the 2019 convocation.

convocation. Thomas G. Sampson, who served in 1989 on the first Chief Justice's Commission on Professionalism, also spoke.

The commission's work to continue its legacy during 2020 has already begun. For example, the commission will honor eight individuals at the 21st Annual Justice Robert Benham Awards for Community Service on March 14. In addition, the commission will present a Suicide Awareness Program on April 28.

As the commission looks toward the next 30 years, we are excited to continue fulfilling the mandate of the Supreme Court of Georgia to provide ongoing attention and assistance to the task of ensuring that the practice of law remains a high calling, enlisted in the service of client and public good. •



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