**Trial & Appellate Advocacy Section**

**(15th Annual Civil Law Update)**

**SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES**

**Charles L. Becton**

*Durham, NC*

Charles L. Becton received his BA degree from Howard University in 1966, his J.D. degree from Duke University School of Law in 1969, and his L.L.M. from the University of Virginia School of Law in 1986. From 1981-1990, he was a judge on the North Carolina Court of Appeals, and in 1985 he was named North Carolina Appellate Judge of the Year. For 30 years, Becton was a litigator who tried scores of major criminal and civil case. Becton has been included in The Best Lawyers of America since 1993, and he is a Fellow in the American College of Trial Lawyers, the American Board of Trial Attorneys, and the International Society of Barristers. He was President of the North Carolina Bar Association in 2008, the North Carolina Academy of Trial Lawyers in 1995, and President of the North Carolina Association of Black Lawyers in 1980.

During the past 35 years, Becton has taught trial advocacy skills to more than 20,000 lawyers. He has served as the John Scott Cansler Lecturer at the University of North Carolina School of Law, and as a Senior Lecturer in Law, as well as a Professor of the Practice, at Duke University Law School. He has taught and lectured at trial advocacy skills institutes across the country, in Canada, and in the Republic of South Africa. He is currently the RJR Nabisco Endowed Chair at North Carolina Central School of Law where he teaches Rhetoric and Advocacy.

Becton has received numerous awards including three national trial advocacy teaching awards. In January 1988, Becton received the William J. Brennan, Jr. Trial Advocacy Award for his work in improving the skills of trial lawyers. In June 1990, Becton was the first recipient of the Charles L. Becton Trial Advocacy Award given annually by the North Carolina Academy of Trial Lawyers. In July 1990, Becton was a co-recipient of the Roscoe Pound Foundation's Richard S. Jacobson Award from the Association of Trial Lawyers of America recognizing the nation's best trial advocacy teacher.

In January 1990, he received the North Carolina Association of Educators “Excellence in Equity” Award. In May 1995, Becton received the South Carolina Trial Jury Foundation's Distinguished Service Award. In October 1995, Becton received the Robert Keeton NITA Trial Advocacy Teaching Award.

In May 2006, Becton was the first recipient of The Advocate’s Award from the NC Bar Association Litigation Section. In October 2006, he was appointed to the NC Innocence Inquiry Commission, and he received the American Bar Association’s Torts and Insurance Practice Section’s Pursuit of Justice Award. In 2013, Becton received the Elon University School of Law Leadership in the Law Award.

In 2013 and 2014, Becton was asked to lead institutions of higher education. He served as Interim Chancellor at North Carolina Central University 2013-14 and as Interim Chancellor at Elizabeth City State University 2014-15.

Becton is married to former Administrative Law Judge Brenda Becton, and they have three children -- Nicole, Kevin and Michelle.

**James P. Cooney III**

*Womble Carlyle Sandridge & Rice, LLP*

*Charlotte, NC*

Jim Cooney is the Practice Group Leader of the Business Litigation Practice Group at Womble Carlyle.  He practices both civil and criminal law, including trial and appellate work.  He is recognized as one of the leading health care litigators and “white collar” criminal attorneys in the State of North Carolina, and has represented numerous businesses and individuals in connection with catastrophic tort cases, significant business disputes and internal investigations in both State and Federal court.

Jim has tried more than 60 jury cases to verdict in civil and criminal cases and argued more than 45 appeals in the State and Federal courts.  He is a Fellow in the American College of Trial Lawyers and a Permanent Member of the Fourth Circuit Judicial Conference.

Jim was recently selected by his peers for inclusion in The Best Lawyers in America© in the fields of Bet-the-Company Litigation, Commercial Litigation, Criminal Defense Non-White-Collar, Criminal Defense White Collar, Medical Malpractice Law – Defendants and Personal Injury Litigation – Defendants.  Jim was ranked as a Best Lawyer “Lawyer of the Year” in Bet-the-Company Litigation in 2015.

He is the only attorney selected as one of the top trial lawyers in North Carolina in civil and criminal work; in 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, and 2010 he was selected as one of the top ten civil attorneys in North Carolina.  In 2007 he was the top vote recipient for criminal attorneys in North Carolina and in 2011 was voted the best attorney for “Bet Your Company” cases.

In 2004, Jim received the N.C. Bar Association’s William Thorp Pro Bono Award and in 2010 the N.C. Bar Association’s Wade Smith Professionalism Award for Criminal Defense.  He is a member of the “Legal Elite Hall of Fame” in North Carolina.

Jim has lectured extensively throughout North Carolina and the country to law-enforcement groups, attorney organizations and law schools.

Jim graduated from Duke University in 1979 with a B.A. in History and Political Science, *summa cum laude* with distinction in History.  He was a member of Phi Beta Kappa.  He graduated from the University of Virginia School of Law in 1982 where he was a member of the Order of the Coif and the Research and Projects Editor of the Virginia Law Review.

From 1982 to 1983, he was a Law Clerk to the Hon. John D. Butzner, Jr., of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit.

Jim practiced law with Kennedy Covington Lobdell & Hickman in Charlotte from 1983 through 2000 before joining Womble Carlyle.

He is a past-president of the North Carolina Association of Defense Attorneys, and has served as the Chair of the Civil Litigation and Courts Committees of the Mecklenburg County Bar, the Chair of the North Carolina Bar Association AIDS Task Force, a member of the Advisory Commission on the Rules of Civil Procedure for the North Carolina General Assembly, and a member of the Special Select Commission of the State Bar of North Carolina investigating the Hoke/Graves Ethics Prosecution.

He and his wife, Betsy, were married in 1979 and have three daughters and two grandchildren.

**Hon. Kaye G. Hearn**

*South Carolina Supreme Court*

*Conway, SC*

Justice Kaye Hearn was elected to the Supreme Court of South Carolina in May of 2009, becoming only the second woman member in the court's history. Prior to her election to the state’s highest court, Justice Hearn was a member of the South Carolina Court of Appeals for fifteen years, serving as its Chief Judge for ten years. During her tenure as Chief Judge, Justice Hearn served as President of the Council of Chief Judges, a nationwide network of chief judges of the intermediate appellate courts.

From 1986 until her election to the Court of Appeals in 1995, she served as a Family Court Judge. Prior to going on the bench, Justice Hearn was a trial attorney with the firm of Stevens, Stevens, Thomas, Hearn, and Hearn, and served as a member of the South Carolina Board of Bar Examiners. Immediately upon graduation from law school, she served as law clerk to Supreme Court Justice Julius B. Ness.

Justice Hearn received her B.A., cum laude, from Bethany College in 1972 and her J.D., cum laude, from the University of South Carolina School of Law in 1977. She received an L.L.M. from the University of Virginia’s Graduate Program for Judges in May 1998; an honorary Doctor of Laws from the Charleston School of Law in 2010; an honorary Doctor of Humanities from Francis Marion University in 2011; and an honorary Doctor of Laws from the University of South Carolina in 2013. In 2004, Justice Hearn was honored with a portrait by the South Carolina's Trial Lawyers Association. In 2010, she received the South Carolina Women Lawyers Association's Jean Galloway Bissell Award; in 2011, she was honored with an award in celebration of Inspiring Women from Coastal Carolina University; and in 2012, Governor Nikki Haley presented her the Woman of Achievement Award from the South Carolina Commission on Women. In 2013, Justice Hearn received the Bethany College Alumni Achievement Award and was named an Alpha Xi Delta Woman of Distinction. Justice Hearn presently serves as Chair of the Chief Justice's Docket Management Task Force and is a member of the ABA's IOLTA Commission.

Justice Hearn is married to the George M. Hearn, Jr., a Conway attorney and former member of the South Carolina House of Representatives. They have one daughter, Kathleen, who is also an attorney in Conway. Justice Hearn enjoys cooking, cycling, and singing in her church choir.

**Meliah Bowers Jefferson**

*Wyche Law Firm*

*Greenville, SC*

Meliah practices primarily in the area of trial and appellate litigation, with an emphasis on complex civil litigation and intellectual property law. Her varied experience includes representing plaintiffs and defendants in cases involving corporate governance, commercial law, election law, governmental authority, and disputes over intellectual property – such as trademark, copyright, patents, and trade secrets. She also assists clients in general corporate matters and advises clients on assessing intellectual property issues associated with corporate transactions, including mergers and acquisitions. She has served as law clerk to The Honorable Jean H. Toal, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of South Carolina and to The Honorable J. Michelle Childs, United States District Judge.

Meliah is a magna cum laude graduate of the University of South Carolina Moore School of Business, where she double majored in marketing and finance. She also earned her law degree from the University of South Carolina School of Law, where she served on the Editorial Board of the ABA Real Property, Probate, and Trust Journal and as President of the Black Law Students Association.

Recently, Meliah was recognized as a South Carolina Rising Star by Super Lawyers Magazine and is among those acknowledged with the National Bar Association 2015 40 under 40 Best Advocates Award.

Meliah maintains active involvement in the legal community as an appointed member of the Board of Governors of the South Carolina Bar. She is also engaged in the process of screening candidates for state court judgeships as a member of the South Carolina Bar Judicial Qualifications Committee.  Her service to the South Carolina Bar extends to participation in the Convention Committee, Living Above the Bar, and the Leadership Academy Steering Committee. She has given continuing legal education presentations on the topics of trial and appellate practice, professional responsibility, and diversity and inclusion. After surviving a massive heart attack in 2013, Meliah became a health advocate with the American Heart & Stroke Association, focusing on outreach to women and minority communities. Starting in September of 2015, she began a year-long term as a National spokeswoman for the American Heart Association Go Red For Women initiative. She also remains engaged in other community service initiatives as an advocate for diversity in the workplace and for equal access to educational opportunity.

**Tina Cundari**

**(Course Planner)**

*Sowell Gray Robinson Stepp & Laffitte, LLC*

*Columbia, SC*

Tina Cundari is a member of the firm Sowell Gray Robinson Stepp & Laffitte, LLC, where she has practiced since 2005. Tina graduated from the Honors Program of the College of Charleston in 1996 and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Law in 2003. After graduating from law school, Tina served a two-year term as a law clerk to the Honorable Jean Hoefer Toal. While clerking, Tina taught legal writing to first-year students at the University of South Carolina School of Law.

Tina practices in the areas of commercial litigation, professional liability and ethics, and appellate advocacy. Tina has tried cases in state and federal court and in alternative dispute resolution forums. She has written numerous appellate briefs on a wide variety of topics and has argued cases before the Supreme Court of South Carolina, the South Carolina Court of Appeals, and the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit.

Tina is a past president of the John Belton O’Neall Inn of Court, former chair of the board of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Greater Columbia, and former president of the Shandon Neighborhood Council.

In 2016, Tina received the South Carolina Bar’s Pro Bono Lawyer of the Year award. Tina has also received the Leadership in the Law award from Lawyer’s Weekly, and in 2012 was selected for the 20 Under 40 award given by the The State newspaper.

Tina is married to Cory Manning, also a lawyer. They have a beloved English Springer Spaniel named Jo Jo.