

# Meet the University's new board chair

*Gerald Roach seeks to emphasize the importance of discourse, not discord*

**STEEPED IN WAKE FOREST** history and connections, Smith Anderson Managing Partner Gerald Roach ('80, JD '82, P '09, '12) of Raleigh began his three-year term as chairman of the Wake Forest University Board of Trustees in July. A nationally prominent lawyer, he brings expertise in domestic and international mergers and acquisitions, joint ventures, corporate governance matters and, among other areas, public company securities, having advised firms in the innovative cluster of more than 250 companies that comprise Research Triangle Park.

Roach's grandfather in eastern North Carolina was the first on that side of the family to go to college. He saved up his money working in a sawmill, graduated Wake Forest and became a Baptist minister. His two children — Roach's father and aunt — graduated from Wake Forest. Roach and his sister finished at Wake Forest, as did the Baptist minister's four great-grandchildren. Roach met his wife, then Stephanie Decker ('81, P '09, '12), in an English class when he was a sophomore, she a first-year student. "The rest is history," Roach says. He and Stephanie are elders in White Memorial Presbyterian Church, where Gerald Roach chairs its capital campaign. Their son, Davis

('09, JD '12), is a lawyer, and daughter, Emily ('12), is deputy director of the North Carolina Council for Women.

*Maria Henson ('82) of Wake Forest Magazine discussed with Roach his devotion to Wake Forest and his aspirations as board chair for the University. Following are excerpts from his comments, edited for length and clarity.*

## Growing up a Demon Deacon

I remember being on campus a lot. My father (Linville: '53, JD '55) was head of the Alumni Council, and my mother (Mary Jon) was very involved. We would go on Alumni Council trips in the summer and meet other Wake Foresters. My parents encouraged me to look and explore anywhere I would like to consider (for college), but Wake Forest was an easy choice.

## Campus life and friendships

I always found that Wake Forest was challenging but nurturing. It didn't feel competitive. It felt like your classmates and your professors were on your side. They weren't going to give you anything, but they wanted you to succeed.

You could go to law school after your third year — a three-three program. I

thought that's a pretty good idea. Your fourth year of undergrad is your first year of law school, and it magically counted for both.

John Vann ('80, P '12), John Sinden ('80,

Gerald Roach, seated beside Stephanie, holds a new potential Deac in the family, Beckett. From left: Beckett's parents, Caitlin and Davis, and Emily, her aunt.

MD '85, P '16), Dave Sozio ('80) — our foursome has remained particularly close over the years. What really solidified John Vann's friendship and mine is the way he helped me through Spanish literature class. (Years later) one of the highlights of my professional career was being able to help advise John (Vann) in selling his business. I have done a lot of legal work in the contract research organization industry. John and his father grew a CRO, and it was a good professional match for us to help him position the company to be sold and then to help him in the sale. When you think of it, to have the opportunity to work with one of your best friends on something that is one of their most important professional life events, that's not something most people get to do.

## Legal highlights

(After law school) I went directly to Smith Anderson and have been there ever since. The Research Triangle is a wonderful place to practice law. All of our clients, even the small ones, have some international contracts or presence. I've had the real blessing to work with some of the most respected leaders in the country. I think of Dennis Gillings, who founded Quintiles; Bob Ingram, who was CEO of GlaxoWellcome; Jack Greenberg, former CEO of McDonald's. After 35 years, the list is long of relationships and people I've advised who have also served as mentors and role models to me. I see how they have run their businesses, served their communities, how they've acted with character in the decisions they make.

## His role as board chairman

I believe this role is a collective role. Our board, our Cabinet, have leaders of character who care about Wake Forest, which is worthy of our very best. Character and leadership are a rich tradition at Wake Forest. There are some parts of Wake Forest that will never change, and I hope that's what we hold on to. But we also want to continue to enhance, adapt and improve our role in society. I would like to help us put a stake in the ground on the Call to Conversation. We need to be a leader in civil discourse. We need to help educate our students to be leaders in a world where conversation is important. Being able to disagree and still respect each other is vital.

