

NEWS

ALUMNUS LOOKING TO LEVEL THE LEGAL PLAYING FIELD

JANUARY 26, 2016 by [Bill Giduz](#)

James K. "Jim" Dorsett III '74 has been named to a three-year term as chair of the N.C. Fellows of the American Bar Foundation (ABF). This latest leadership position extends an impressive record of service to his profession and community, and will allow him to lead the statewide drive to help an organization that tackles some of the most difficult and important issues in the legal world.

Headquartered in Chicago, the ABF is a 501c(3) philanthropic organization founded 60 years ago. It serves the legal profession, the public and the academy through empirical research, publications and programs that advance justice and the understanding of law and its impact on society. Its residential faculty, and more than 50 affiliated scholars from across the globe, conduct research, convene forums and issue reports on some of the most pressing issues of the day.

Recent projects focused on the social and political costs of mass incarceration, on how juries actually decide cases, on the effectiveness of medical directives, and helping new nations craft constitutions that effectively establish the rule of law. The ABF also provides information on the legal needs of Americans, and suggests innovations that might fill the justice gap.

Dorsett said the ABF initiative that most strongly attracts his interest is provision of legal services to those living in poverty.

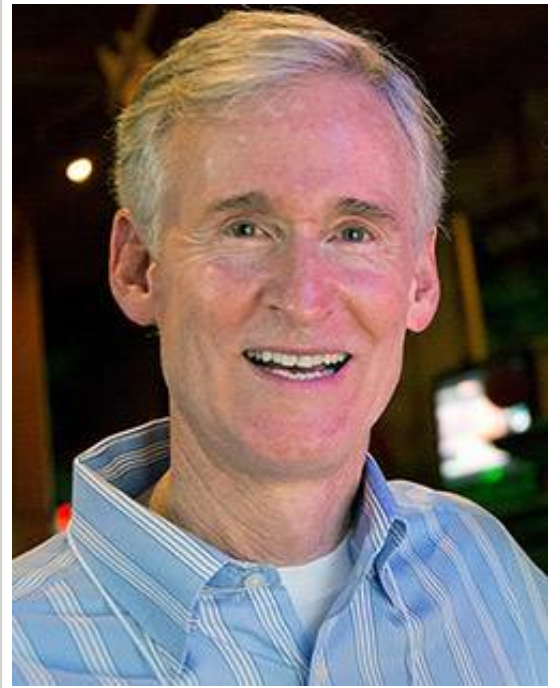
"I see that as a huge issue facing our profession and society," he said. "Legal services have become very expensive, and the poor and many in the middle class cannot afford them. We have a crisis of funding for legal services in this country, and I want to support the ABF and the Legal Services Corporation in helping to level the playing field for all who need legal counsel."

READY TO SERVE

As statewide ABF president, Dorsett will lead the effort to raise funds for the ABF, primarily through donations from ABF Fellows. Just one percent of lawyers statewide can be designated as fellows, for a total of 138 in North Carolina. Another 100 have fulfilled their fellows pledge and achieved the designation of Life Fellow. Dorsett joined the fellows in 2004, and is a Life Fellow.

Fellows have more than tripled their contributions to ABF in the past decade, growing from \$500,000 and eight percent of revenue to more than \$1.5 million and 25 percent of revenue. The ABF also receives support from the American Bar Endowment, and receives funds for specific projects from the National Science Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

In addition to raising funds for the ABF, Dorsett will be charged with recruitment of qualified lawyers to become new Fellows, and attending and chairing state and national meetings.



James K. "Jim" Dorsett III '74

Dorsett's presidency extends a long list of public service achievements. He served in 2002-2003 as president of the N.C. State Bar, and continues to serve on the board of trustees of the N.C. State Bar Foundation. He is also a past president of the American Counsel Association, the International Society of Barristers Foundation, and the American Board of Trial Advocates (eastern N.C. chapter). He continues in service on each of these boards. He further served as president of the N.C. Supreme Court Historical Society, and was board chair of the Food Runners Collaborative food bank. He also currently sits on the Davidson College Board of Visitors.

Dorsett said the volunteer work comes with the profession. "I believe part of practicing law involves giving back to the bar and organizations that serve the community," he said. "Most volunteer organizations -- whether church, sports or civic -- are going to have lawyers involved."

In addition to his outside obligations, Dorsett continues to practice in the areas of commercial litigation, products liability, and trusts and estates litigation as a partner in the law firm of Smith Anderson in Raleigh, North Carolina.

"In following the example of my father, I have a hard time saying 'no' when asked to serve," he said. "I'm not planning an early retirement!"

The Dorsett family has been firmly entrenched in the legal profession -- and Davidson -- for nearly a century. Dorsett's grandfather, father, several uncles, brother and three brothers-in-law also practiced law. His father was Class of 1938 and his brother Stuart graduated with the Class of 1982.

Dorsett majored in history and played varsity tennis at Davidson, and was president of Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity. He received his juris doctor degree from Wake Forest University Law School in 1977.

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