

## Andrea Davis

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**From:** Jesse Rigsby [ncaj@ncaj.com]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, May 10, 2011 8:21 AM  
**To:** Andrea Davis  
**Subject:** New Lawyers Division: The Latest News!



## NEW LAWYERS' DIVISION

### Newsletter

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May 2011

### The 2011 Honorary New Lawyer Award Recipient is...Vernon Sumwalt!



*Your votes are in! The recipient of the 2011 New Lawyers Division Honorary New Lawyer Award is **Vernon Sumwalt** of the Sumwalt Law Firm in Charlotte.*

The NLD Honorary New Lawyer Award is presented to a NCAJ member who has strongly supported, encouraged and contributed to the development of new lawyers -- and Vernon certainly fits that bill!

Vernon will receive his award at the New Lawyers Division Meeting at Convention on Sunday, June 19.

Vernon has graciously provided some insights, indicated below, into his professional journey to date. On behalf of all Division members, NLD leadership sends congratulations and thanks to Vernon for all that he does for newer lawyers!

**1) The New Lawyers Division "Honorary New Lawyer" award is presented to a NCAJ member who has strongly supported, encouraged and contributed to the development of new lawyers (Past award recipients include: Charles Blanchard, Joe Cheshire, Joe DiPierro, Staples Hughes, Mary Ann Tally, John Drew Warlick). What was your reaction when you were notified that you were voted the "2011 Honorary New Lawyer" by the New Lawyers Division?**

I was most surprised at the honorary part. You mean I'm not a "new" lawyer any longer?

**2) How has your career path changed from when you were a new admittee to currently?**

I started out with a mid- to large-sized plaintiffs' firm (20+ attorneys), but then left to start our current firm with my uncle, **Mark Sumwalt**. I've been in North Carolina for over eleven years now. We focus on case quality instead of volume. Our bottom line is more sensitive to this factor and with only two of us to handle the work, we have grown more selective in the cases we handle.

**3) What did you learn most from mentoring lawyers when you started?**

Because I started out with a larger firm, I learned both what to do and what not to do from my exposure to different styles of lawyering. Not that anything anyone did was wrong, but I had an idea of the type of lawyer I wanted to be. Exposure to different styles taught me some good lessons on how to improve and reach my goals. These lessons dealt with anything from case selection, to trial methods, to balance at

work and home, you name it. I learn best by copying others, and it was nice being in an environment where there were a lot of different models to chose from.

#### **4) What advice would you share with new lawyers now?**

Three things.

First, it takes 20 years (or more) to build a reputation, and 20 seconds (or less) to destroy it. So don't take short cuts. One of my early mentors, Ken Suggs, taught this to me not only by example, but he put it best in a passing comment he probably doesn't even remember. I was wrapping up summer assignments as a law clerk before heading to Bar Review, and I passed Ken in the hall. I remember him asking if I was ready for the bar exam. I don't remember what I said-probably something dumb, like "It's a big test"-but I do remember Ken's response as he kept walking to his office: "Don't worry. When you get into practice, you're tested everyday." This is so very true.

The second piece of advice I can give is that you're not going to be a good lawyer unless you like what you do. Figure out what you're good at and fit these talents to your work. And be honest with yourself. You might fancy yourself as becoming a great appellate lawyer, but if writer's block is a problem or you can't churn out the equivalent of several novels per year on tight deadlines, you're just not going to find your happy place. One of my majors in college was music, and I thought entertainment law was a possibility. It sounded neat. Then I found out what entertainment lawyers did-tax work, contracts, dealing with prima donnas. It's not stuff that really excites me. I like to perform and be on my feet. I like public speaking. Believe it or not, this is how trial work found me.

My third and final bit of advice is to take all advice, even mine, with a grain of salt. You'll have to find your own path as you develop as a lawyer, and you're not going to go down that path by following instructions word by word.

#### **5) You participate in every aspect of NCAJ -- serve in leadership as Small Office Section Chair and Incoming Workers Comp Section Vice Chair, present at NCAJ seminars, act as Program Co-Chair for Convention 2010 & 2011, advocate on legislative issues important to your clients -- how would you suggest a newer lawyer best use NCAJ's resources to enhance his/her professional development?**

Just get involved and contribute. Everyone of us has something to bring to the table, even if you're confused half the time like I am. We can only better ourselves as a group through the unselfish exchange of ideas and resources that improves our ability to help those we represent. When I was a new lawyer, it appeared that 10% of our membership was pulling 90% of the load. Imagine what we could do if we flipped those numbers? I think we're seeing that now in our current legislative efforts, which are encouraging, despite the odds.

#### **6) Any final words of support and encouragement?**

Trial lawyers live in a tough environment. No one has ever liked us. Or, at least, it seems that way.

The simple truth is that people don't like us because they are human. That's just who they are. The strong have never liked the weak, the fortunate have never liked the unfortunate, and the rich have never liked the disenfranchised. But these groups are who we represent. It's who we have the privilege of representing. We shouldn't be afraid to do what we do just because human nature calls it unpopular.

All of us will come to a day when we are no longer able to help and, like it or not, we'll lie on our deathbeds and ask questions about what our lives really meant. And by "all of us," I mean all of us. I don't care whether you're a trial lawyer or not. We'll ask questions about what was important to us. What our lives were about. Whether we made a difference. One of these questions will not be, "I wonder how much money I saved AIG?"

I am always thankful to belong to a profession that challenges me and lets me look in the mirror each day without compromise. We won't change what the public thinks of us. But we will change how people think of us, one by one. And there are a lot of people out there. So let's get to work.

To send Vernon congratulations or thank him for his efforts, contact him at [Vernon@sumwalllaw.com](mailto:Vernon@sumwalllaw.com).

## Convention 2011: Have You Registered Yet?

June 18-22, 2011  
Hilton Riverside  
Wilmington

**Online registration is NOW OPEN for Convention 2011 which will be held at the Hilton Riverside in historic downtown Wilmington on June 18-22!**

Convention 2011 Program Co-Chairs, **Emily McNamara**, *Wilmington* and **Vernon Sumwalt**, *Charlotte* have planned a tremendous Convention!

### Convention Highlights:

- *Keynote Speaker*: consumer advocate **Erin Brockovich**
- *Saturday's Luncheon Speaker*: North Carolina's own **Roger Smith**
- *Civil Masters in Advocacy Seminar*: Hone your skills at **Arguing Motions** (morning) and **An Introduction to Reptilian Trial Advocacy from the Founders** (afternoon)
- *Criminal Masters in Advocacy Seminar*: **Hit & Runs: Fast-Paced Multi-Subject Hot Button Topics for the Everyday Practitioner**
- *Summer Conference for Paralegals*: Get a full year's CPE credit!

Along with the awesome line-up of speakers, informative law updates & workshops in a range of practice areas and exciting social events, also plan to attend the **New Lawyers Division Meeting** on **Sunday, June 19** (RSVP for the Division Meeting to [AndreaD@ncaj.com](mailto:AndreaD@ncaj.com)):

### New Lawyers Division Meeting Agenda:

- 2011 NLD Honorary New Lawyer Award Presentation to **Vernon Sumwalt**
- NCAJ Legislative Update
- NLD Events
  - Fall 2011 Food Drive
  - New Admittee Training Spring & Fall 2011
  - Charlotte NLD Networking Social Wrap-Up
  - Winston-Salem NLD Networking Social Update - Fall 2011
- How Can NLD Better Serve You?
- Other Business?

If you are a law student or first-time attendee of Convention, make sure to take advantage of the discounted Convention registration rate.

[Click here](#) for a Convention Brochure.

[Click here](#) to register for the Criminal Masters, Civil Masters and/or Convention.

[Click here](#) to register for the Summer Conference for Paralegals.

**WAIT! You've registered...Make your room reservation NOW!** NCAJ has reserved room blocks at the following locations. *Be sure to mention the NC Advocates for Justice for discounted rates!*

- **Hilton Riverside** - \$159/night - 910.763.5900 (*Both river view and city view rooms available.*)
- **Best Western Coastline** - \$129/night - 910.763.2800 or 800.617.7732 (*All river view rooms, less than two blocks from the Hilton.*)
- **Riverview Suits** - \$159/night - 910.772.9988 (*One-bedroom condos, all river view, one-half block from Hilton.*)
- **Shell Island Resort** - \$199/night - 910.256.8696 or 800.689.6765 (*In Wrightsville Beach, oceanfront one-bedroom condos.*)

Wrightsville Beach is a 20-minute drive from downtown Wilmington. For those who wish to rent beach cottages, NCAJ recommends the following realtors:

- **Intracoastal Rental** - 800.533.1840 or 910.256.4503 - [www.intracoastalrealty.com](http://www.intracoastalrealty.com)
- **Bryant Real Estate** - 800.322.3764 or 910.256.3764 - [www.bryantrealestate.com](http://www.bryantrealestate.com)

## Division Member News

**Russell Johnson** is pleased to announce that, effective January 2011, he became a shareholder at *Howard, Stallings, From & Hutson, P.A.* in Raleigh. *Congrats Russ!*

Campbell Law Students, **Kevin Davis**, **Peng Gong**, **Charis Link** and **Kavita Puri**, were named the NCAJ Student Advocacy award winners for 2011. The award, selected by Campbell's Trial Advocacy faculty, is given to a law student who demonstrates the greatest improvement during his/her required 2L Trial Advocacy performance session. *Congrats award winners & keep up those awesome trial advocacy efforts!*

## NCAJ's 2011 Educational Achievement Program Award Recipients

*Over 100 NCAJ members have qualified, to date, for an Educational Achievement Program (EAP) award and there is still time for you to qualify!*

[Click here](#) to view a list of NCAJ members who have qualified to date.

At the beginning of his year **NCAJ President Phil Baddour** created the Educational Achievement Program to recognize members for their participation in NCAJ's continuing legal education programs. The Educational Achievement Program is designed to recognize NCAJ members--both attorneys and legal assistants--for their commitment to improving trial skills and understanding of substantive law as a means to better serve their clients. Participation in this program provides recognition for dedication, commitment and enthusiasm in the pursuit of legal education.

Those NCAJ members who qualify earn the distinction of "Advocate" in the Educational Achievement Program. Attorneys need to have completed twenty or more CLE hours in one year and legal assistants need to have completed ten or more hours in one year.

"Advocates" will be recognized in *Brief Notes*, *Trial Briefs*, the NCAJ membership directory, on the NCAJ website and at the upcoming Annual Convention and the Summer Conference for Paralegals. In addition, those members that achieve the "Advocate" status will receive a specially-designed logo to use within the guidelines set forth by NCAJ.

The deadline to accumulate the needed-hours to achieve "Advocate" status is June 30, 2011. It's still not too late, if you believe that you are close to attaining your needed-hours for 2010-11, to be included in the inaugural class of "Advocates."

Contact [Kim@ncaj.com](mailto:Kim@ncaj.com) with questions about EAP or for the exact number of CLE hours you have accumulated for the 2010-11 year.

[Click here](#) to view the upcoming CLE schedule.

## Join a NCAJ Section Today!

*"Through NCAJ's Sections you will have access to a wealth of knowledge on how to tackle problems in the areas of law in which you practice. Developing statewide relationships with other attorneys in your areas of practice will give you a strong sense of connection to the greater good of what you do for a living and will also help you develop your own skills to become the best attorney you can be. I have personally found the Section listservs to be invaluable tools that help me to identify and understand emerging issues in my practice areas. Listservs also provide an accessible and easy forum in which to discuss issues that you will face in your daily practice."*

--- **Stewart Poisson**, *New Lawyers Division Chair*

NCAJ supports its members by providing a wide range of Sections - more than most TLAs in the nation: Auto

Torts, Civil Rights, Commercial Litigation (free through June 2011), Consumer Areas of Practice, Criminal Defense, Disability Advocacy, Eminent Domain, Employment Law, Family Law, Juvenile Defense, Nursing Home Litigation, Products Liability, Professional Negligence, Small Office Practice, Workers Compensation.

[Click here](#) to renew your NCAJ membership and join a Section(s).

Questions? Contact [AndreaD@ncaj.com](mailto:AndreaD@ncaj.com).

## Introducing NCAJ's Newest Listservs – ERISA & Veterans' Affairs

NCAJ has created two new listservs just for you...the Veterans' Affairs listserv and the ERISA listserv. Participation in either of these listservs is free of charge to NCAJ members and a membership list for each listserv can be found on the Members' Homepage, [members.ncaj.com](http://members.ncaj.com). Contact [AndreaD@ncaj.com](mailto:AndreaD@ncaj.com) to participate in either (or both) listserv(s).

## 2010-11 New Lawyers Division Officers

**Chair** [Elizabeth Stewart Poisson](#) (Wilmington)

**Vice Chair** [Kristina Brown](#) (Raleigh)

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**Immediate Past Chair** [Ben Whitley](#) (Raleigh)

**CLE Chair** [Matthew Ballew](#) (Raleigh)

**Publications Chair** [Jesse Rigsby, IV](#) (Raleigh)

### NLD Regional Captains:

**Region 1 - Eastern** [Meredith Hinton](#) (Greenville)

**Region 2 - Southern** [Elizabeth Stewart Poisson](#) (Wilmington)

**Region 3 - Triangle** [Joseph Baznik](#) (Raleigh)

**Region 4 - Triad** [Rhett Johnson](#) (Winston-Salem), [Whitney Wallace](#) (Salisbury)

**Region 5 - Charlotte** [Brad Champion](#) (Charlotte)

**Region 6 - Western** [Steve Agan](#) (Asheville)

### NLD Liaisons:

**Auto Torts** [Meredith Hinton](#) (Greenville)

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**Consumer Areas of Practice** [J. Matt Norris](#) (Raleigh)

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**Employment Law** [Vanessa Lucas](#) (Raleigh)

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*If you wish to contribute content to this e-newsletter or have ideas for enhancing the e-newsletter, contact [AndreaD@ncaj.com](mailto:AndreaD@ncaj.com).*

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