

## Bar balances its needs with profession's woes: Brown

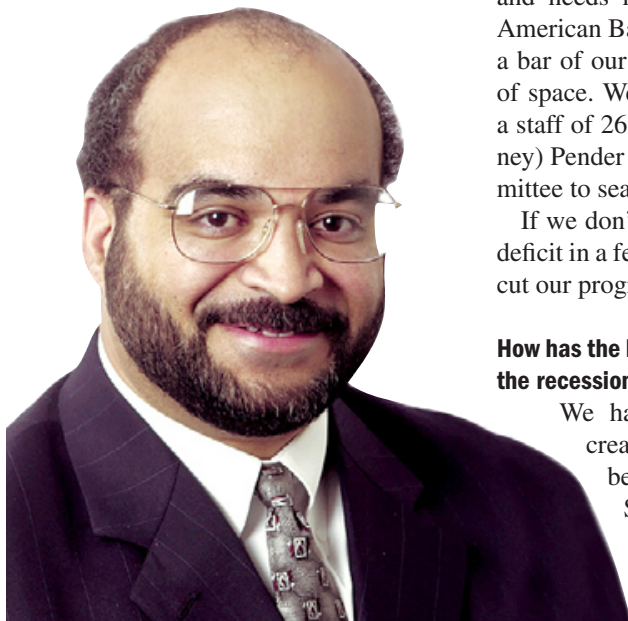
**BEA QUIRK**  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

When A. Todd Brown starts his term as the 99th president of the Mecklenburg County Bar next month, a first order of business will be a vote to increase annual dues to \$225 from \$150.

It'll be the first increase in a decade for the Bar's 4,000-plus members. Yet it is in line with Brown's goal for the year: "To build on the strong foundation of what has already been established. I'm pleased and proud of where we are, and I plan to be a good steward. We have a strong staff."

Brown, 49, joined the Raleigh office of Hunton & Williams in 1987 after earning his J.D. from the University of South Carolina. After making partner in the early 1990s, he moved to the Charlotte office in 1998. He's a commercial litigator in labor and employment law.

Brown has served the Bar and the community in many ways. When he co-chaired a Bar committee on diversity, he helped launch Lunch with a Lawyer, a mentoring program for minority students in middle



### **A. TODD BROWN**

*Hunton & Williams partner,  
new Mecklenburg County Bar President*

school. In 2008, United Way of Central Carolinas Inc. named him to the review panel that investigated the process that led to the controversial retirement package for former Chief Executive Gloria Pace King.

Brown recently discussed his agenda for the Bar with the Charlotte Business Journal. Edited excerpts follow:

#### **A 50% dues increase in the midst of a recession — that's quite a jump. What is the reasoning behind that?**

No one wants to raise dues in this environment. But membership has grown 30% in the last decade, and we have an obligation to provide our members with services. We have vetted it fully, and we have kept members informed.

Our building (on Queens Road) and staff are one reason. The building — which we lease from the Bar foundation — is old and needs major repairs. Studies by the American Bar Association have shown that a bar of our size needs 13,500 square feet of space. We have 5,900. We should have a staff of 26. We have 17. (Charlotte attorney) Pender McElroy is heading up a committee to search for new facilities.

If we don't increase dues, we may run a deficit in a few years, and we would have to cut our programs.

#### **How has the law profession been impacted by the recession?**

We haven't seen a significant decrease in membership. There have been layoffs at the large firms. So lawyers are retooling and doing different things — setting up their own practices, being a general practitioner

instead of a specialist, and practicing different kinds of law. Lawyers are generally not stopping practicing law altogether, but are doing it differently.

#### **Has this situation impacted any of the Bar's programming?**

Assisting attorneys in this difficult economic time is one of our obligations. We have responded by reducing fees for continuing-education courses for those who can't afford it. We've greatly increased networking opportunities. We have quarterly Coffee Connections at the Bar office, plus a monthly luncheon series at First Presbyterian that's \$10. We also offer programs to assist members with substance-abuse problems or depression.

#### **What about long-term plans?**

A long-term strategy committee is developing a plan designed to govern and guide us over the next five years. We'll start its implementation by July 1. The first priority will be to enhance services to members — we want to add programs that add value and serve members more meaningfully.

We're looking at offering Webcasts of CLE programs to make them more convenient. About 40% of our members are under age 36, and we want to partner more with our young attorneys. We remain strongly committed to diversity and will assist and partner with our affinity Bar groups.

#### **Why are you involved in the Bar and taking on a leadership position?**

My partnership agreement with Hunton & Williams says, in part, that "the practice of law is a service to society," and that's been a driver for me. The firm not only encourages us to get involved, but to be leaders in the organizations we are in. I believe we have an obligation as lawyers to give to the community in a variety of ways. The Bar is one of those ways.