

# South Carolina Access to Justice Commission

Happy  
New  
Year!



**D**uring this time of year, many of us are quick to push our thoughts toward “*out with the old and in with the new.*” While I often agree with that sentiment, I also appreciate a thoughtful review of annual events as we start to plot the course for the new year. Below you’ll find a brief review of 2007. Reflect and enjoy!

## Supreme Court establishes South Carolina Access to Justice Commission

On January 31, 2007, the Supreme Court of South Carolina established the South Carolina Access to Justice (SCATJ) Commission. The Commission was created in recognition of the need to expand access to civil legal representation for people of low income and modest means in South Carolina. With this Order, South Carolina joins 26 other states who have staff dedicated to access to justice.

One early responsibility is to conduct a needs assessment of South Carolinians with low income or modest means. This assessment will enable the Commission to identify ways to meet those needs and other responsibilities identified in the Administrative Order found at <http://www.sccourts.org/whatsnew/displaywhatsnew.cfm?indexID=367>.

To that end, the Commission has scheduled seven regional hearings at county court-houses in the spring culminating with the final

hearing at the Supreme Court in October. In lieu of the Commission meeting this spring, we are asking that each member sit on at least one panel to listen to the concerns expressed by the public. We are excited to have this opportunity and ask that each Commissioner participate to the extent able. More information about these hearings will be forthcoming at the January meeting and in the coming months.

### 2008 South Carolina Access to Justice Public

#### Hearing Dates:

MARCH 13 CHARLESTON

MARCH 27 LEXINGTON

APRIL 10 COLLETON

APRIL 17 ANDERSON

MAY 29 LANCASTER

JUNE 5 FLORENCE

JUNE 26 SPARTANBURG

## Justice Dickinson inspires Commission

The first meeting of the SCATJ Commission convened on September 27, 2007 on the 17th floor of the Meridian. Our keynote speaker was Justice Jess Dickinson from Mississippi. He challenged Commission members to educate themselves, set goals for the next five years, and get acquainted with the movers and shakers who will help accomplish these goals.

Justice Dickinson captivated the Commission with his personal story about the ramifications of inadequate legal representation. He was the visiting judge on a circuit court when he had a transformative moment and realized that “the guy who has the best attorney wins.” He reconsidered “liberty and justice for all” as well as the concept of fairness.

(see **INSPIRATION** next page)

(Inspiration cont'd)

[news/1/2730/index.aspx](http://news/1/2730/index.aspx).

With visions of fairness and liberty in the legal profession, the Commission broke into four small groups to discuss the ideas presented by Justice Dickinson and the charge from Chief Justice Jean Toal for the Commission to become a state and national leader. Each of the groups developed a list of priority areas.

At our January meeting, the Commission will review the broad lists and determine the next steps for making *liberty and justice for all* a reality in South Carolina.

## South meets North at the Summit

Commissioner Patricia Harrison and SCATJ Commission Executive Director Robin Wheeler attended North Carolina's first annual Access to Justice Summit in Cary on October 12, 2007. The free summit was presented by the North Carolina Equal Access to Justice Commission.

We heard many inspiring speeches that day. Some of the riveting speakers were Thomas W. Lambeth, Senior Associate and former Executive Director of the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, and Gene Nichol, the President of the College of William and Mary. More importantly, we were urged to move outside our comfort zone to assist people in need of equal access to justice.

Early on, it was obvious that this was to be a special, eye-opening day. Not only were the speakers good, but the videos and exercises were informative and thought provoking as well. I encourage everyone to review the material and speeches online at <http://www.ncbar.org/>

## SCATJ Delegation heads to Harvard Law School



Pictured left to right: Robin Wheeler, Rosalyn Frierson, Jill Rothstein, Judge Cordell Maddox and Stephanie Nye (not pictured: Judge Robert N. Jenkins).

On November 1st, a delegation of six headed to Harvard Law School to attend the two-day **National Judicial Conference on Leadership, Education and Courtroom Best Practices in Self-Represented Litigation.**

Prior to attending, the delegates had to complete "homework" assignments for each of the group sessions attended. Each state's representatives were divided into several small groups in order to provide feedback for future judicial training about self-represented litigants, also known as pro se litigants, as well as prepare for meetings with the legislature, the state bar and other interested entities.

Each of the South Carolina delegates came away with fresh ideas, invigorated at the breadth of knowledge and experience available as we prepare for self-represented litigants in our quest for access to justice.