

Legal Aid turns 30

By Joseph Pardington

After 30 years of service to those below the poverty line, Legal Aid of North Carolina held an open house November 16 at its Pittsboro Office.

The brief gathering featured a number of distinguished guests, such as North Carolina Rep. Joe Hackney, whose legal background basically began with Legal Aid.

Retired Judge Wade Barber was on hand, as was District Court Judge Allen Baddour; George Hausen, executive director of N.C. Legal Aid (LANC), Dick Taylor, director of the N.C. Academy of Trial Lawyers and John Lea, former interim director and coordinator of the Private Attorney Involvement (PAI) initiative.

The open house was an opportunity to display the Legal Aid of NC's Pittsboro Office at 959 East St. It was also an opportunity to honor those who helped build a legal service that now serves six counties (Pittsboro office) and the rest of North Carolina (24 offices throughout the state).

LANC's mission is to offer free legal services to those below the poverty line. "Roughly 35 percent of the population of North Carolina is eligible for our services," Hausen said. "Private sector attorneys volunteer their services pro bono (for free). They are a big part of our service delivery practice."

But not everybody who requests services receives them.

"For every two we accept, we turn away seven because we don't have the resources," Hausen said.

State law prohibits LANC from providing a number of services—such as criminal, class action, drug cases or undocumented aliens.

"We're pretty much restricted to serving the needs of the working poor and protecting their basic needs when they are confronted legally," he said.

LANC's services include cases of housing, family law,

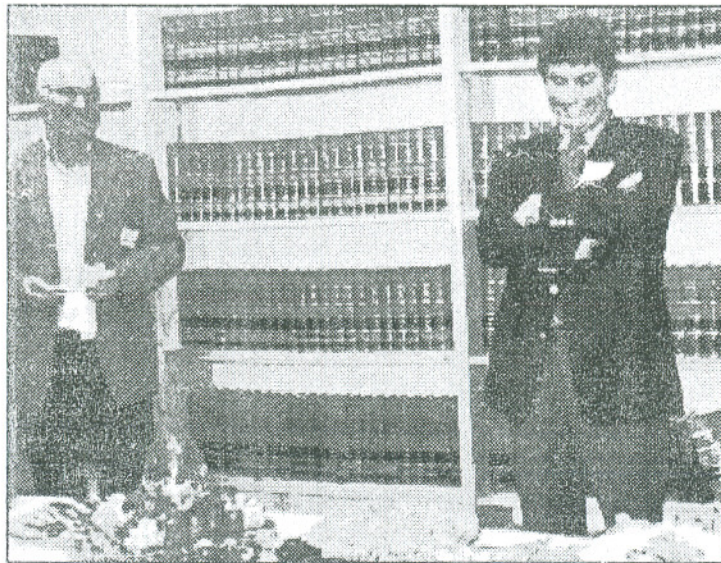
education, employment, community economic development and foreclosures. "Foreclosures in North Carolina are up 400 percent," Hausen said. The reason for this increase is predatory lending. "People are just being scammed."

Hausen said LANC staff

members could figure out if applicants met the requirements with regard to the poverty level. "Call us, let us figure it out."

He estimated that 50,000 are eligible for services in the six counties that are served by the Pittsboro office.

Maccene Brown, managing attorney at LANC-Pittsboro



Noting Legal Aid's anniversary...

Dick Taylor (right) is the founder of Orange County Legal Services, which later became Legal Aid of North Carolina--Pittsboro Office. Taylor, the executive director of the North Carolina Academy of Trial Lawyers, spoke at Legal Aid's recent anniversary celebration. At left is Jim Sheldon, volunteer attorney who works with the agency.

Chatham News/Record, Thursday, November 30, 2006

thanked Hackney for his efforts.

"We're still trying to fulfill what you all had as a vision some 30 years ago in terms of equal access to justice." Hackney was the board's first president.

Brown also presented a plaque to Taylor. She told him, "Thank you for your commitment to equal access to justice."

Taylor told the small crowd of his early career in the 1970s with the program. He also spoke about Hackney's contributions.

"Joe Hackney helped get the program started in Orange County," Taylor said. "From the beginning, we organized it to be a two-county program."

The obstacle to expansion was the lack of a local match in funding. Once Chatham added a local match, the program expanded.

Others involved included former Chatham County Commissioner Margaret Pollard and Judge Chuck Anderson, who was the first lawyer to work for the program. Barber was involved then as now. He has volunteered for the past six months with LANC—Pittsboro.

"I began my career as a Legal Aid lawyer in Charlotte," Barber said. He added that he was impressed by the staff's commitment to serving "the

people who need it most."

The whole thing started in 1976 as Orange County Legal Services and was founded by Taylor, with the active cooperation of Joint-Orange Community Action (JOCCA).

Later that year the program became Orange Chatham Legal Services. A year later it became North State Legal Services. Three counties were added: Alamance, Caswell and Moore.

In 1982 the Private Attorney Involvement (PAI) initiative was created for the domestic violence client.

In 1984 the program added two new counties: Anson and Richmond.

In 2002, North State Legal became a part of Legal Aid of NC Inc. and changed its name to LANC.

In 2004, the LANC office moved from Hillsborough to Pittsboro and added Lee County to its service area.

For more information, call 1-800-682-7902.