

# Meet Robert E. Harrington, President, Mecklenburg County Bar



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In addition to providing high quality legal services, Robinson Bradshaw & Hinson also tries to give back to the community. Whether it is providing *pro bono* services to underserved populations in the area, or providing leadership for a variety of community organizations, the firm understands that giving back is an important part of what it does. As part of this commitment, RBH lawyers have long played a leading role with the Mecklenburg County Bar.

Over the years, five RBH attorneys have served as president of the Mecklenburg County Bar. Currently, RBH partner Robert Harrington is serving a one-year term as the Bar president, a term that runs through the end of June. Harrington, a Duke Law graduate, came to the firm in 1999 after several years working in New Orleans, and runs a commercial litigation practice that focuses on representing financial institutions acting as fiduciaries, trustees, and estate executors/administrators.

The Mecklenburg County Bar is the local subdivision of the North Carolina State Bar, which all N.C. lawyers are required to join. The Bar's primary mission is regulatory, including handling grievances and fee disputes between the public and its lawyers, interviewing new Bar members, and even recommending judges to the governor to fill district court judge vacancies. The Bar also operates continuing education programs for attorneys and promotes *pro bono* services in the community.

The North Carolina State Bar should not be confused with the North Carolina Bar Association. The Association is a voluntary professional organization and performs various support work for lawyers, such as continuing legal education and other activities that benefit the legal profession.



**Robert Harrington**  
Partner  
Robinson Bradshaw



One of the most important initiatives taking place during Harrington's term is planning for a new headquarters building to be located on Rozzelles Ferry Road near Johnson C. Smith University. The Bar's staff of 18 has outgrown the current facility on Queens Road as the number of Bar members has expanded

from 2,000 lawyers when the facility opened in 1994, to over 4,600 lawyers today.

"We've been finishing the process of securing the new site, preparing to sell the current site, and then preparing for the move," explains Harrington. "The actual move will obviously take place after I'm finished with my term, but that's a large part of what we've done this year."

The Bar is also working to beef up its mentoring and lawyer support services. Hiring of new lawyers slowed during the recession, so many young lawyers who once would

have started out with a larger firm are venturing out on their own, creating the need for a broader legal support and mentoring structure in the community to help these new lawyers succeed in their new practices.

Congressman Mel Watt was the first African American Bar president of the Bar; Harrington happens to be the fifth.

"Being in line with those folks is a real honor, as they all made great contributions here," says Harrington. "But we've always had a very strong minority lawyer population in Charlotte. Julius Chambers and his colleagues argued at least five cases before the United States Supreme Court, and Chambers was the lawyer who represented the plaintiffs in the famous Swann vs. Charlotte Mecklenburg Board of Education case in the early 1970s.

"I think we're making progress in bringing more diversity into the Mecklenburg legal profession," Harrington continues. "But while we've made great strides, there's still work to be done."