

2016 Citizen Lawyers: Arnita M. Dula

By Whit Davis

HICKORY – Arnita Dula, a recent past-president and board member of the Women’s Resource Center of Hickory, has had a lifelong interest in promoting the particular interests of women. “I’m a woman ...,” Dula says, “... and I think the health and wellbeing of women is critical for the success of communities and families.” The Center provides crisis assistance to unemployed and underemployed women and families in Hickory, as well as job mentoring and career building services.

In addition to serving in leadership roles at the Center for seven years and supporting the organization, Dula has actively mentored women through the Center’s Women to Work program. Many of these women are long-term unemployed or underemployed and struggle with self-esteem issues and depression, and Dula helps provide all-around support and coaching to them in their search for work to improve their own and their families’ economic situation.

Cindy Rose, the Center’s Executive Director, has been friends with and worked with Dula at the Center for the last ten years. “She’s a strong community advocate,” Rose says of Dula’s dedication to the Center’s mission, “and she’s the most honest and down to earth woman I have ever met.” Rose had the honor of being part of Dula receiving the Phenomenal Woman Award from the Hickory Parks and Recreation Commission in March. Rose says that Dula is “... like a sister, and worthy of whatever honor she receives,” such as this Citizen Lawyer Award for which Dula has been nominated.

Dula has also dedicated her adult professional life to serving the community. Before attending law school, Dula was a teacher, then an assistant principal, and then a principal. After attending law school at UNC-Chapel Hill, Dula worked as a Hearing Officer with the Guilford County Schools for five years, adjudicating long-term suspension appeals.

Since August 2006 she has worked as a Deputy City Attorney for the City of Hickory, where she advises and represents the City Manager and various City departments concerning contracts, policies, ordinances, and legal opinions. Regarding her professional and personal dedication to public service, Dula says that it “... just seems to be my path.”

Another interest that is rather personal to Dula is her Christian faith. She has been involved since childhood with the Dula Chapel Baptist Church in Lenoir, which was founded by her grandfather and where many of her family members in Lenoir still attend. She currently lives in Hickory and attends the Greater Faith Missionary Baptist Church. She is active in lay ministry and speaks at local churches as well as to women’s groups around the community. Dula is very close to her family in the area, in particular her nieces and a “furry niece” lab mix named Cocoa.

The Citizen Lawyer Committee of the NCBA Young Lawyers Division, in conjunction with the NCBA Citizen Lawyer Committee, provides expanded coverage of the 2016 Citizen Lawyer Awards in recognition of their volunteer service and leadership in their communities and beyond.

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