

2016 Citizen Lawyers: Pamela W. McAfee

By Molly Martinson

RALEIGH – The North Carolina Bar Association has recognized Raleigh attorney Pam Wachter McAfee with its Citizen Lawyer Award. The award honors attorneys who dedicate their time and talents to serving their communities and inspire others to do the same.

A 107-year-old Durham woman, a group of teenage skateboarding enthusiasts, and McAfee all have at least one thing in common: their lives have been touched by HopeLine. HopeLine is a Triangle-based nonprofit that supports people and saves lives during times of crisis through caring, confidential conversations.

McAfee joined the HopeLine Board of Directors in 2012 at a time when funding for the organization had been slashed. The Board was engaged in serious discussions about shutting HopeLine's doors.

Faced with the prospect of closing, McAfee and other Board members instead focused on reorganizing the organization and creating new funding opportunities. McAfee diligently worked to expand HopeLine's community brand, and sought to supplement funds by writing grant applications. Two Executive Directors later, HopeLine has grown to a workforce of forty active volunteers.

On May 14, for the sixth year running, HopeLine will host its biggest annual fundraiser, Skate for Life. Skate for Life was originally conceived as a skateboard competition by two mothers who tragically lost their skateboard-loving sons to suicide. The event has since been adopted by HopeLine as one of its largest community outreach events.

But HopeLine provides services beyond suicide intervention. For example, volunteers make daily "reassurance calls" to the elderly and people with disabilities who may not have daily contact with others.

No matter what motivates callers to contact HopeLine, they can talk about anything—from stress, to relationships, to problems with friends or family. Volunteers are trained not to give advice, but instead to communicate with callers by active listening—validating the caller's feelings in an entirely confidential and anonymous forum.

Active listening is a skill that comes naturally to McAfee. As a law professor, certified mediator, and career law clerk, McAfee believes that her personality is better suited to a neutral than an advocate. She relishes her role as a mentor to law students through Campbell's Connections Mentorship Program and as a coach for the ABA National Appellate Advocacy Competition.

Through both her civic work and mentorship roles, McAfee loves meeting people wherever they are, and helping them identify and achieve their own goals. She often

tells her law students “there are only two things you can control in life: how you show up, and how you react when things don’t go your way.”

Whether showing up at the Rotary Club at 7 a.m. to promote HopeLine, or guiding law students as they react to a turbulent market, McAfee gracefully follows her own advice, and for that she exemplifies the citizen lawyer.

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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