

## Mittie R. Smith Receiving Citizen Lawyer Award

*The Citizen Lawyer Committee of the NCBA Young Lawyers Division, in conjunction with the NCBA Local Bar Outreach Committee, provides expanded coverage of the 2017 Citizen Lawyer Awards in recognition of their volunteer service and leadership in their communities and beyond. The following article is submitted for your consideration by the North Carolina Bar Association. The 2017 Citizen Lawyer Awards will be presented on Friday, June 23, at the NCBA Annual Meeting in Asheville, but the recipients have been notified of their selection and there is no embargo on this information. A photo of the recipient is attached.*

### **By Agnes Gambill**

HIGH POINT – Citizen Lawyer Mittie R. Smith knows about service and sacrifice. After losing her mother when she was only four years old, Smith’s father sacrificed to raise her and her eight siblings on his own in an era when civil rights tensions were flaring up across the nation. Her brother paid the ultimate sacrifice on the battleground in Vietnam, courageously serving our country. The selfless acts of her family taught Smith to give beyond what is expected without the expectation of recognition.

Prior to law school, Smith spent 10 years as a social worker in various agencies in the Northeast, Midwest and North Carolina. With the civil rights movement quickly unfolding, Smith found her calling in the legal profession. She graduated from the University of North Carolina School of Law and began her career under the guidance of Sammie Chess Jr., the first African-American Superior Court judge in North Carolina.

When asked why she decided to be a lawyer, Smith responds, “There, but for the grace of God, go I,” adding that she could easily be in the shoes of the less fortunate. “It was never about what I could earn, but how I could serve.”

Part of what makes Smith a talented lawyer and counselor is her uncanny ability to empathize with others. As the past chairwoman of Open Door Ministries of High Point (ODM), Smith saw that the homeless shelter badly needed renovating. She enlisted a team to repaint the walls of the shelter in cheerful shades of green, yellow and purple. She replaced worn, damaged furniture with polished, hardwood pieces and purchased an eclectic range of artwork and mirrors that now hang tastefully throughout the building. The staff at ODM say that the beautified environment had an immediate calming effect on their clients. “Everyone deserves dignity and a quality of life they can feel good about,” says Smith.

Under her leadership, over 45 individuals have found lodging in temporary or permanent housing through the camps and other services offered by the organization. “Mittie has raised Open Door Ministries to extraordinary heights,” says fellow High Point attorney Kenneth W. McAllister.

Smith has also served as president of the High Point Bar Association, where she started the annual CLE seminar held in February. With funds raised from the annual CLE, the High Point Bar Association began giving donations to local service agencies in December 2015. To date, the bar association has given \$15,000. Smith is also recognized for establishing the High Point

Memorial Wall next to the Guilford County Courthouse to honor the memory of deceased members of the High Point bar.

Over the span of her 49-year career, Smith has fulfilled her vow to give back to her community. Her advice to the next generation of citizen lawyers: “You can give money, but giving time is something different. You have to find time and make time to give back.”

**END**

*Agnes Gambill is a 2017 graduate of the University of North Carolina School of Law.*