

**JOINT NORTH CAROLINA BAR ASSOCIATION CENTENNIAL & GREENSBORO
BAR ASSOCIATION 2011 COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD**

TO ROBERT C. CONE

**Presentation by David F. Meschan To The
Greensboro Bar Association
February 16, 2012**

Mr. President, Honorable Judges, fellow bar members and distinguished guests – which include: Marilyn Chandler, Executive Director of the Greensboro Jewish Federation; Samantha Magill, a member of the Board of Directors of the Greensboro Urban Ministry and a member of the Greensboro Rotary Club; and Susan Shumaker, President of Cone Health Foundation.

From time to time this Association recognizes one of its own for outstanding achievement in the field of community service. This is such an occasion, and we are proudly joined by the North Carolina Bar Association in making tonight's award. The award was actually established in 1999 as a part of the centennial celebration of the North Carolina Bar Association. Hence, it is called the "Centennial" award.

The first awardees (in 1999) were Carole Bruce and Bob Klepfer. Last year we honored Harriett Smalls. In between, we honored other deserving members. Always it has been and remains the practice to recognize those who have truly had an impact and, in the process, made Greensboro and its surrounding region a better place to live. Tonight, we recognize another exemplary member – who has made such impact – and enriched our community in a unique and special way. I have been asked to make the presentation on behalf of both organizations, and it is my honor and privilege to do so.

I will say at the outset that this could also have been about the honoree's legal skills, or about his service to the Bar both here and in Raleigh. However, it is about neither of those things. It is all about his extraordinary community service.

Mahatma Gandhi once said:

“I shall pass through this world but once. Any good therefore that I can do or any kindness that I can show to any human being, let me do it now. Let me not defer or neglect it. I shall not pass this

way again.”

Winston Churchill also observed:

“We make a living by what we do, but we make a life by what we give.”

Booker T. Washington said, to like effect and with beautiful “full circle” reasoning:

“Living is the art of loving. Loving is the art of caring. Caring is the art of sharing. Sharing is the art of living.” He then added, profoundly: “If you want to lift yourself up, lift up someone else.”

Similar insights are well documented throughout recorded history.

I will add just one more. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said it very simply: “Everybody can be great because anybody can serve. You only need a heart full of grace, a soul generated by love.”

Tonight’s honoree qualifies hands down as the quintessential community servant. For 35 years, he has meant so much to so many, and he shows no signs of letting up. He doesn’t talk much about what he does, however. He just quietly “gets it done.” That is because

helping other people is part of his make-up. It is his very essence. And he does it with passion, grace and humility. Our honoree is – my friend – Bob Cone. Let me now tell you about Bob’s extraordinary community service.

1. With unrelenting vigor, Bob served for twenty years, from 1982 to 2002, on the board of directors of what started out as the Moses H. Cone Memorial Hospital and evolved into what’s now known as Cone Health. During this remarkable tenure the hospital grew in size exponentially – merging with Wesley Long in the process in 1997. Bob was intimately involved in that process every step of the way, in collaboration with CEO Dennis Barry and other board members, and guided it into what it became and still is today: a model health system serving all of Greensboro and the surrounding geographic region.

2. A by-product of the 1997 merger was the establishment of the “Moses Cone Wesley Long Community Health Foundation,” now known simply as the “Cone Health Foundation.” Following the completion of his 20 years on the Cone Health board, in 2003 Bob was

invited to serve and did serve for 9 more years on the Foundation board, becoming its chairman in 2009, a position he held until 2011. The value of the Foundation's endowment exceeded \$100 million during Bob's board tenure, and it poured an incredible \$43 million back into our community during that time – for grants, scholarships and contributions to organizations working to improve the health status of our community.

During Bob's chairmanship alone (2009 to 2011, a very difficult time for our economy) the Foundation, under his leadership, still managed to plow \$14.5 million back into our community for these purposes, a staggering feat by all accounts.

3. While this was going on, Bob – unable to say no – was invited to serve and did serve on the Greensboro Public Library Board of Trustees from March of 2001 to January of 2008, nearly 8 years, assuming the chairmanship from 2005 to 2007. In that leadership role, he propelled the library's continued growth in its marvelous Davie Street location, accessible to and usable by everyone in the Greensboro community. While Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Bob also served

on the library's Foundation board and currently serves on its advisory board.

4. Another organization – one dear to the honoree's heart was – and still is – the Greensboro Rotary Club. Like his father, and his grandfather before that, he was elected to serve as the club's president – in Bob's case during 2007 and 2008. Through this, his favorite club, he has contributed much to our community over the years. His dream – a children's merry-go-round in or near Center City Park – has yet to reach fruition. No doubt it soon will, given this honoree's dogged persistence and determination.

5. In preparation for tonight, I have had several discussions with long-time Greensboro Rotary Club members. As a result, I have a story to tell about Bob, unbeknownst to non-club members – *until now*.

It involves the ceremony in which Bob (as president) formally passed the president's gavel to his successor, Carole Bruce. As he did so – get this – this is for real – he sang a song to her – which he had

composed – and he accompanied himself on the guitar. This was a musical side of our honoree seldom seen or heard and, needless to say, it brought the house down. Of course, the lyrics were all about the club’s deeds and goals.

6. Another way in which Bob has nobly served the Greensboro community was through his board membership on the Greensboro Urban Ministry from 2003 to 2011. The Weaver House (for the homeless) and the Potter House (for the hungry) are two of the most visible success stories in Greensboro, which Bob, through his service, helped make even better during his 8-year term on the board.

8. Time will not allow me to talk about everything else, but I will touch upon a few other achievements by Bob in the field of community service. Note as I do so the diversity of these projects:

- He led the effort to preserve and perpetuate Temple Emanuel’s Fisher Park sanctuary at the corner of Greene and Florence Streets. Thanks in large

measure to Bob's efforts, a historic and architectural landmark in Fisher Park is still being used and continues to thrive.

- He chaired the North Carolina advisory board for the Anti-Defamation League during 1983 and 1984, championing its work in fighting bigotry in all forms.

- He was a driving force in the establishment of the Herbert Falk Society (in honor of this distinguished former member of our association). It continues to foster and encourage pro bono legal work by this Association's members.

- On November 1, 2001, Bob was presented with a special humanitarian award by the Al-Ummil Ummat Islamic Center here in Greensboro, for his role

in “Making Ends Meet,” a cross-cultural bridge-building project.

- For his service to the Old North State Council, a local chapter of the Boy Scouts of America, Bob received in 2002 the Whitney M. Young, Jr. Service Award for his work in making scouting accessible to youth in Greensboro’s lower income neighborhoods.

- Bob has served as a Preceptor at Elon Law School, whereby he has mentored Elon law students.

- And Bob has been an unwavering source of support for Jack Boger, the dean of UNC’s law school in his fund-raising efforts. In addition, he served on the UNC Law Foundation Board for a 15-year period, from 1986 through 2001, and was Chairman of that board for 7 of those years, from 1994 through 2001.

His work for the Foundation included management of the law school's endowment.

- Back here in Greensboro, Bob has been an advocate and fund-raiser for too many stand-alone causes to list, let alone talk about, in my allotted time. I will mention just one – our Greenway – which will one day completely encircle our city thanks to the hard work of many devoted people – including Bob. After only modest physical training (he does not do a lot of running), I will also tell you that he put on his sneakers, signed up and ran in the “Run for the Greenway” race this past September 10, completing the 5-mile course in 83-degree heat. That, I think, tells you a lot about the man – and how Bob always tries to become involved in what he talks about.

9. Lastly, I want to tell you about the Ilyasov (EE-LEE-YAH-SOV) family. I picked this story because, like many other stories

about Bob, it was totally *off* the radar screen. This one involved – and could not have happened without – his lovely wife Sally. By 1990, persecution of Jews had become a harsh reality in the former Soviet Union. Suddenly, for the first time, Jews were allowed to leave, and no one knew when the window would close – and/or when worse things might happen. A nationwide network was set up here in the United States to receive these Jewish refugees. Bob and Sally stepped up. Rakhil (ROCK ILL) and Ilyas (EEL-E-US) Ilyasov, together with their two beautiful daughters, Dora and Inna (EE-NAH), traveled from a town called Baku in Azerbaijan (in the former Soviet Union) to Greensboro. They did not know a soul when they arrived here. The parents did not even speak English. Instantly, Bob, Sally and their equally enthusiastic children, Sam and Laurie, became the Ilyasovs’ new extended family in America. They helped them find jobs, make friends, and get the two girls enrolled in school. They also regularly had them as guests and for meals in their home, and otherwise adopted the Ilyasovs as family. Just so you know, Dora,

one of the daughters, went on to get her PhD in epidemiology in Chapel Hill and has become a researcher at Duke. Inna, the other daughter, was married to her husband in the home of Bob and Sally. After completing her education, Inna became, and still is, a valued employee of the Center of Creative Leadership here in Greensboro. The families remain close to this day.

10. At this point, I want to read a letter to you. It is from Susan Shumaker, President of the Cone Health Foundation, dated February 14, 2012. It reads as follows:

Words are hard to find to adequately capture the impact that Robert C. “Bob” Cone had on Cone Health Foundation. Bob’s strong commitment and advocacy for the marginalized, the underserved, minorities and others without access to health care was always at the forefront during his Board tenure and as our Board Chair. Bob served tirelessly and selflessly, never shying away from any opportunity to advance the mission of Cone Health Foundation – to *“measurably improve the health of people in the greater Greensboro area.”* Bob’s gentle nature, wisdom, vision, kindness, keen intellect, knowledge, humor (and I must not leave out persistence!) informed and soundly guided the Foundation. While we miss his passion, dedication and

humble spirit greatly, we are forever grateful for the legacy of his leadership.

Susan Shumaker

President, Cone Health Foundation

11. Before asking Bob to come forward, I want to introduce two special people: first, Sally, the love of Bob's life, who has been there with him every step of the way, who also happens to be a lawyer herself and a long-standing member of this Association. And second, Bob's mother Barbara, the matriarch of a truly extraordinary family – without whom we would not have Bob. Barbara, we are thrilled to have you with us tonight.

12. Bob, I would now ask that you come to the podium to accept this well-deserved award. After three amazing decades of service to our community – from the two stalwart organizations for whom I speak, who desire to honor you tonight, I present you with this plaque. We appreciate from the bottom of our hearts all you have

done – and continue to do – for our wonderful community. You
are the man. We love you.