



Charleston School of Law, Charleston, SC

[By Barbara Chalsma]

A unique law school in Charleston, South Carolina, is about to graduate its first J.D. class. Its focus is “to use the law as a calling in the public interest.” Although the average citizen would not find this so innovative, for people connected with the law and legal education, it is a novel idea.

This is not to say the public interest is ignored by other law schools, but neither do they ignore corporate law, entertainment law, and international law. At no other law school in the U.S. is public service first, foremost, and virtually all-consuming.

Only the second law school in South Carolina, Charlestown School of Law has goals—a mission, if you will—that are worth quoting in their entirety:

- To teach *students of high moral character and unquestioned personal integrity* through a careful and refined study program;
- To teach the practice of law as a profession, having as its *chief aim providing public service*;
- To teach the law as a means of *providing relief for those who suffer because they are helpless, weak, outnumbered, or because they are victims of prejudice*;
- To teach the law as a means of *alleviating human misery and human suffering*;
- To teach the law as a means of making possible the continued processes of manufacture and commerce that *bring realization to the twin goals of prosperity and peace in the world*;
- To *institute and coordinate legal outreach programs* to the South Carolina and American bars, local, state, and federal governments, as well as to the general population; and

- To encourage and foster *legal reforms*.

Presently the student body totals 600, one third of whom are part-time students. Only the J.D. is offered, either through the full-time program or the part-time program. A full panoply of student activities is offered, including the *Charleston Law Review*; moot court, which fosters excellence, particularly in appellate oral advocacy; mock trial; and dispute resolution, all of which are run by student boards.

In addition to participating in the *Charleston Law Review*, students are selected competitively to participate in the *Federal Courts Law Review*, which is published by the Federal Magistrate Judges Association. Finally, there is also the venerable Forensic Club, which is a mere 180-plus years old.

Charleston is a metropolitan area of roughly 500,000 inhabitants with a major international airport for easy travel in and out. Its beauty and cultural attractions, including an abundance of historic architecture and the famed Spoleto Festival in late spring (set for May 25-June 10 this year), are known throughout the world.

The Charleston Museum and South Carolina Aquarium add to the draws of the city. The weather is conducive to outdoor activities (which, unfortunately, means muggy in summer, but there are five “pristine” beaches that can be used early and often). In 2005, *Forbes* magazine ranked Charleston as the nation’s 47th-best city in which to live, with a cost-of-living rating of 90 and a crime rating of 107.

Potential students from the more than three fourths of the U.S. that is not part of the Deep South will be either charmed or amused by the focus on tradition and roots. Even the dean’s professional credibility appears to be based on the facts that his “mother is from Charleston, his wife is from Charleston, and he is related to the late Coleman Karesh, a Charleston native [...] for whom the University of South Carolina’s law library is named.”

The school’s publications remind readers repeatedly about Carolina moonlight and magnolias and that its origins “predate the oldest law school in the state.” In fact, the Charleston School of Law is the fourth oldest in the country because it began as the Forensic Club in 1825.

It will be interesting to follow the progress and growth of the Charleston School of Law, particularly if it steadfastly continues with its mission of educating public-service lawyers and if it attracts a national student body and faculty.

Presently, Charleston School of Law has provisional accreditation from the ABA, which it received at the end of 2006.

ON THE NET

Charleston School of Law
www.charlestonlaw.org

Federal Magistrate Judges Association
www.fedjudge.org/index.asp

Charleston, SC
www.charlestoncvb.com