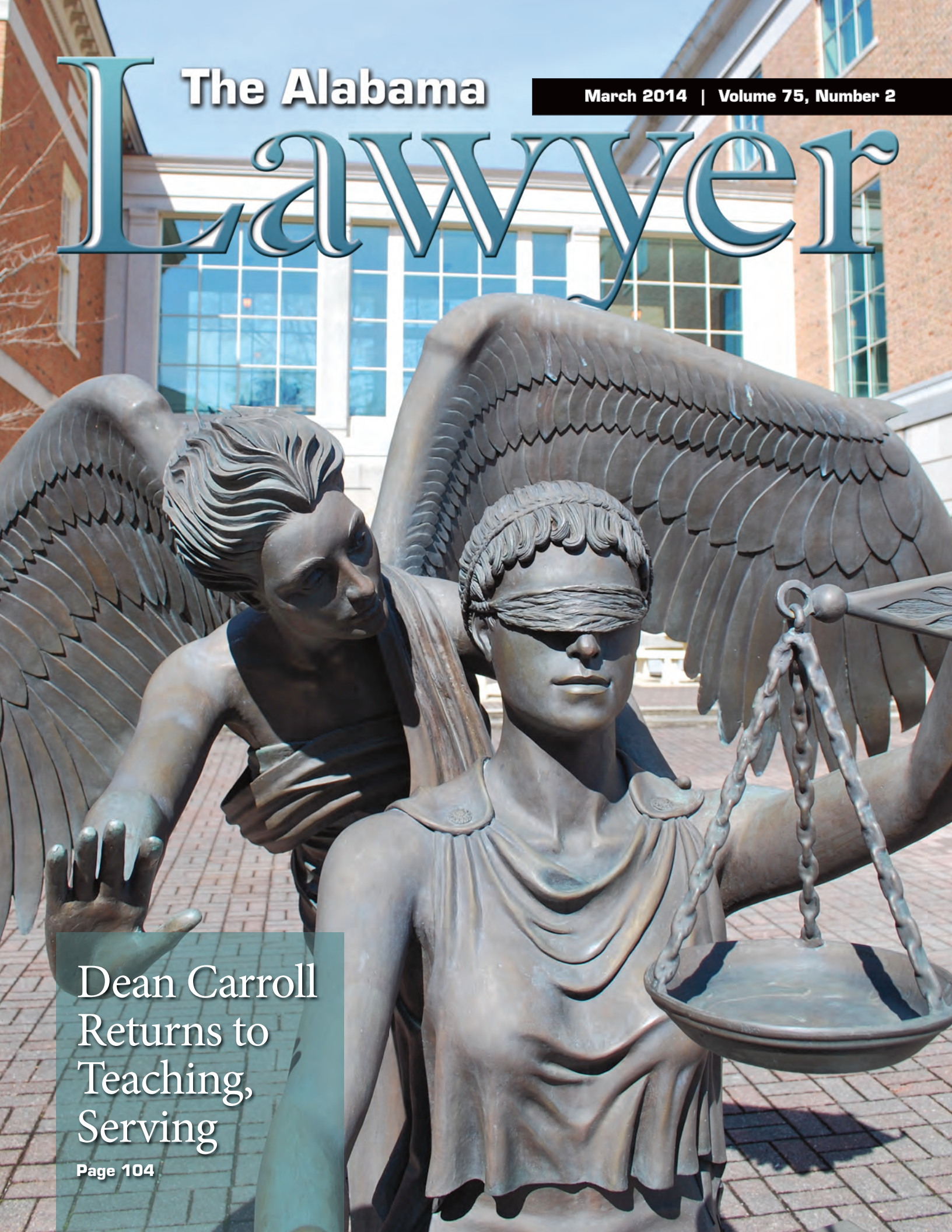


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*"Justice and Mercy" was commissioned by Lucille Stewart Beeson for Samford University's Cumberland School of Law and dedicated February 15, 1996, the same day the Lucille Stewart Beeson Law Library was dedicated. The sculptor was L. Glynn Acree III.*

*Photo by Derrek G. Smith, director of law communication, Samford University*

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*The Alabama Lawyer* (USPS 743-090) is published six times a year by the Alabama State Bar, 415 Dexter Avenue, Montgomery, Alabama 36104. Periodicals postage paid at Montgomery, Alabama, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *The Alabama Lawyer*, P.O. Box 4156, Montgomery, AL 36103-4156.

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## Dean John L. Carroll: Game Changer

### Game Changer

In recent years, a new term has been added to our lexicon. The term is "game changer." It is defined as "[a] newly introduced element or factor that changes an existing situation or activity in a significant way."<sup>1</sup>

Dean John L. Carroll will step down as dean of the Cumberland School of Law in July after serving in that capacity for over 13 years. That is noteworthy, as most deans only serve an average of about four years.

Dean Carroll came to the school with a sense of mission; he flourished because of the fruits of that effort, and he helped educate the next generation of lawyers. Simply stated, Dean Carroll assumed his position as a calling, and embraced it because of this passion.

During his illustrious career, he has worn many hats, and borne many labels—lawyer, law professor, judge, mediator, arbitrator, dean, media commentator, triathlete, and friend to many. While he has been successful in



*Carroll*

each endeavor, his role as dean has been transformative, influential, and yes, game changing.

The true measure of a dean rests with his understanding of the importance of a holistic view of the profession and the law school's role in preparing students to become a contributing part of that profession. Dean Carroll recently noted the correlation when he stated:

"The prevailing philosophy is simple: practical skills outweigh raw knowledge, and application transcends erudition. If the goal were to produce great law students, the tenets might be exactly the opposite. Our goal is to produce exceptional lawyers."<sup>2</sup>

That intent to impart knowledge, to provide practical skills, and develop exceptional practitioners has driven Dean Carroll in guiding and educating law students for over a decade.

## Vision

One of Dean Carroll's inspirational quotes is derived from the Book of Proverbs:<sup>3</sup>

WHEN THERE IS NO VISION, THE PEOPLE PERISH.

Dean Carroll arrived at Cumberland with a vision for how to train the next generation of lawyers. He wanted to ensure that the law school environment reflected not only a solid educational foundation, but that it would also serve as a vehicle for creating principled lawyers. And he has succeeded in doing that. When students leave Cumberland, they have witnessed and experienced his commitment to the school, to them, to the profession and to the Rule of Law.

## Community

A recurring theme that emanates from Dean Carroll is his focus on a "sense of community." Dean Carroll has stated:

"There are many roles the dean plays, but in my judgment, there is no more important role than that of emotional leader, and no more important aspect of that emotional leadership than the articulation of a vision that the many communities of the law school can understand and embrace."<sup>4</sup> Dean Carroll

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has done much to bring together the alumni, faculty and students to advance the mission of the law school and the profession. He did this through his love of the students, dedication to the school and tremendous rapport with the alumni.

## Professional Involvement

Dean Carroll also understands the importance of professional service. He models this in his walk and talk. Dean Carroll recognizes, and has recently noted, that “[n]o one has greater opportunity to influence the future of the profession than we as law school deans.”<sup>5</sup>

Dean Carroll’s actions speak loudly as well. He has served as a United States Magistrate Judge, a reporter to Electronic Discovery Act Project and a member of the United States Judicial Conference Advisory Committee on the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure. Also, while serving as dean, he worked pro bono on capital cases, and has served on a host of non-profit boards. He has also been an active member of the Alabama State Bar, the American Bar Association, the Birmingham Bar Association and the District of Columbia Bar Association.

On a different note, he is visible in his role as a legal commentator on television and in the print media. He is often asked to discuss a variety of legal matters. He has been the voice of legal knowledge and sound reasoning to many in the general community.

## Service

Dean Carroll also believes it is our responsibility as lawyers to encourage community service and ethical behavior. In furtherance of that commitment, Cumberland, under Dean Carroll’s leadership, established the Cumberland Mediation Center in 2005 to provide free and confidential mediation services to the Greater Birmingham community in matters between organizations and individuals who could not afford the services of a paid mediator. This project has been conducted by volunteer law students, attorneys and community members, and is considered by all to be a tremendous success.

Additionally, under his tenure as dean, the Public Interest Fellowship Program was established. Through this program, law students work for judges, public defenders and with Volunteer Lawyer programs to gain practical experience while learning the meaning of public service.

Dean Carroll was also the catalyst for the establishment of the James E. Horton Inns of Court. The Inn is designed to promote professionalism and ethical behavior in the profes-



*Judge Carroll serving with others*

sion. Judges, lawyers and law students regularly meet during the school year to discuss relevant ethical dilemmas and challenges facing the students and the profession. The program also encourages and promotes mentoring between the participants.

Last, but not least, Dean Carroll also is engaged in very worthy, non-legal endeavors. He leads a Bible study group, known as the St. Thomas Moore Society, during the academic year. He also established a book club led by a number of law professors that encourages group interaction and better relationships between professors and students.

## Conclusion

It has been said that “[t]rue leadership cannot be awarded, appointed, or assigned. It comes only from influence, and cannot be mandated. It must be earned.”<sup>6</sup> That is so true.

Dean Carroll is that type of influential leader. He has demonstrated that through his vision for the law school and his example, teaching, philosophy and unwavering service to the profession. He has earned our respect and gratitude for a job well done. He leaves as a “Game Changer.” On behalf of the Alabama State Bar, I thank him for his service and example to us all. | AL

## Endnotes

1. Merriam-Webster Dictionary.
2. Dean John L. Carroll’s address to the Cumberland School of Law’s 2006 graduation class.
3. Proverbs 29:18.
4. John L. Carroll, *Words of Wisdom for Deans from Mick Jagger and Others*, 36 U. Tol. L. Rev. 29 (2004).
5. *Id.*
6. *Id.*