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CATAWBA COUNTY ATTORNEY NAMED COUNTY ATTORNEY OF YEAR BY STATE ASSOCIATION

Catawba County Attorney Debra Bechtel has been named County Attorney of the Year by the North Carolina Association of County Attorneys. She was honored on July 21 at the Association's annual meeting, held in New Bern.



The County Attorney of the Year honor is given annually to one county attorney in the state. Bechtel was recognized for her service to Catawba County and for her service to the association and local governments across the state.

"This award is a reflection of the great respect that Debra has earned from her peers for her expertise, hard work, and dedication as a county attorney," said Pitt County Attorney Janis Gallagher, President of the Association. "Debra has contributed significantly to the North Carolina Association of County Attorneys, an affiliate group of the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners, through her service as an officer over the last four years, serving as President in 2010-2011. Debra's professionalism, commitment to public service, and leadership among county attorneys in North Carolina contributed to her achievement of this great honor."

"Debra is well deserving of this recognition," said Kitty Barnes, Chair of the Catawba County Board of Commissioners. "She is well respected throughout the state for her thorough research and education she provides both locally and shares with her fellow county attorneys throughout the state. "

The mission of the North Carolina County Attorney's Association is to support county attorneys in their endeavor to advise, represent and assist elected county commissioners, county managers, and employees in the execution of their duties. The organization also promotes continuing education and the reinforcement of ethical behavior by its members.

"Doing the work county attorneys do is a unique niche within the legal profession," Bechtel said. "The North Carolina Association of County Attorneys is comprised of attorneys from across the State who are dedicated to the elected officials, managers and citizens they serve. The professionalism and expertise of this excellent group of lawyers is outstanding. To receive the Outstanding County Attorney of the year from these peers is such an honor and I am very appreciative of the recognition."

Bechtel, who was admitted as a member of the bar of the United States Supreme Court in 2004, served as president of the Catawba County Bar Association in 2005, and as president of both the North Carolina Association of Police Attorneys and the 25th Judicial District Bar in 2006.

A graduate of the University of Florida College of Law, Bechtel began working with Catawba County in January 1996, after having served as an Assistant District Attorney in the 25th Judicial District since 1992. She provides day to day support to the County Manager's Office, Cooperative Extension, Economic Development Corporation, Emergency Services, Environmental Health, the County's Library System, Public Health, Register of Deeds, Sheriff's Office and Utilities and Engineering. She has served the Catawba County Board of Commissioners as County Attorney, responsible for providing legal advice to the Board, since December 2006.

Bechtel created the first EMS legal training course used in Catawba County, and has done a complete revision of the County Code. She has taught numerous groups on legal issues related to planning and zoning, and has taught human services and law enforcement issues and been a guest lecturer at Wake Forest University for the past sixteen years.

Bechtel is a member of the North Carolina Bar Association and the National Public Health Lawyer's Association; is a founding member of the Legal Advisor Section of the National Sheriff's Association; and is chair of the Catawba County Criminal Justice Partnership Board and Past President of the Catawba County Parenting Network.

Bechtel and her husband, Ken, a professor of sociology and criminology at Wake Forest University, live in Conover. They have two sons, Greg, 24, who sells spine stabilization equipment and assists neurosurgeons in operating rooms and Stephen, 15, a sophomore at Discovery High School and member of the Newton-Conover High School football team.

"We're extremely proud of Debra, and deeply appreciate the guidance and counsel she provides here in Catawba County," said Tom Lundy, Catawba County Manager. "Her knowledge and the vast array of her legal experience have served the organization and the citizens of Catawba County well, and earned her the respect of her co-workers and her colleagues. We're glad her state association benefitted from her leadership, and that her contribution to local government statewide has been recognized by her peers."