

NCPA Award Like ‘An Oscar’ For Amanda Martin

By Russell Rawlings

The North Carolina Press Association recently honored Amanda Martin as the latest recipient of the William Lassiter First Amendment Award. The award is presented annually at the NCPA Winter Institute to a citizen who has demonstrated exemplary commitment to open government and First Amendment rights.

Martin could not be a more fitting recipient. Even back in high school, when she was drafting mock legislation on a reporter’s privilege, Martin has always been passionate about First Amendment causes.

“I got interested in those issues then,” Martin said, “and when I studied journalism at the University of Florida, I took a media law class and loved it. It has been an interest and passion of mine for decades.”

Martin, who was born in Raleigh, grew up in Florida because that’s where her father’s position with Monsanto had taken her family. She came back to the state to attend the University of North Carolina School of Law and, save for a brief stint in Atlanta, has called North Carolina home ever since.

“I had worked with John Bussian for about a year in Durham,” Martin recalled, “when an opening came up with Everett Gaskins. Bob and Heather Gourley were law school classmates of mine, and Bob was in the firm.

“I got a call from Hugh Stevens, who was doing the work for the press association that I now do, and he asked if I was interested in coming to work with him. That was 22 years ago.”

Martin joined the firm in 1995 and took on the title of associate general counsel. She became general counsel in 2002 when Stevens retired from his full-time duties with the press association and became counsel emeritus. He received the Lassiter Award in 2003.

“Hugh has been the best mentor any lawyer could have,” Martin said. “He simultaneously pushed me to do what I could do but stayed there as safety net when I needed it. I know I said something about him that evening when I received the award, but I am not crystal clear what I said.

“Essentially, I would not be sitting where I am today if not for the leadership and caretaking that Hugh Stevens has given me throughout my career.”

A past chair of the NCBA Constitutional Rights & Responsibilities Section, Martin continues to embrace the opportunities afforded her by working with the press association.

“It has been an amazing opportunity,” Martin said. “Because we represent the press association, we do two things. As corporate counsel, I go to their board meetings, but the bigger piece of this job is answering calls from reporters and doing training for reporters.



Carolyn Martin beams as she helps present the award to her daughter, Amanda Martin.

“For instance, on the Thursday afternoon of the winter institute, I facilitated a panel about police wearing body cameras. I have been across the state doing training in newsrooms, and I just love all of that. I have taught off and on at UNC and Campbell, teaching media law to undergraduates and law students. It is an extended version of the teaching that I do for reporters, and a delightful part of what I do.”

Martin was overwhelmed by her selection for the award.

“It was an amazing feeling,” Martin said, “made doubly so by having my mom, Carolyn Martin, there with me to help present the award. I told friends the next day that I felt like I had won an Oscar.

“There is no group whose confirmation could mean more to me than the North Carolina Press Association. It truly has been a joy to represent them for 22 years. Never in a million years did it occur to me that I would be receiving this award.

“I could not have been more surprised.” ***.ncz***