



S T U D E N T  
P R O F I L E S



Future  
Litigator  
Takes  
Community  
Service to  
Heart

by Roban Johnson

When you think of law students, you most often picture them buried under piles of thick books, researching case law and preparing briefs and memoranda. What you may not envision is the high degree of commitment many of them have for community service.

One such student at Mercer's Walter F. George School of Law is Patricia Ann Parker, a third-year student with a strong advocacy for community involvement — an involvement that has led her to receive a governor's commendation, a mayor's commendation and a county commissioner's award for community service.

While in undergraduate school at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Parker played a key role in providing community service to the Wilmington area. She was a board member and spokesperson for Big Brothers/Big Sisters, a spokesperson for the American Cancer Society, and was the founder of two programs, "Believe in Yourself," and "CanSurvive."

With "Believe in Yourself," Parker reached out to elementary students — teaching them how to set small-term goals and plan for the future. "CanSurvive" is a support group she established for families who have lost someone to cancer.

Although she left those two programs behind when she enrolled at Mercer, she has remained staunch in her commitment to provide service to the community, as a law student and as a practicing attorney.

"I've probably gained as much from my outside activities as I have from formal education," said Parker. "Mercer provides a broad array of student organizations to become involved in, and I've tried to become as involved as possible, not only to provide a needed service but to better develop my leadership and interpersonal skills. My involvement has been beneficial to me while in school and will carry over in practice as well."

One project she worked on last semester was an AIDS Law Practicum — a course in the Law School. This

was the first practicum of its kind at Mercer, and Parker was among the first three students chosen to participate.

"It was a great experience for me," Parker said. "We developed an outreach program for a 23-county area, providing legal services for people who have tested positive for HIV." Federally funded, the practicum teamed up the three Mercer students with Georgia Legal Services and pro bono attorneys in Macon.

For Parker, it was a learning process, one not duplicated in the classroom or in summer internships. "During the practicum we counseled clients on employment discrimination, housing problems and social security claims. We were there to handle domestic problems like divorces, prepare wills, living wills and powers of attorney. We did our own research, our own writing and advising of clients."

In addition to the direct client contact, Parker also researched and wrote community service presentations on the legal aspects and problems AIDS patients face. She talked to AIDS-education groups, social security workers and hospital staffs to let them know what legal services can be provided.

If that sounds like a full-time job, it nearly was. "Time varied depending on how many clients I had, but I probably spent 30 hours a week on it, counting the seminar class we took once a week, the actual office hours we had, the actual time we spent at the clinic and giving presentations, and the time spent doing the actual work for our clients."

Parker's commitment has not gone unnoticed, according to Professor Sidney Watson. "Tricia has shown a real commitment to serving her clients. She cares about her clients as people, and they have really responded to her caring by seeking her out."

Although community service projects will continue to play an important role in her life, her main focus is practicing law. She graduates in May.