



Left: Well-known local attorney Mark Rabil shares insight from his decades of practice.

Black lawyers hear from Rabil

BY LAYLA FARMER
THE CHRONICLE

Members of the Winston-Salem Bar Association heard from a local legal legend Tuesday.

Attorney Mark Rabil, who is best known for his successful defense of Darryl Hunt, addressed the WSBA, the city's predominantly African American bar association, during its monthly luncheon meeting at the Piedmont Club. The co-director of the Wake Forest University School of Law's Innocence and Justice Clinic, Rabil has built a reputation over the last two decades as a fearless and highly accomplished defender, said WSBA President Frederick Adams II.

"He has a passion and commitment to our profession that is unquestioned," Adams stated. "Of course, we know how important the case of Darryl Hunt was and continues to be to this community. I'm just glad to see the work continue."

Adams added that the Hunt case and the many entities that have been created as a result, including the Clinic and Hunt's Darryl Hunt Project for Freedom and Justice, demonstrate how the silver linings can be found in even the darkest of clouds.

"It shows that out of sometimes the worst circumstances, good things can still come out of it," said Adams. "It's tragic what happened to Darryl Hunt, but the fact that other people are able to be helped is a wonderful thing. That's why I chose (Rabil) as our speaker."

As a capital defender, Rabil travels over much of the western part of the state, fighting for defendants who are rapidly running out of chances to fight for themselves. It is frustrating and emotionally draining work, but Rabil says he cannot afford to walk away.

"The individuals that I represent need help against a system that generally is stacked against them," he remarked. "That's what motivates me."

Among those in attendance Tuesday was Superior Court Judge L. Todd Burke, who served as a clerk for Rabil in 1985, when Hunt was initially imprisoned.

"Twenty six years ago, Judge Burke and I were ... in the bullpen with Darryl Hunt, waiting to see if he was going to be given life or death," Rabil told the group. "It was a moment neither of us will ever forget."

Burke, who spent time as a prosecutor, said he has heard other prosecutors joke about convicting innocent people. Rabil urged the attorneys to look beyond the obvious conclusions when viewing cases.

"Every time you hear about an exoneration, I just want you to stop and think about, what is it that led to that travesty?" he said. "If I can get people to stop and take a pause every once in awhile, then that to me is what justice really is. We spend too much time listening to ourselves, especially us lawyers."

Rabil, who has attended both national and international conferences about wrongful convictions, said that despite its high rate of imprisonment, America affords its citizens some legal luxuries that many of its contemporaries do not. In America, the top reasons for wrongful convictions include faulty evi-



Fred Adams II greets the group.



Superior Court Judge L. Todd Burke drives home a point.

dence and mistaken eye witness testimonies. In many other countries, false confessions, which are often coerced, are the chief factor, Rabil said.

"In these other countries, they don't have the adversary system that we have, which does somewhat filter these things out," he said.

Attorney Pridgen Amos said she first heard Rabil speak alongside Hunt at UNC-Chapel Hill in 2004, while she was a second-year law student.

"I have a lot of respect for him and what he did for Darryl Hunt," said Amos, a city native and the WSBA secretary.

Hunt, who had only recently been released at the time, made an impression on her, Amos recalled.

"I was so impressed and shocked that somebody that was wrongfully imprisoned would even want to talk to people in the legal community," she declared. "He was such a gracious person to try to enlighten us with his story so it could have an impact on how we view our careers."



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