

NCBF Justice Funds
Joseph B. Cheshire V Bio

Joseph B. Cheshire V was born on May 19, 1947, in Raleigh, NC. He attended public schools in Raleigh and then spent six years studying at Groton School in Groton, Massachusetts, graduating in 1966. Thereafter, he attended and graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill with an AB in History. Following graduation from undergraduate school, he attended law school at Wake Forest University and earned his J.D degree in 1973. At Wake Forest he was the founding Chief Justice of Wake Forest's moot court program. While in law school, Joe was commissioned a lieutenant in the United States Army and served both in an active duty and then reserve officer capacity after graduation from law school.

Upon being licensed to practice law in October 1973, Joe became the fifth straight Joseph Blount Cheshire to practice law continually in the courts of North Carolina since 1836, a tradition of which he is extraordinarily proud and one which has molded his view of the law as a profession designed to help speak for those who may not be able to help themselves or have come up against the awesome punitive power of government. Over the course of his practice, he has handled cases in 16 of the states or territories of the United States, several foreign countries and 85 of the 100 counties in North Carolina, as well as numerous state and federal administrative agencies. He has handled appeals in all state appellate courts, several federal circuits and the Supreme Court of the United States.

Joe first joined the firm of Ragsdale and Liggett, where he was trained to defend civil cases. He was made a named partner with the firm name changing to Ragsdale, Liggett and Cheshire in 1975. He fulfilled a lifelong passion by developing an extensive criminal law practice which included handling in excess of 15 first degree murder cases in his first five years of practice. In 1977, at the age of 29, he was appointed special prosecutor for Wake County and oversaw the prosecution of the long time sheriff of the county and numerous of his deputies in an extensive corruption scandal. In announcing the appointment, the chief resident judge of Wake County stated as one of his reasons for the appointment, "You can go back through five generations of lawyers in the Cheshire family and (never hear) of a Cheshire being accused of dishonesty or lying down. It's very unusual."

In 1978, Joe left the firm of Ragsdale Liggett and Cheshire and formed his own firm specializing in criminal law. In the course of the next four decades, Joe has handled scores of first-degree murder cases, both capital and otherwise, tried scores of complex conspiracy cases, handled numerous political corruption cases, and represented many varied businesses and business people in crisis during both state and federal investigations. His clients have included congressmen, governors and other noted political and government figures, prominent members of the entertainment, banking, health care and business community nationwide, and people from all walks of life who have been unfortunate enough to come into contact with the criminal justice system.

In the early 1980s, Joe also developed a practice of representing professionals in front of licensing boards, and the firm has developed what is perhaps the largest practice of this type in the state. In the last decade, Joe has been the lead lawyer in cases in which death row inmates have been exonerated and freed, was the lead lawyer for Greg Taylor who was declared innocent after serving 16 years for a murder he did not commit, and led the defense of the wrongfully accused Duke lacrosse players.

Joe has also been intimately involved in the criminal defense bar during his career. He has written and lectured extensively throughout the United States on criminal law trial practice and ethics issues. He was responsible for founding the criminal law section of the North Carolina Advocates for Justice (NCAJ), formerly the North Carolina Academy of Trial Lawyers, and served as its founding chair. He is past president of NCAJ. He was responsible for creating the requirements for the specialization of criminal lawyers by the North Carolina State Bar. He has served lengthy chairmanship and membership on the Criminal Justice Section of the North Carolina Bar Association and served a three-year term on the North Carolina Bar Association Board of Governors and the NCBA Executive Committee. Joe served as an appointed member of the North Carolina Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission as well as the Governor's Judicial Nominating Commission from 2011-2012. Most importantly, he served on the state legislative study commission that established the Indigent Defense Services (IDS) Commission to oversee the provision of all indigent defense throughout the state of North Carolina. This agency now oversees a budget in excess of \$150 million and is responsible for the provision and quality of legal representation for people in North Carolina who are entitled to a lawyer but cannot afford to hire one. In addition to sitting on the study group that led to the establishment of the IDS Commission in 2000, Joe was the chair of the Commission for 8 of its first 10 years. He also served on the legislative study commission that was responsible for the overhaul of discovery rules in criminal cases which resulted in passage of the open file discovery law in 2004.

Joe has also been active in his community throughout his life. He served on the first board of Hospice of Wake County, was instrumental in creating Drug Action of Wake County, the county's first drug treatment program, and served for years as its president. He also served on the board and as president of the Capital Area Soccer league, helped found and acted as president of the Make A Difference Foundation, which raised and spent millions of dollars in drug prevention programs nationwide in conjunction with bands such as Bon Jovi and Mötley Crüe, and he served on the Board of Directors of Christchurch School and continues to serve on the Board of Trustees of St. Augustine's University, a university founded by Joseph Blount Cheshire I.

For six years in a row, Joe was named the top lawyer in North Carolina by SuperLawyers.com and has continually remained in the top list since the list's inception. Among many other organizations, he is a fellow in the American Board of Criminal Lawyers as well as the American College of Trial Lawyers. He has been listed in Best Lawyers in America since its inception and has an AV rating in Martindale-Hubbell. Among many awards, he has received the Order of the Long Leaf Pine and the Old North State Award, North Carolina's two highest civilian honors, as well as the North Carolina Bar Association's highest award for criminal defense attorneys, the Thurgood Marshall Award by the North Carolina

Advocates for Justice, and the Walter Clark Award from the North Carolina Advocates for Justice, which is their highest honor. Perhaps his most valued award was received this June when Groton School presented him with its distinguished service award for his selfless work for others. It is the school's highest honor.

Joe has been married for 53 years to Carolyn Beale Cheshire. They have two grown sons, two daughters-in-law, two beautiful granddaughters, and a grandson – and they are mighty proud of each of them. They also have three horses and two dogs.