Elon to host moot court competition honoring 3 N.C. justices

By PAUL THARP, Staff Writer

The Elon University School of Law has announced the creation of a national moot court competition to be held at the school next month.

The event will honor three former N.C. Supreme Court chief justices who serve on the school’s advisory board — Rhoda Billings, James G. Exum and Henry B. Frye.

“We want to commemorate their significant contributions to appellate advocacy and law in the state of North Carolina,” said moot court director Alan Waters.

The April 28 announcement was timed to coincide with a meeting of the Board of Governors at the school, which include former governors James B. Hunt and James Holshouser.

Former presidential adviser David Gergen, who also serves on the school’s advisory board, said he likes the way the three former chief justices names roll off the tongue.

“Billings, Exum and Frye,” he said, likening the names to the Chicago Cubs’ all-star lineup of Tinker, Evers and Chance.

“When you have the same roll as an all-star team,” Gergen said, “you’re off to a great start.”

He predicted the event will attract as many as 32 moot court teams from law schools around the country.

Said Hunt, “It’s good for Elon, good for downtown Greensboro and good for the state of North Carolina. I’m proud of what Elon is doing.”

Holshouser said the competition will inspire students and alumni to seek positions of leadership in their communities.

“It also will reaffirm public service as a hallmark of the practice of law,” he said.

“That is why these justices are perfect choices for [naming of the competition].”

Justice Frye said he feels proud to have his name associated with the Elon School of Law.

“This is an institution that stresses excellence and service,” he said. “Hosting this competition here will not only attract students to come here to learn, but will attract lawyers to come here to teach,” he said.

Justice Exum said the competition will enhance the school’s reputation. “Teaching students to assume positions of leadership in their community and to engage in public service are the cornerstones of this school,” he said. “This competition will reinforce those ideals.”

It is important for students to be able to test and hone their oral-advocacy skills in order to be prepared for trial work following graduation, Justice Rhoda B. Billings said.

“This competition is a good blend of the experience we’ve had as justices with the skills students will be developing as they prepare for and participate in the competition,” she said.

The work of organizing the competition will be undertaken by Elon’s Moot Court Board, which consists of 20 students from the third-year law class and 20 from the second-year class.

“They have their work cut out for them, I can tell you that,” Exum quipped.

“I’m really excited,” said Tiffany D. Atkins, a second-year law student and member of the board. “We’re pleased to be honoring these justices. To have people like this serving on our board, I think, says a lot about the quality of this law school.”

Woodlief said the subject matter of the competition will be constitutional law, with a focus on public policy. “We will be looking in the fall at cases pending before the Supreme Court to find some cutting-edge legal issues.”

He said moot court board members “are very excited about the opportunity to show leadership and provide a service and example for other students throughout the country.”

Woodlief added that justices Billings, Exum and Frye have “exhibited leadership, professionalism and service. Those are characteristics we want to hold up for Elon law students and for students who come here to compete in the competition.”

Will Warrhuy, a 3L, said the competition will be held in the North Carolina Business Court, which is located at the law school.

Warrhuy added that Exum, who coached the moot court team at an American Bar Association competition in Washington, D.C., and Billings and Frye have made themselves available to law students.

“Their advice has been invaluable,” he said. “We look up to and model ourselves after them.”

Woodlief said the inaugural event would likely take place in March or April 2011.