

Law school near site selection

Uptown out of mix; school focuses on campus in midtown, nearby areas

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Charlotte School of Law, the for-profit law school that opened in midtown last year, is close to selecting a permanent campus site and has ruled out an uptown location.

The school, which opened with 85 students in August, has narrowed its site search to three options — one in midtown and two near uptown, says Gene Clark, dean of the school.

CharlotteLaw, as it is informally known, operates on East Morehead Street in a building that formerly housed law firm Alston & Bird and is now owned by lawyer Michael DeMayo.

For two years, the school is leasing about 40,000 square feet in the Morehead building and an office building behind it. For its permanent location, Clark says, the school will need 100,000 square feet and an option for adjoining property that would allow for expansion.

Clark says the site he hopes to secure early this year will need to offer some of the same advantages the midtown location has, including plenty of free parking and proximity to the courts and government facilities uptown. CharlotteLaw has ruled out a move uptown, he says, because of a shortage of available space and parking.

Perhaps just as crucial as establishing a permanent home, the school faces the task of gaining accreditation with the American Bar Association. If CharlotteLaw does not receive accreditation, its graduates will not be allowed to sit for the bar exam.

In April, the school will have a mock audit, hiring outside consultants to conduct a site visit and examine the school as if it were being evaluated for accreditation. Clark says

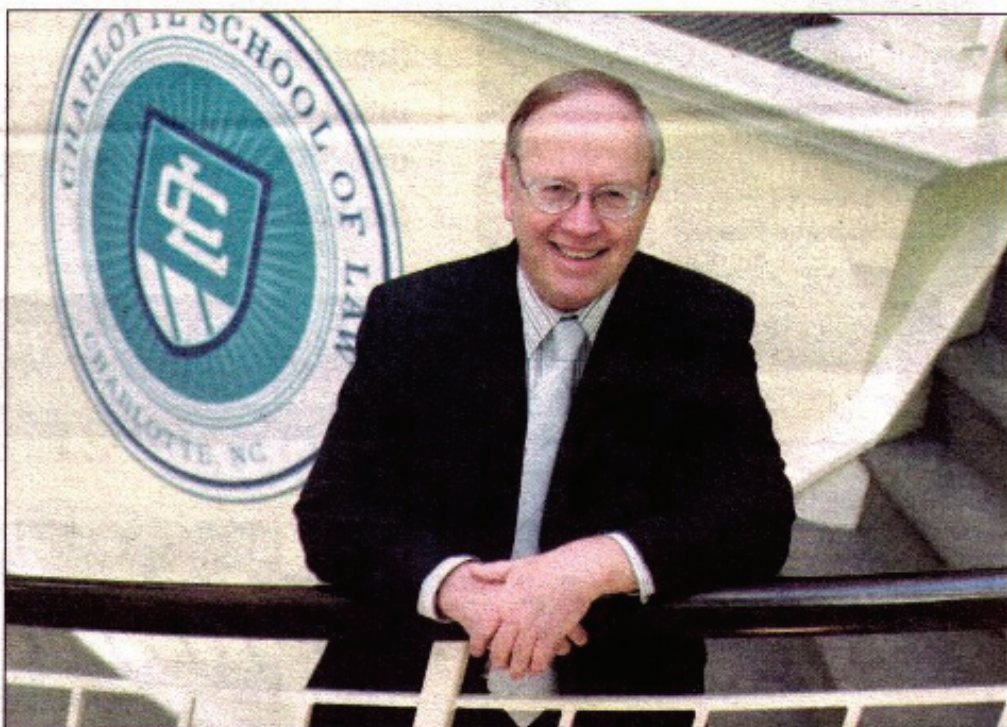


photo NANCY PIERCE

Gene Clark, dean of Charlotte School of Law, has ruled out a move uptown because of a lack of space and parking the growing school will need.

the ABA evaluation will likely occur in the fall.

CharlotteLaw is part of The InfiLaw System, a consortium of for-profit law schools that includes Florida Coastal School of Law in Jacksonville, Fla., and Phoenix School of Law in Phoenix. InfiLaw is a portfolio company of Sterling Capital Partners, a \$300 million private equity fund.

Clark says the school's ownership structure allows for a nontraditional approach to education, but one that is focused on student preparation. Like Campbell University in Buies Creek, south of Raleigh, CharlotteLaw will place special emphasis on bar preparation in both Carolinas.

"We say for-profit, but that's not really what we're for," Clark says.

"We're for making a significant difference in the lives of our students."

The local legal community's response to CharlotteLaw has been "heartening and encouraging," he says. The school houses the Mecklenburg County Bar law library, as well as a satellite office of the North Carolina Bar Association. The state association has established a satellite office as well at the Elon University School of Law in Greensboro, which also opened last year.

Clark hopes to host a luncheon at the school for some of the corporate counsel at Charlotte's Fortune 500 companies, which could be potential employers of CharlotteLaw grads. "We think with our business model, they especially would find our graduates of interest."