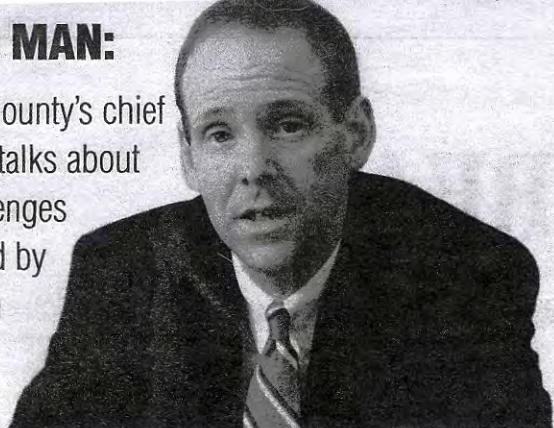


## PITCH MAN:

Gaston County's chief recruiter talks about the challenges presented by downturn

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## Duke searching for nuke plant partner

Company could drop \$11 billion S.C. project if it can't share the growing financial risk.

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## Landlords turn to flexible terms

With vacancy rising and fewer prospects in the market, building owners are cutting new deals.

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## Law school's first grads hit tough job market here

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Greg Spink knows he wants to work as a trial attorney in North Carolina. When that will happen, he says, is far tougher to predict.

Next weekend, Spink and 60 other students will receive diplomas from the Charlotte School of Law in a ceremony at Ovens Auditorium. The class of 2009 is the first the school will graduate since the for-profit institution launched here in August 2006.

Spink, a Raleigh native, hasn't had much time to worry about the weak job market that awaits him. Like most of his classmates, he spent this week focused on his final exams. And he'll soon shift his attention to the state bar exam in late July, which would license him to practice in North Carolina.

But he has started his job search, traveling to Durham recently for an

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# LAW: First grads from Charlotte's only law school hit a tough job market

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interview with a law firm.

After interviewing several candidates, the firm decided not to hire anyone, citing economic concerns.

"It's a tough time," Spink says. "Everyone right now is pretty gun-shy about doing anything."

CharlotteLaw's inaugural class is doubly challenged as it heads into the work force. With law firms laying off associates and canceling summer associate programs, the market for entry-level lawyers has "constricted measurably," according to one report.

That makes jobs scarce for new graduates.

On top of that, CharlotteLaw is an unknown quantity for law firm partners who do the hiring. And the school doesn't have a network of graduates for students to call on as they begin their job search.

"In a great market, that would be extremely challenging," says Keeley Mitchell-Wallace, a managing director at legal placement firm Major, Lindsey & Africa. "The market is awful for anyone coming out of law school right now."

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 Arizona. The schools use a "practice-ready" curriculum designed to produce graduates who can hit the ground running in their first jobs.

The Florida and Phoenix schools typically place more than 90% of their graduates in jobs within nine months after graduation.

Andrew Walsh, director of the center

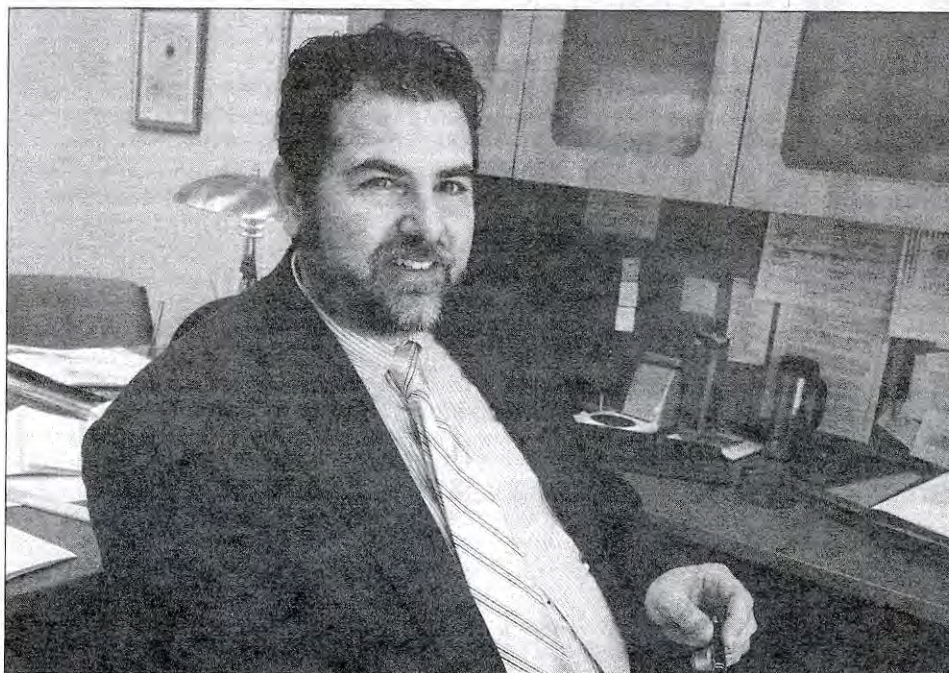


photo NANCY PIERCE

**Andrew Walsh, director of the center for professional development at CharlotteLaw, says the school is striving to reach the more than 90% placement rates of InfiLaw campuses in Florida and Arizona.**

for professional development at CharlotteLaw, says the economy is a "real issue" when it comes to finding jobs for graduates. But he wants CharlotteLaw to equal the high job-placement rates at its sister schools.

"Just because it's become more challenging doesn't change what I aspire to," he says. "It's going to be harder. It's kind of like telling a runner, 'We just discovered there's a hill in the last lap. Will you finish?' The answer is yes, I will finish. But it will be a little tougher."

Walsh doesn't have any estimates on

how many of the school's first grads already have jobs lined up. He notes it takes about nine months after graduation to get an accurate picture. But Spink says about 10 of his fellow students — a sixth of the graduating class — have been hired.

All the indicators regarding the market for new lawyers trended downward in 2008, according to a recent study by the Association for Legal Career Professionals. That's after four years of a strong legal recruiting market.

One of the most notable indicators,

the association says, is the number of offers made to second-year students for summer-associate programs in 2009. At employers of all sizes, the median number of offers for jobs this summer dropped to 10 in the fall of 2008 from 15 a year earlier. And at firms with more than 700 lawyers, the median number of summer offers dropped to 18.5 from 30.

Many local and regional firms are scaling back their recruiting because of the recession. And law school graduates across North Carolina will be competing not only with each other, but also with laid-off associates.

Walsh acknowledges some "tension" among CharlotteLaw students about the job market.

But he tries to alleviate their anxiety by helping them come up with a plan and a checklist of small tasks they need to tackle. "That takes that amorphous, fearful black cloud out there and turns it into something you can handle," he says.

Mitchell-Wallace says next year's CharlotteLaw grads will likely have an easier time. The inaugural graduating class will have to be creative, she says. They'll have to "sell themselves individually" to law firms who are taking a wait-and-see approach toward the school.

Spink, who earned his undergraduate degree from N.C. State, says he is trying to network with Wolfpack alumni in the legal profession as part of his job search.

"We don't have any alumni we can turn to for help," he says. "We're the first ones ever. We've got to go out there and find some kind of way to connect with someone. And we've got to network in different ways."