



Keri Christensen, center, director of Harbor Inc., accepts a donation of \$18,625 from Smithfield attorneys Lamar and Marcia Armstrong.

HERALD PHOTO BY COLIN CAMPBELL

Two attorneys give proceeds of settlement to Harbor

By COLIN CAMPBELL
STAFF WRITER

Lamar and Marcia Armstrong could have taken the money from their accident settlement and put it toward their daughter's college tuition.

Instead, they decided that the windfall ought to serve a higher purpose.

"It doesn't matter what we end up settling for, we're going to give it to Harbor," Lamar Armstrong said of his thoughts at the time.

The \$18,625 settlement stemmed from a car accident in 2006. The Armstrongs gave all of it to Harbor, which provides aid, including shelter, to victims of rape and domestic violence.

Marcia Armstrong and her daughter were driving down Bright Leaf Boulevard after soccer practice when a drunk driver plowed into the side of their car. No one was hurt, but the damage to the family's car was extensive.

The other driver was insured and at fault, so Lamar

VALENTINE BALL

Harbor Inc. will hold its annual Valentine Ball from 7:30 till 11 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 13, at the Johnston County Agricultural Center, 2736 N.C. 210, Smithfield. The night will feature food, drink and dancing to music by the Upbeats. The cost is \$50 per person with beer and wine, or \$45 per person without. Fortickets, call Harbor at 919-938-3566.

Armstrong set about getting the driver's insurance company to pay for the damage. "I think I got a bad draw with the adjuster," he said, noting that the insurance company offered only a fraction of what he thought he was owed. "I didn't want a lawsuit."

But the courts proved to be their only option, so the Armstrongs sued, seeking money for the car and punitive damages against the driver for recklessness. The Armstrongs had the resources to pursue their complaint through the courts, so they decided to make a stand for oth-

ers who feel wronged by insurance companies.

"A lot of lawsuits can't be pursued on principle," Lamar Armstrong said.

The Armstrongs, both lawyers, also saw an opportunity to combat stereotypes about lawsuits. "A lot of times you hear negative publicity about lawsuits," Lamar Armstrong said.

The donation came at a good time for Harbor, which has seen its state funding cut by 7 percent and local funding withheld by several towns. This past year was a busy one at Harbor's 12-bed shelter, which was full from July to December, director Keri Christensen said. Private donations make up about 10 percent of Harbor's budget.

Marcia Armstrong has been involved with Harbor since it started 25 years ago, so she knew how much the settlement money would help. "Harbor was in need of money pretty badly," she said.

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