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## Charlotte native wins state's highest honor

By BRUCE HENDERSON

Charlotte native Mike Leonard, a lawyer whose passion for conservation has helped protect some of the state's most precious lands, will receive North Carolina's highest civilian honor.

The North Carolina Awards have been presented since 1964 to recognize achievement in fine arts, literature, public service and science. Former UNC President Bill Friday, singer James Taylor, poet Maya Angelou and evangelist Billy Graham are among past winners.

Leonard, 57, said his interest in conservation sprang from watching development engulf the natural environment of southern Mecklenburg County, where his family lived. As a senior at East Mecklenburg High, he and a friend made a movie about the threatened strip mining of Crowders Mountain in Gaston County that aired on WBTV.

"My first overnight hike started from my parents' back door at our house on McAlpine Creek between Sardis and Providence roads and took us on a two-night journey down to the Catawba at Easter break in 1971," he said.

Now a lawyer in Winston-Salem who does product-liability litigation, Leonard said conservation projects "have helped preserve



Mike Leonard

my sanity." He's worked for land preservation across the South for more than 30 years.

In North Carolina, Leonard worked with the Conservation Fund, a national group, in linking Crowders Mountain State Park to Kings Mountain State Park in South Carolina. He was a key player in placing two beloved landmarks, Chimney Rock and Grandfather Mountain, into state ownership.

His work has won national recognition from Chevron Corp., the Conservation Fund and the Nature Conservancy.

This year's other award recipients: public service, Margaret "Tog" Newman of Winston-Salem, chair of the N.C. Center for Nonprofits; Ivy Carroll, a medicinal chemist known for his research into addiction and drug abuse; Carole Boston Weatherford of

High Point, a poet and children's book author; Robert Ebendorf of Greenville, an artist and teacher renowned as a leader in the studio jewelry movement; and Asheville native Donald Sultan, a painter, sculptor, designer and printmaker.

Gov. Bev Perdue and state cultural resources secretary Linda Carlisle will make the presentations Oct. 7 in Raleigh.