

Professional development—our pathway to the law



Kathleen M. Uston, 2003–2004 Young Lawyers Conference President

Now to what higher object, to what greater character, can any mortal aspire than to be possessed of all this knowledge, well digested and ready at command, to assist the feeble and friendless, to discountenance the haughty and lawless, to procure redress to wrongs, the advancement of right, to assert and maintain liberty and virtue, to discourage and abolish tyranny and vice?

—John Adams in a letter to Jonathan Sewell, excerpted from *John Adams*, David McCullough (Simon & Schuster 2001)

Upon reading John Adams's impressions of our noble profession, I was struck by his pride and esteem for the practice of law. Adams practiced what he preached. At age 34, he defended nine British soldiers who had fired on a crowd in what came to be known as the Boston Massacre. No other member of the bar would take on their defense. After their acquittal, Adams claimed to have lost more than half of his practice.

Adams did not regret his decision, proclaiming that it is better that many guilty should escape punishment rather than a single innocent man be hanged. "The reason," Adams wrote, "is because it's of more importance to community that innocence should be protected, than it is that guilt should be punished."

New and young attorneys should take account of all that our mentors offer. They have vast knowledge, rich experiences and life lessons learned. For new practitioners, it is a difficult challenge to take on the hard cases, to tackle the tough issues and to represent unpopular positions. Yet, the importance of assisting the feeble and friendless remains, the battle to maintain liberty and virtue is no less joined. Thus, we all should seek advice and assistance from the most experienced practitioners.

Formerly, an attorney was admitted to practice only upon years of apprenticeship under an experienced member of the bar. Study at a traditional law school was not the path to a law degree,

and in many ways, the old system is vastly superior. When I struck out on my own, I had never handled a single case, never appeared before a single judge, and was struck dumb with fear at the prospect of facing either. When that first case was referred my way by an experienced attorney willing to help a new lawyer get started I was nearly too frightened to take it.

I cleared those first hurdles because of experienced mentors like David Rosenfeld, Ben DiMuro, Rob Surovell, Elaine Bredehoft, Tom Palmer, Ken Labowitz and Judge Robert Colby. I made it through my first trials thanks to tolerant and understanding trial judges like Judge Stanley Klein, Judge Lesley Alden, Judge Michael Valentine and Judge Donald Haddock (one of whom was willing to recess while I quickly reviewed *Friend* to get the business record exception right).

Many of you reading this message surely have similar tales. We owe a debt of gratitude to those lawyers who read the books before we did, who argued the positions we were forced to take and handled the tough clients. They offered their time, advice and counsel to a new lawyer, who was wet behind the ears, gunning for justice and truth, but sometimes missing the point.

A few years ago, the VSB Young Lawyers Conference, under the sage guidance of Tracy Giles and O'Kelly McWilliams, organized the Professional Development Conference (PDC). This confer-

ence of CLE and non-CLE programming addresses the unique issues facing new attorneys. The YLC will hold our third such conference in Charlottesville on March 12–13, 2004. The PDC offers more than 6 hours of CLE credit for only \$115.

Justices from the Supreme Court of Virginia and judges from the court of appeals and trial courts will speak about practice and what they expect of attorneys before their respective tribunals.

Experienced and well-respected practitioners, including Tom Spahn, Glenn Lewis, John Foote, Barbara Williams, Samuel Meekins, Edward Good, Bruce Rasmussen, Robert Scully and Joe Condo will offer their wisdom and advice on evidence, privileges, ethics, effective deposition techniques, legal writing and malpractice avoidance.

We are fortunate that those who have rowed the waters ahead of us are willing to give back to those of us who have come after them. Without our mentors, getting started in the practice would be daunting and treacherous.

All of us have the gift of the vast knowledge of which Adams spoke, and there is always a need and room for more, “well digested and ready at command.”

I look forward to seeing you in Charlottesville. ☺

R. EDWIN BURNETTE, JR. YOUNG LAWYER OF THE YEAR AWARD

Seeking Nominations



The Virginia State Bar Young Lawyers Conference is seeking nominations for the R. Edwin Burnette, Jr., Young Lawyer of the Year Award.

This award honors an outstanding young Virginia lawyer who has demonstrated dedicated service to the YLC, the profession and the community.

The nomination deadline is May 1, 2004. Letters of nominations and any supporting materials should be sent to:

Jimmy F. Robinson
LeClair Ryan, P.C.
707 E. Main St., 11th Floor
Richmond, VA 23219
(804) 783-7540

CALL FOR YLC BOARD NOMINATIONS

THE NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE of the Virginia State Bar Young Lawyers Conference is now accepting nominations for seats on the Board of Governors which are up for election at this summer’s Annual Meeting. Elections will be held for positions representing the following Young Lawyers Districts:

YLC District
7th District
10th District

consists of Judicial Circuits
Circuits 16, 20 & 26
Circuits 27, 28, 29 & 30

and one At-Large positions.

Anyone interested in serving on the Board of Governors for the Young Lawyers Conference or in nominating a young lawyer to the Board of Governors should forward a letter of interest or nomination to:

Jimmy F. Robinson, Jr.
LeClair Ryan, A Professional Corporation
707 East Main Street, Eleventh Floor
Richmond, VA 23219
Fax 804-783-7641

The deadline for receipt of nominations is May 1, 2004.