

Roanoke Attorney Is New VSB President

by Dawn Chase

When Phillip V. Anderson was just out of college, before he went to law school, he spent some time working in the district office of U.S. Representative W.C. "Dan" Daniel Jr. from Virginia's Fifth District.

Anderson recalled how the congressman would bring his staff from Washington to Southside Virginia and hold town hall meetings. "He would go to every county seat and nook and cranny in the district, every little crossroads in Southside Virginia."

Daniel, a sharecropper's son who never lost his connection to the people he represented, listened carefully to his constituents, Anderson said. "About seventy-five percent of things they complained about were state or local matters which he could do little about." But people left the meetings satisfied. "He listened patiently, treated people with respect and directed them in the right direction even when he could not help them."

The lessons he learned from the late congressman will serve Anderson well in his new job. He was sworn in as president of the Virginia State Bar on June 17, at the bar's annual meeting in Virginia Beach. He will spend the year visiting some of Virginia's nooks and crannies, and hearing the concerns of twenty-four thousand Virginia lawyers.

"The first thing I hope to accomplish is to listen to Virginia's lawyers and then try to respond," he said. He wants to be remembered as "somebody who treated people with respect, who listened to their concerns and did his best to address their concerns."

If Anderson strays from his intended path, his community in the Roanoke area likely will set him straight. In Southwest Virginia, schmoozing and self-promotion—particularly by people who represent an agency in Richmond—are looked on with suspi-

cion. "People here expect you to not forget who you are and where you come from," Anderson said.

Where he came from was a working farm that has been in his family for three generations in the Climax community of Pittsylvania County. He worked alongside the hired help to raise tobacco, grain and beef cattle. He was the first Anderson male in over three generations to go to college—Hampden-Sydney, Phi Beta Kappa magna cum laude, 1980; University of Virginia School of Law, 1994—but he learned his work ethic from the farm.

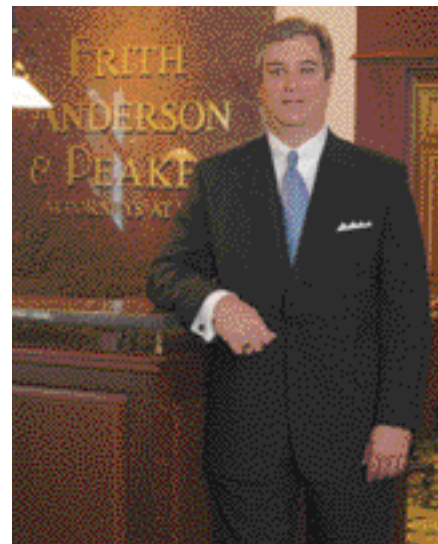
"My summers were spent engaged in hard manual labor," he said. "My parents believed that I should have a healthy respect for hard work and a realization that there was no task that was beneath me."

Anderson also credits U.S. District Judge Jackson L. Kiser, for whom Anderson clerked, as helping develop a proper respect for judicial institutions.

"Judge Kiser always treats those who appear before him, whether lawyers or litigants, with dignity and respect and expects the same respect from them for our courts and institutions of justice," Anderson said.

"I will always remember the day a juror tried unsuccessfully to get excused from jury duty because it was the first day of deer season. Having failed to get excused, he decided that he would just answer during *voir dire* that he could not be fair so he would be struck. Although he succeeded in not sitting as a juror, the judge had him sit through the trial anyway. He left the court that day with a special appreciation for the civic responsibility of jury service and the importance of our institutions of justice."

Anderson is a cofounder of the law firm Frith Anderson & Peake in Roanoke, where his practice focuses on civil litiga-



tion, including insurance defense, professional liability and commercial litigation.

He and his wife, Beth, have three sons—Ben, 19, who just finished his freshman year at Furman University; Jordan, 17, a rising senior in high school; and Will, 15, a rising sophomore. Beth Anderson is a registered dietician and certified diabetes educator.

Anderson has found that educating is part of the bar president's job as well. In his duties as president-elect, preparing to succeed David P. Bobzien in the presidency, Anderson repeatedly explained that, "We're not an association. We're not a trade organization. We're a state agency."

His view of the agency: "We have two very distinct constituencies, and I don't think we can promote one over the other. The lawyers of the commonwealth are certainly our constituency; however, the public is also our constituency. We didn't come into being for the lawyers. We came into being to protect the public."

In his inaugural speech at the annual meeting, he talked about the 235 lawyers who gathered sixty-seven years ago to witness the swearing-in of the first VSB president.

"They understood the role [lawyers] had played in the creation and maintenance of the economic and governmental structures of this state," he said. "They understood that, if not properly regulated, there would always be a few unscrupulous ones to prey upon the vulnerable in our society. They understood that, over time, the public would lose confidence and respect for our profession."

Then Anderson came out swinging on issues the bar faces today: Virginia's low compensation of court-appointed lawyers who defend indigent people in criminal cases, judicial independence and public service work.

"Today and for years, Virginia lawyers appointed by courts to represent indigent defendants have faced choices: . . . Do they discharge their professional obligations and zealously represent their clients? Or do they only go as far and only do as

much as they are compensated? While we would hope that they would make the right choices, no Virginia lawyer should face that dilemma.

"This circumstance, if left unaddressed, not only jeopardizes a full and adequate representation of those charged with crimes but it reinforces the notion that justice in Virginia is not for all but only for those who can afford a full defense."

He urged lawyers in all areas of practice to speak out against "this intolerable situation."

"Will we decide that all of Virginia has a stake in this matter, because of the perception that justice in Virginia partially rendered to any citizen is a threat to justice for all Virginians?"

Likewise, the system is threatened by attacks on judges, he said.

Judges face "the choice to exercise their independence, to follow the rule of law and judicial precedent, and decide cases on the basis of facts . . . or the choice to bow to external pressures of public opinion, the media or other branches of government.

"When criticism abounds because a decision, while legally well reasoned and legally sound, strikes chords of unpopularity, will we be heard to respond?"

And lawyers must recommit to their traditional roles as public servants. "Public service comes with great professional and personal sacrifice," he said. But lawyers must contribute their "unique" perspective to legislative bodies and other civic work.

He called on the voluntary bars to join the VSB in addressing the problems. "The challenges before our profession are

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greater than any one lawyer, and they are greater than any one bar. If any of us are to succeed in confronting these challenges before us, we must choose to work together . . . to ensure that we can respond to the ever-changing demands of our profession.”

At home in Roanoke, Anderson’s most recent commitment to public service was serving on a steering committee which assisted with the opening of Roanoke County’s Hidden Valley High School.

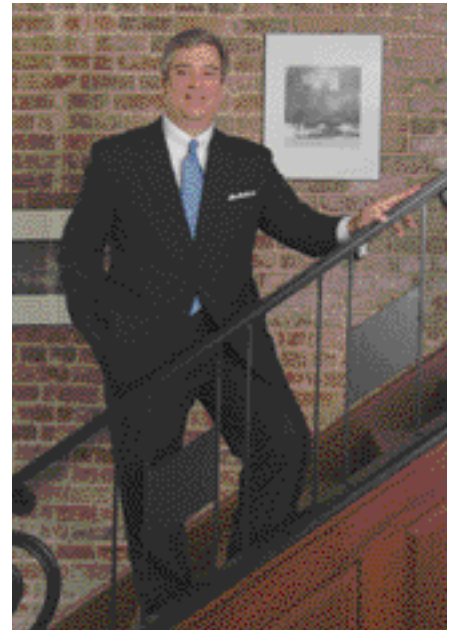
“He just became an invaluable asset,” said the principal, David Blevins. He drew up 501(c)(3) plans for three booster and parent support organizations, “just for a thank you.” He raised “probably one hundred thousand dollars.” And, when plans were being made to transfer athletes in their junior to Hidden Valley, Anderson was able to work with the feuding factions.

“He is able to put people together,” Blevins said.

Because of Anderson’s work, Hidden Valley awarded its first athletic letter to Anderson, which he presented to the original Athletic Booster Club Board.

Roanoke accountant C. Drew Barrineau got to know Phil and Beth Anderson when their children were in middle school, and Barrineau was elected to the Roanoke County School Board with their help. “He and his wife are nearly professional volunteers,” Barrineau said. “They don’t get into things for recognition. They do it because it’s the right thing to do.”

From the things Anderson says about the bar, Barrineau has concluded, “This position isn’t about him. It’s about what he can promote to move the bar forward. He is proof of the old cliché, ‘It’s amazing what you can accomplish when you don’t care who gets credit.’”



Phillip V. Anderson at his office in Roanoke.