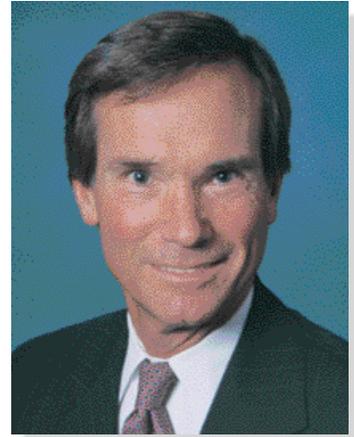


Year of the Rooster



by David P. Bobzien, 2004–2005 VSB President

The Chinese calendar is based on a repeating cycle of twelve years, with each of the twelve years named for an animal. The system has practical benefits. Because of the respect and deference accorded the elderly in China, old people are rarely asked their current age, and they sometimes lose track of how old they are. But if they remember the animal attached to the year in which they were born, they can calculate their age fairly easily.

On February 9, 2005, we began the Year of the Rooster, an appropriate animal for the Virginia State Bar and the VSB's revitalized relationship with its parent, the Supreme Court of Virginia.

As I pass the gavel to Phil Anderson in this summer of 2005, I recall Virginia Chief Justice Leroy R. Hassell Sr.'s address to Bar Council at last year's annual meeting. The Chief Justice challenged the State Bar to work more closely with the Court and to provide greater service to the lawyers of Virginia.

Roosters are regarded as hardworking, resourceful, talented, and courageous, and I have seen all of those characteristics at work in meeting that challenge.

In the last issue of *Virginia Lawyer*, I recounted the extraordinary effort that was extended in March by Chief Justice Hassell, Justice Cynthia D. Kinser, the Conference of Local Bar Associations, the bar staff, and many others to bring a high-quality training program to Abingdon—aimed at lawyers who practice solo or in small firms, the practice setting for almost all of the lawyers in southwestern Virginia. Plans are well under way to bring the program to Harrisonburg on September 21, 2005, and then to Fredericksburg and Hampton Roads before the end of the bar year and to Danville the following year.

The rooster-like hard work, talent, and resources that were brought to bear in Abingdon in March were evident once again on May 20 when the Chief Justice's Indigent Defense Training Initiative was presented live to some three hundred lawyers at the Richmond Convention Center and simulcast to another one hun-

dered lawyers gathered at the Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center in Abingdon. Chief Justice Hassell, Court of Appeals Judge Walter S. Felton Jr., President-elect Phil Anderson and others arranged a continuing legal education program that some regarded as the best they had ever attended. Engendering that kind of praise does not come by accident. Bar staff, led by Bet Keller and Maureen Petrini, worked countless hours to ensure the success of the program—even though CLE production is not their daily fare and preparation for the annual meeting vied for their time and talent.

Hard work, talent, and resources will be marshaled once again by the State Bar on December 9 in Richmond, in an exploration of ways to improve the involuntary commitment process in Virginia, with specific emphasis on the physical treatment of individuals who are the subjects of the proceedings. This issue is of particular concern to Chief Justice Hassell and members of the Senior Lawyers Conference who recognize that an aging population and the dementia that often afflicts the elderly will result in more individuals coming into contact with a system that can charitably be described as troubled.

Did I mention that roosters are regarded as courageous? On June 13, 2005, five days before the end of my year as president—the Supreme Court issued a rule of Court authorizing and directing the Virginia State Bar to provide an online computerized legal research service to its members. The compelling reasons for providing this service are recited eloquently in the purpose section of the rule:

It is the policy and objective of the Commonwealth of Virginia to improve the quality and reduce the costs of legal services available to the citizens of Virginia. It is also the policy of this Commonwealth to enhance the availability of legal services to poor litigants and indigent criminal defendants. The provision of online computerized legal research tools to

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all Virginia lawyers will further these policies by increasing and improving the available knowledge and information base for attorneys, enhancing the quality of legal research and advice, making legal research more efficient for many attorneys, reducing the costs of legal services to the poor, and providing additional resources to lawyers who are appointed by courts to represent indigent criminal defendants. The provision of online computerized legal research services to all lawyers in Virginia will reduce the time spent and costs incurred in performing legal research, which will decrease the costs of legal services to consumers in Virginia and thereby increase access to attorneys. In addition, the provision of online computerized legal research will enable more lawyers to provide pro bono services since this research tool will lower their costs and reduce the amount of research time required.

Although not without controversy, the provision of this service will not only provide the very substantial benefits articulated in the rule, but also serve as a symbol of the new direction of the State Bar and the efforts that are firmly in place to meet Chief Justice Hassell's challenge that your State Bar do more for you, the members. ☺
