

# —VSB Attorney Profile—

## Paul D. Georgiadis

*This is one in a series of Virginia Lawyer magazine profiles of state bar attorneys.*



Paul D. Georgiadis has been an assistant bar counsel in the Virginia State Bar's Professional Regulation Department since 2000. He prosecutes ethics complaints in Hampton Roads—primarily Norfolk and Virginia Beach.

Before joining the VSB, he had a private practice in Henrico County that focused largely on professional liability issues for lawyers. He practiced professional liability defense with the firm Thompson, Smithers, Newman & Wade, then went into solo practice, through which he served as a malpractice risk manager in several states, including Virginia. He also handled immigration and naturalization and adoptions.

Georgiadis is a former president of the Henrico County Bar Association and a member of the Lewis F. Powell Jr. Inn of Court. He served as vice president of the Professionals', Officers' and Directors' Liability Committee of the American Bar Association's Tort Trial and Insurance Practice Section. He is president of the Virginia Boat Club.

Georgiadis joined the Virginia bar in 1986.

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**Tell us a bit about your upbringing—where you're from, where you went to school, what brought you to settle in Richmond.**

I'm from Memphis, and I attended prep school in New Jersey and Georgetown University. After a year of teaching high school Latin in the Shenandoah Valley, I knew I wanted to stay in Virginia but didn't want to be a teacher, so I came to Richmond for law school at the University of Richmond's T.C. Williams School of Law.

**Before you joined the Virginia State Bar staff in 2000, you were a risk man-**

**ager for state bars in Arizona, Hawaii, New Mexico and Tennessee, as well as Virginia. Did you see differences in the challenges faced by lawyers in different states?**

While the landscapes, accents and rhythms might change, the challenges I saw are strikingly similar—the inroads made by lay providers of legal services, increased competition from expanding bars in legal services that too often are treated as a commodity, and younger lawyers starting solo practices without the benefits of mentoring and seasoning at a law firm.

**How did working as a risk manager prepare you for your current job of prosecuting lawyers?**

In addition to consulting with a few thousand lawyers on our risk management hotline, I audited more than 150 law firms at their request. That experience gave me some pretty good insights that help with directing an investigation into misconduct and trying misconduct cases. I'm aware of how firms practice and the shortcuts they sometimes take. On the other hand, I hope it has also given me some empathy and humanity for the struggles faced by the practicing bar.

**Your private practice also included immigration law. What was that like?**

Because my father came over to this country on a boat, I appreciate the struggles and sacrifices my clients made to try to build their lives here. I'd like to forget some of the bureaucratic idiosyncrasies of the Immigration and Naturalization Service and remember instead the young wife from Iraq—for whom I won refugee status—standing in my reception area with a platter of stuffed grape leaves as a thank-you. I also remember the family from North Africa who was fleeing fundamen-

talist terrorists. I won them asylum, and their eldest daughter won a county spelling bee after being in the U.S. less than two years.

**With that background, what were your thoughts as the events of 9-11 unfolded?**

Knowing how difficult the system was pre-9-11, I can only imagine how much more complex the practice of immigration law has become.

**What does the Lewis F. Powell Jr. American Inn of Court do, and what do you gain from it professionally?**

Our inn meets monthly to break bread and to hold formal programs and discussions on ethics, trial skills and professionalism. The inn brings together a diverse group of lawyers and judges—and we are fortunate to have an extraordinary mix of active and committed members from the state and federal courts in Richmond. The inn has a central goal of addressing declining civility in the practice of law—a side effect of the coarsening of our society. It is a steady reminder of goals to keep in sight every day as a lawyer.

**You are very involved in the sport of rowing. Tell us about your rowing club's activities with youth here, and its role in the development of the James River waterfront in Richmond.**

Richmond lost its rowing facilities in 1973 due to floods, fire and lack of interest. In 1987, I joined four others who were

founding a new rowing club just south of downtown. Since then, we've built a club of more than sixty members, assisted University of Richmond and Virginia Commonwealth University in returning to rowing, and we're sponsoring James River High School's team at our new upstream site in Chesterfield County. The youth and college rowers bring a raw fervor to the river, and we get a great deal of joy from passing along a sport we love.

**What is it about rowing that you find satisfying?**

It's wonderful exercise in an always-changing setting. I greet the dawn on the water. I usually see blue herons on the shore, we now have a nest of ospreys next to our practice course, and one morning recently a bald eagle gave my rowing partner and me a very close look as he hunted for breakfast. It's also a chance to constantly test oneself and reach for new goals in practice and at regattas.

**Please describe what the Henrico County Bar Association contributed to your professional development.**

As a board member and then president, I had the great opportunity of working with a diverse group of attorneys from around the county. I learned quite a bit about checking my ego at the door, identifying common interests and reaching common goals. I failed to get a resolution for banning smoking in the courthouse corridors, but did succeed—with a lot of good help and advice—in setting up a pro bono clearinghouse that worked in conjunction with the Hunton & Williams Church Hill Clinic.

**Tell us about your family.**

I have two children—a boy and a girl who attend middle school—and two dogs from the pound, and I am married.

**As an avid reader, you meet regularly with other booklovers for discussions. What are some titles you've taken up recently, and what does that contribute to your life?**

I'm in a book group that includes my former law partner, Paul Childress, who enjoys history and current affairs as much as I. We have read a number of biographies over the past few years, with subjects ranging from Warren Buffett to Katharine Graham. Over the summer, I read a biography of Chief Justice John Marshall and am starting a biography of Justice William O. Douglas. I always keep nearby the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius, the philosopher-king. His guiding principles, set forth as aphorisms, are a remarkable guide for our own hurried, complex and conflict-ridden times, especially since Marcus Aurelius was no saint, but a man of a similarly difficult world. At the beach, I laughed through Tom Wolfe's *I Am Charlotte Simmons*—a rollicking read.

**You are an astute observer of the political scene on all levels. What is it you find interesting about Richmond and Virginia politics?**

I follow politics as some follow sports—though strictly from the sidelines. It's fascinating to see that while Virginia has been transformed into a cutting-edge, postindustrial economy with an increasingly diverse population, it still hews to a resilient sense of place, sense of history, and demand for public decorum. The same issues that kept cousins Thomas Jefferson and John Marshall barely speaking still burn with each election cycle. As a lawyer, I'm proud to be a member of the bars in which Lewis F. Powell Jr. and Oliver W. Hill practiced—although they were not politicians, one can't underestimate the profound changes they brought, using their quiet skills and tempered judgment during distrustful and angry times. Oliver Hill often quoted from Mark Anthony's funeral oration in *Julius Caesar*: "When the poor cried, Caesar wept." Mr. Hill obviously held and tempered that passion to his own skills as a lawyer, to huge and good effect. A remarkable story.

**Last year, you worked with Dolly Shaffner, also from the VSB staff, to lead the agency's Commonwealth of Virginia Campaign to raise money for**

**charity, and the bar set a record for donations. What was the secret of your success?**

I'm proud to work with some very public-spirited colleagues. Dolly Shaffner put some fun into the campaign—she arranged for a pair of dalmatians to visit with us during our opening day of the drive, so of course we had to have chocolate chip cookies in their honor. The pups never left—a staff member adopted both on the spot. So there was a great spirit in the campaign. I also found that the direct approach worked—I tried to make personal contacts with staff members to make contributing easy, and most wanted to and did contribute.