

# Conference Priorities Include Katrina Response, Senior Citizens Law Day



**William T. Wilson, 2005–2006 Senior Lawyers Conference Chair**

William B. Smith, our former chairman, reported to you in the last edition of *Virginia Lawyer* about the accomplishments of the SLC during 2004–2005. I am grateful for his work as one of the best chairs of the SLC. His dedication and his accomplishments are much appreciated. I also thank the current members of the board and especially those who rotated off the board: Robert Hunter Manson III, Robert A. Cox Jr., the Honorable James E. Kulp, Patricia Ann Barton, F. Mather Archer, Clarence M. Dunnville Jr., Carolyn O’Neal Marsh, Thomas F. McPhaul and Colin J. S. Thomas Jr. I also thank Frank O. Brown Jr. for his many contributions and Patricia A. Slinger, our Virginia State Bar liaison. Without their help we could not function.

So much of my thinking recently has been about the people in the Gulf Coast area who were affected by Hurricane Katrina. VSB Executive Director Thomas A. Edmonds has contacted his counterparts in Louisiana and Mississippi about how we can help. I hope that many of our members will volunteer to provide pro bono legal services. Please indicate your willingness on the form that is available on the VSB Web site and in this magazine. Our members also can consider donating to the American Red Cross and the Salvation Army. In addition, The Virginia Bar Association has established a Hurricane Katrina Legal Assistance Fund so that lawyers in affected areas can provide needed legal services and restore their damaged offices and records. Persons and organizations wishing to contribute to the disaster relief effort may send tax-deductible donations to:

The Hurricane Katrina Legal Assistance Fund  
c/o The Virginia Bar Association Foundation  
701 East Franklin Street, Suite 1120  
Richmond, VA 23219

Checks should be made out to “The Virginia Bar Association Foundation” with “Hurricane Katrina Legal Assistance Fund” in the memo line.

At our meeting of the SLC on September 22, 2005, I proposed the following programs for the coming year:

**Senior Citizens Law Day**—I asked the board of governors to adopt a program whereby the SLC will ask every Virginia bar association to promote a Senior Citizens Law Day. The Alleghany-Bath-Highland Bar Association conducted such a program on May 24, 2005, and it was very successful. We had one hundred in attendance in the circuit courtroom. Eight members of the bar and bench, including a general district judge, served on a panel that explained the *Senior Citizens Handbook*, which is produced and distributed by the SLC and the Young Lawyers Conference (YLC). I was impressed by how attentive the audience was and how hungry they were for this information. I believe that senior citizens and others in Virginia want and need this information.

**Nursing Homes and Assisted Living Facilities**—I also proposed that we examine these institutions to identify ways we can improve them. The Virginia General Assembly is trying to improve the institutions where senior citizens do not receive proper medical care and treatment. I plan to contact chairs of key committees in both the Virginia House of Delegates and Senate to ask them to speak to our board about these problems.

**Hospital-Acquired Staph Infections**—Almost everyone I know has a family member or friend who has acquired a staph infection at a hospital, nursing home or assisted living facility. Recent articles in the *Chicago Tribune* revealed a nationwide staph infection problem. Until recently, the General Assembly left the problem to hospitals and doctors to solve. At the last session of the General Assembly, however, Delegate Harry R. “Bob” Purkey of Virginia Beach advanced a bill that requires hospitals to report staph infections. But reporting does not kick in until July 1, 2008. I do not understand the delay. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has been working on this problem for a long time, but it has done so quietly without advising the public of the problem’s magnitude. Hospitals have been asked to participate in several studies on a voluntary basis. This is a problem that needs legislation, and it needs that attention fast. Appropriate hygiene in hospitals and in recovery rooms can go a long way toward solving the problem.

*continued on page 37*

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SLC *continued from page 44*

**Senior Citizens Handbook**—The *Senior Citizens Handbook* is the pride and joy of the SLC and the YLC. I recommended that we continue to sponsor this handbook and that we disseminate it to the public in every reasonable way.

**Planning Ahead**—We will continue to advance the work of past SLC Chair Frank O. Brown Jr. in a program that helps attorneys protect their clients' interests in the event of the lawyer's disability or death.

I am also pleased to report that the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Virginia, Leroy Rountree Hassell Sr., is supportive of the SLC. He came to one of our board meetings last year and he recently wrote me in support of Senior Citizens Law Day. He has also increased our budget. He expects big things from the SLC, and we plan to respond accordingly.

We are already planning to promote an initiative by the Chief Justice to improve the involuntary commitment process in Virginia. A conference on the subject will be held on December 8, 2005, in Richmond. (See page 13 in this magazine.)

The SLC Board of Governors is made up of senior lawyers from all over Virginia. Many of them have been leaders in the VSB for years and have reached a point in their lives where they have more time than ever before to give to the improvement of the profession. A number of our board members are judges and have been very active and helpful in our programs. I am excited to be chairing the SLC Board of Governors, and I am looking forward to a productive year. I only hope that I can do half the job my predecessor, Bill Smith, did during his chairmanship. ☺