

Conference of Local Bar Associations

by Gifford Ray Hampshire, Chair



Local Bars Can Help You Survive Difficult Times

GREETINGS FROM THE Conference of Local Bar Associations (CLBA). We are busy planning the Solo & Small-Firm Practitioner Forum. It will be held on Monday, March 8, 2010, at the University of Richmond School of Law. For some years now, the CLBA has assisted the Supreme Court of Virginia with this forum. The purpose is to inform and train solo and small-firm practitioners on topics such as ethics, law office management, and technology. The forum also provides information on substantive areas of the law, such as appellate practice or jury selection. The idea is to provide solo and small-firm practitioners with information that will improve their practice and quality of life.

This year's forum — the second to be held in Richmond — will feature programs on law office management and finance, and marketing and technology. Another session will offer tips on how to improve your memory in court. A panel on jury selection will include a retired circuit judge. Six hours of continuing legal education credits, including one hour of ethics, will be provided free of charge. For the forum agenda and registration information, go to <http://www.vsb.org/site/conferences/clba/>.

The Solo & Small-Firm Practitioner Forum is especially relevant in these trying economic times. The January 2010 edition of the *ABA Journal Law News Now* includes a cover story titled "When the Detour Becomes the Destination, How Five Grads Survived the Recession — And How You Can Too." <http://www.abajournal.com/>

magazine/article/when_the_detour_becomes_the_destination. The story tells us how law school graduates from the early 1990s survived the law firm recession of that era, and how lessons from that experience can benefit lawyers attempting to cope with the current downturn. Law school graduates who in better economic times would have expected to have landed jobs with large law firms turned to smaller firms, or opened their own practices. Others performed contract legal work and taught at night. These experiences, the article says, actually created unexpected career opportunities for the new lawyers: the detour into small-firm or solo practice became a successful career path.

The current recession provides similar challenges for law school graduates and big-firm lawyers. Big firms reportedly laid off more than twelve thousand people in 2009 — the worst year ever — and more layoffs are expected.¹ Thus it would seem that, these days, solo or small-firm practice is a likely career alternative for seasoned lawyers as well as recent graduates. The Solo & Small-Firm Practitioner Forum is designed for this increasing segment of practice.

Aside from the organized effort reflected in the forum, individual lawyers have a responsibility to help colleagues in their efforts to find work in difficult economic times. Local bar associations provide good networking opportunities for these efforts. Joining and becoming active in your local bar provides valuable contacts with lawyers who might need permanent or con-

tract assistance. Those lawyers might have clients or acquaintances that have employment needs.

Mentoring is another benefit of local bar membership. Mentoring facilitates ethical and effective solo and small-firm practice. Those of you who are already solo practitioners know how difficult it can be not having someone down the hall to consult about issues that arise. Many local bars across the commonwealth have vibrant mentoring programs and e-mail-based mailing lists that assist solo and small-firm practitioners noodle with the day-to-day challenges of practice. These forums also advertise employment opportunities.

So if you are worried about what 2010 might bring, I encourage you to make a New Year's resolution to attend the March 8 Solo and Small-Firm Practitioner Forum in Richmond. I also encourage you to resolve to become active in your local bar. Not only will participation provide you with an opportunity to serve your community, but it just might assist you in converting an unplanned detour to solo or small-firm practice into a successful permanent career.

1 "The Year in Law Firm Layoffs — 2009." <http://lawshucks.com/2010/01/the-year-in-law-firm-layoffs-2009/> (accessed February 3, 2010).