

New VSB President Steps Up to the Plate

by Dawn Chase

Howard W. Martin Jr. once played first base on the Washington and Lee University baseball team in the 1960s. Today, at 65 with a 6-foot-4-inch frame, he still looks like he could knock one out of the park.

One could apply many sports analogies to the challenges that await him as he takes on the presidency of the Virginia State Bar. Sworn in June 15, 2007, during the agency's annual meeting in Virginia Beach, Martin's most urgent duty will be to preside as the bar hires a successor to longtime Executive Director Thomas A. Edmonds, who will retire at the end of the year.

Martin also will continue the work of his predecessors, Karen A. Gould (2006–2007) and Phillip V. Anderson (2005–2006), to prepare the way for an eventual hike in bar dues, which will require an increase in a statutory ceiling set by the General Assembly.

Martin comes to the job with extensive bar experience. He grew into VSB work through the disciplinary system, which he considers the bar's primary responsibility. "The bar has a lot of other roles, but the regulatory function is the one that is first and foremost," he said. He has represented his home circuit, Norfolk, on the VSB Council, and he has been on its executive committee since 2003.

As a past president and now fellow of The Virginia Law Foundation—and former chair of the VSB Budget and Finance Committee—he commands the fiscal stature to oversee the bar's \$12.7 million budget.

He was secretary of the Virginia Bar Association and a member of its executive committee in the late 1980s and early 1990s. That duty and his friendship with leaders of other statewide bar associations have attuned him to the missions and chal-

lenges of the commonwealth's voluntary bars. "One of the things I am very interested in is encouraging cooperation and mutual assistance between all of the statewide bars," he said.

He had some success with that in 1997–1998, when he was president of the Norfolk & Portsmouth Bar Association. His bar joined with the Virginia Beach Bar Association for some political, educational and social activities. He was unsuccessful in his attempt to pull Hampton Roads bars together for recommendations on judicial appointments. However, the experience gave him early grounding on a political issue that is still contentious today—efforts by bar groups to more effectively advise the General Assembly in the selection of judges.

From his corner office on the twelfth floor of the Bank of America Building in downtown Norfolk, Martin pointed out landmarks he has known since his earliest days: The fork where the eastern and southern branches of the Elizabeth River join to flow toward Hampton Roads and the Chesapeake Bay. The Norfolk Naval Shipyard—actually across the water in Portsmouth—where Martin's father worked as a crane operator during World War II. Two blocks from the riverbank, the Berkley neighborhood where Martin lived before the family moved to Virginia Beach, when he was 8.

He described new landmarks—the baseball stadium where the Norfolk Tides play; the MacArthur Center, an upscale shopping mall; and gleaming modern office buildings, including the Bank of America edifice, the Dominion Tower and the Norfolk Southern Tower, all erected on land once blighted with warehouses and substandard structures. As a lawyer who represents housing authorities in Norfolk and neighboring jurisdictions, Martin had a

hand in the development that has taken place in downtown Norfolk.

Despite increased bustle and a large population of out-of-towners drawn by the military, "The city is typified by Southern hospitality," Martin said. Martin's manners are courtly, of a style that somehow keeps tenacious hold in Virginia, like the Norfolk Island pine that determinedly lays claim, among books and papers, to a corner of Martin's office.

Martin has lived his life in Hampton Roads, with the exception of college (W&L and the University of Virginia School of Law) and a four-year stint in the Navy during Vietnam (two years as a line officer on a fleet oiler, then two years of shore duty in Charleston, South Carolina, in the Judge Advocate General's Corps).

He and his wife, Heather, met in ninth grade homeroom at Princess Anne High School in Virginia Beach, but didn't get serious until after his second year at Washington and Lee. The two make their home in Suffolk. They have three children: Jeffrey, a U.S. Naval Academy graduate who flew airplanes for the service and now is a financial manager for General Mills near Atlanta; Brad, a civil engineer in Virginia Beach; and Hilary Chaney, a lawyer in Fayetteville, Arkansas. Howard and Heather Martin also enjoy two grandchildren.

Martin credits his family's athletic skills with winning the VSB Executive Committee its first-ever championship title in the traditional volleyball tournament that ends the annual meeting. VSB Director Edmonds, the team coach, displayed the trophy with glee at a staff meeting following the victory.

Martin is senior partner of Crenshaw, Ware & Martin PLC, a firm that has prided itself for generations on bar leadership and



development of young lawyers. The firm originated in 1923 and five past or present partners have been presidents of the Norfolk & Portsmouth Bar Association, with two as VSB presidents—Edward Rouzie Baird in 1959–1960, and Martin.

“As a young lawyer, I was the beneficiary of picture-perfect mentoring,” he said at his swearing-in by Virginia Chief Justice Leroy R. Hassell Sr. Martin paid tribute to partners Frank Crenshaw—“a pillar of the bar and the community,” Guil Ware—“the perfect Essex County, Virginia, gentleman,” and Walkley “Johnny” Johnson—“one of the very best litigators around.” All three attended the inaugural banquet.

While Martin’s time will be engaged with administrative and legislative leadership of the VSB, he plans to try to keep his eyes on the stars. There are lots of reminders around of what those stars are: The nation celebrates the four hundredth anniversary of Jamestown this year. Eighteen miles away, in Virginia Beach, a copy of the Magna Carta has been on display at the Contemporary Art Museum. 2007 is the 100th birthday year of Oliver White Hill Sr., a Virginia lawyer whose cases forever changed the landscape of civil rights in the United States.

Martin contemplated the James River—which his firm can see from another side of its office suite—and said, “The shores on each side are exactly what those settlers saw four hundred years ago. This could have been a Spanish place. This

could have been a Norwegian place. This could have been an Indian place.”

While suggesting that any settlement would have had its pros and cons, he focused on what might be the best the English gave this country: the Rule of Law, English version. That’s why he asked that the cover photo for this magazine invoke the heritage of the Magna Carta. And he wrote his first VSB presidential column (page 6), on the Rule of Law.

Martin is detail-oriented and he is serious. But at the end of the day, he kicks back and talks about barbecue and baseball.

Barbecue, because his mother was a North Carolinian and his father a Virginian. They’d round up the family, climb into their DeSoto on a Saturday morning and drive 134 miles to Bob Melton’s, in Rocky Mount, North Carolina, for a meal that cost 40 cents (a nickel for a Coke and 35 cents for a sandwich).

When he was Norfolk bar president, Martin made a cause célèbre in his president’s column of his quest for good barbecue; *Virginia Lawyers Weekly* picked up the challenge, and Virginia lawyers contributed nominations for the best ‘cue in the state. Dozens of lawyers responded with phone calls and letters. A circuit court judge called to say that he had perused Martin’s column and was waiting to see how Martin would tie barbecue to weighty matters of law.

“You never did,” the judge chortled. “Congratulations!”

Martin’s favorite barbecue joint remains the White Swan, at exit 90 off I-95 in Smithfield, North Carolina. Nothing fancy about it he says. “Good ol’ eastern North Carolina barbecue, vinegar-based.”

Then there’s baseball. Most of his favorite players are from the old days—“Gehrig, Musial, Clemente, Ted Williams, Mays, Brooks Robinson, Aaron, Yogi, Moose Skowron, Whitey Ford. And even a few of the more modern-day heroes like Cal Ripken,” he wrote in an e-mail.

His favorite was Mickey Mantle. Martin has a photo in his office that compares his own batting stance with Mantle’s, and a baseball with the Yankee’s signature is the favorite in Martin’s signed baseball collection.

In 1985, he went to a New York Yankees fantasy camp in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, where he met Mickey Mantle, was coached by Moose Skowron and Ralph Houk, and credited with base hits against Hoyt Wilhelm and Whitey Ford.

With a record like that, will bar associations be proffering mitts and baseballs for him to autograph?

Martin didn’t miss a nanosecond in the e-mail exchange. “I usually get Pete Rose to sign them for me,” he said. ☺