

But Seriously, Folks ... New VSB President Ready for Biggest Gig

by Dawn Chase

Picture Jon D. Huddleston, new president of the Virginia State Bar, as the master of ceremonies for a production that involves all of Virginia's lawyers.

He has experience. He used to do stand-up gigs introducing acts during "all-lawyer nights" and fundraisers at Headliners, an Alexandria comedy club. "I had two good jokes — one at the beginning and one at the end — and enough stuff in the middle to get by."

One audience was primarily composed of political partisans helping to retire a campaign debt. They had been coerced into buying tickets, and they weren't particularly receptive to the night's entertainment. "My first really good joke died," Huddleston recollected. Of the experience he said, "I enjoyed it. But it was hard. It was definitely a don't-quit-your-day-job."

He picked himself up and dusted himself off, and he's back in the game. This time, Huddleston is handing the microphone over to other lawyers so they can deliver not punch lines, but interviews about projects they are passionate about, and to which they volunteer their time. He is collecting stories from citizen lawyers across the state.

Huddleston has a tagline for the project: "Virginia Is for Good Lawyers." His venues this time are his column in *Virginia Lawyer* (see page 12), the VSB.org website, his appearances before

bar groups, and a Virginia State Bar first — YouTube clips, produced by Madonna G. Dersch of the Virginia State Bar publications staff. The series of clips will be released throughout the year and can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/user/VirginiaStateBar>.

"The purpose is to show lawyers as really integral parts of the community" — a role they have played since Virginia's earliest days, Huddleston said.

"Ours is a profession that is known for time away from home and family and countless hours in pursuit of our profession and service to our clients. But there are many lawyers who have found time to make a difference in their community, who are out walking the walk. ...

"Lawyers are part of the big picture. I don't think we're doing a good job as a profession in showcasing what they're doing."

One of Huddleston's first YouTube hand-offs is to attorney Jay M. Weinberg, who is involved in many civic works in Richmond as a board member and benefactor. Weinberg said his commitment to community started as a child. "It was an obligation. It wasn't a choice."

Weinberg recalled his law school dean telling the students that "as lawyers, we were going to be experts in democracy and practitioners in humanity — and that's an awesome responsibility, if you think about it. ...

"One change I find most difficult to accept is, I think, when we got out of law school forty years ago we entered a

profession. I hate to think I'm going to be retiring from a business."

Citizen lawyers receive a return on their investment. "A commitment to the community in which you live simply makes you a better lawyer," Weinberg said.

HUDDLESTON, forty-nine, practices with Sevila, Saunders, Huddleston & White in Leesburg — a firm he has been with since he clerked there during law school at the College of William and Mary. The firm has nine full-time attorneys.

Huddleston's wife, Cyndy, is an associate dean of the McIntire School of Commerce graduate program at the University of Virginia. They have two sons — Bobby, fourteen, and Jack, nine.

His civic commitment is coaching youth sports, which he has done for more than sixteen seasons. Starting with children as young as four, he has watched them grow in basketball, soccer, and life.

"What led me to the law was a sense of competition," Huddleston said. "I did not have the size or speed to excel on the field." He noted that athletics and trial work are often a matter of winning and losing. "That was an area I saw myself as being able to compete in."

He describes his family law practice as crisis management of people in broken relationships. His approach, he says, is honesty. "It is so easy to fall into the trap of telling your client what they want to hear." What he tries to do instead is

“be blunt with them, if their expectations are unrealistic. ...

“I like attempting to get the client from point A to point B as painlessly as possible. If we’re doing our job, hopefully we do so with negotiation, rather than put them through the stress and expense of going to trial.”

Now clients are coming to lawyers with fewer resources. Huddleston can see a change in practice as a result. “Lawyers are being more judicious in filing motions because of the cost concern.” They also are turning more to alternative dispute resolution, which Huddleston sees as a good thing.

“What is often missed in the equation is there is an intangible value to not destroying the other side. Your relationship is going to continue for many years, especially if there are children.”

Perhaps Huddleston’s practice methods are colored somewhat by his love of competition. In his experience, “trying cases is easy. Settling cases is hard,” he said.

His involvement with the Virginia State Bar began with the Young Lawyers Conference during his first year of practice.

In recent years, he sat on the executive committee of the Conference of Local Bar Associations, which he served as chair.

“Bar service for me has been really reaffirming. I think that’s especially true when you deal with an area of law that can be as contentious as divorce litigation,” he said. Working with the VSB helps him “reconnect with lawyers on a civil basis and a professional basis.”

He was sworn in as president on June 19 by Loudoun County Circuit Judge Burke F. McCahill, a former law



Jon D. Huddleston, president of the Virginia State Bar, prepares a segment for his YouTube series on the good things lawyers do for their communities. The backdrop is a painting, Ed Bordett’s *Blue Ridge Steeples*, which hangs in the VSB library.

partner. Huddleston succeeds Manuel A. Capsalis of Arlington in the position.

“I’m excited about it,” Huddleston said. “Inevitably, as president, there will be something you face that you didn’t see coming.”

But Huddleston — sportsman, coach, and lawyer — intends to meet the challenge.

Biography

Jon D. Huddleston

Sevila, Saunders, Huddleston & White,
Leesburg

Education:
Bachelor’s and law degrees from the
College of William and Mary

Family:
Wife — Cyndy
Children — Bobby, 14; Jack, 9

Leisure activities:
Coaching youth basketball and soccer