

Local Bars Encourage Public Service



I WRITE TO YOU AS THE NEW CHAIR of the Conference of Local Bar Associations (CLBA). I thank William T. “Bill” Wilson, the immediate past chair of the CLBA, for his introduction in the June/July 2009 issue of *Virginia Lawyer*. Bill deserves high praise for his leadership during a very busy and successful year.

As Bill stated in his outgoing article, the CLBA held its annual Bar Leaders Institute (BLI) on April 15, 2009, at the Virginia Historical Society in Richmond. The CLBA is currently working on a BLI program for July 2010. If you are a current, future or aspiring local bar leader, you will want to attend. The BLI will help you plan for your time at the helm of your local bar. Be on the lookout for more information in *Virginia Lawyer*, as well as in e-mails from the VSB.

For some years now, the CLBA has also been honored to provide a forum for the VSB Small-Firm Practitioner Forums held in conjunction with the Supreme Court of Virginia. These programs inform and train solo practitioners and members of small law firms. Topics include ethics, law office management, and technology.

The latest Solo and Small-firm Practitioner Forum was held on July 16, 2009, in Abingdon. Former VSB President Joseph A. Condo spoke on “Breaking Free of the Jealous Mistress — Achieving Balance and Reducing Stress in Your Life as a Lawyer.” Joe’s talk flowed naturally from his term as VSB president in 2000–01, when he made “getting a life” a central theme of his presidency. Joe’s theme was that a balanced and healthy life is far from

antithetical to a successful practice. Joe conveyed the important message that a rested and less-stressed lawyer will usually make sounder professional judgments than a lawyer who is sleep-deprived, unhealthy, or stressed.

The demands of the Jealous Mistress can also be checked through public service. Former Governor Gerald L. Baliles spoke eloquently on this subject at the 2008 Solo and Small-Firm Practitioner Forum in Virginia Beach.

*When we don’t rise to service and our profession fails to deeply encourage it, it’s not entirely surprising that law students become nervous and lawyers become burned out — because I believe that lawyers chose the profession in order to contribute to the public good. Lawyers are practical but lawyers also — especially the best — have a twinge of idealism, a yearning to do good, as a citizen lawyer in the long tradition.*¹ (emphasis added)

It is apparent that local bar associations provide Virginia lawyers with an important way of breaking free from the Jealous Mistress by deeply encouraging public service. The CLBA provides to local bars assistance with ideas and resources for this public service, but the local bar associations do the heavy lifting. Here are just a few examples of how local bars have given back to their communities through the good works of their citizen lawyers.

Members of the Roanoke Bar Association recently took time out of their busy schedules to teach the

importance of law to American society. They provided this free instruction to seventh and eighth graders. They taught the students the importance of the Rule of Law and that lawyers are dedicated to public service in their community.

Another example of public service is the Metropolitan Richmond Women’s Bar Association’s Partnership with Safe Harbor. Safe Harbor is a shelter for women who face domestic violence. Members of the association donated goods and more than \$2,500 to the shelter. The association also hosted a luncheon at which the shelter’s director of development spoke, as did a prosecutor experienced in domestic violence abuse. The association’s contribution to public service heightened public awareness of the problem of domestic abuse and demonstrated that lawyers are prepared to fight it — not only with financial resources, but also through public scrutiny on the problem.

The Prince William County Bar Association recently gave back to its community by creating a Modest Means Program, designed to provide reduced fee legal services for civil matters to residents of the county and the cities of Manassas and Manassas Park. The program’s goal was to help those with incomes too high to qualify for legal aid but too low to afford an attorney at market rates. The association’s pro bono committee partnered with Northern Virginia Legal Services and the Potomac Legal Aid Society in providing these reduced-rate services.

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The good works of three bar associations are representative of how local bar associations enable lawyers to realize what Governor Baliles recognized as their inherent desire for public service. The CLBA will continue this year to assist local bar associations as they strongly encourage public service by Virginia lawyers.

The next Solo & Small-Firm Practitioner Forum is scheduled for Monday, March 8, 2010, at the University of Richmond School of Law. Details and registration information will be available in January at <http://www.vsb.org/site/conferences/clba/>.

1 The full text of Governor Baliles's remarks at the July 21, 2008 Solo and Small-Firm Practitioner Forum at Virginia Beach are published on the VSB website. Look for "Conferences" and "CLBA."