

# Executive Director's Message

by Karen A. Gould



## Three Giants of the Bar Are Lost

THE VIRGINIA STATE BAR suffered three significant losses in recent months, with the deaths of former presidents Roderick B. Mathews, Robert H. Patterson Jr., and William B. Poff. The three were not only leaders of our State Bar, they were giants of the legal profession in the state, the country, and the world.

RODERICK BELL MATHEWS, who was bar president in 1987–88, died April 27, 2012, at his home in Richmond.

Rod Mathews was a tireless advocate for the rule of law. The *Richmond Times-Dispatch* reported that in 2006 he helped launch the World Justice Project, whose mission is advancing the rule of law throughout the world. He was treasurer of the project when he died of cancer. In tribute, the World Justice Project Opportunity Fund, which provides seed money for on-the-ground programs generated in regional and global meetings, will be renamed in his honor.

Robert Grey, former ABA president and Richmond lawyer, eulogized Rod with this message: “We all know Rod Mathews as a former President of the VSB and the longtime Virginia State Delegate to the ABA. But what you may not know is that Rod Mathews was a bar leader with worldwide experiences. He studied, visited and valued all societies, cultures and the rule of law here and abroad. To that end, Rod was a founding board member and officer of the World Justice Project, an

organization formed to aid all countries in improving civil society through a multi-disciplined effort. Rod thought deeply about the rule of law and was committed to making a difference. We will truly miss him.”

Rod’s interest in rule of law programs continued up until his death. He was instrumental in orchestrating rule of law programs held through the generous support of the Virginia Law Foundation at the Holocaust Museum in Richmond.

Rod was born in Lawton, Oklahoma, grew up in Charleston, West Virginia, and moved to Richmond in 1957. He graduated from Douglas S. Freeman High School and in 1963 he earned a bachelor’s degree in economics and political science from Hampden-Sydney College. He earned a law degree from the University of Richmond, where he was on the law review. He also graduated from the executive program of the University of Michigan School of Business.

Rod began practicing law with the firm now known as Christian & Barton LLP. He left the firm after 22 years and became senior vice president of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Virginia, which he was instrumental in turning into a mutual insurance and publicly traded company. He also served as Virginia’s delegate to the American Bar Association’s policy-making House of Delegates for 23 years. Rod was also very active in the Virginia Law

Foundation, serving on its board of directors from 2004 to 2010.

After retiring, Rod worked as an arbitrator in health law cases. He was a certified mediator under the rules of the Supreme Court of Virginia.

Survivors include his wife, Karia Kurbjun Mathews; three sons, Roderick B. Mathews Jr. of Columbia, South Carolina, Andrew Crittenden Mathews of Copenhagen, Denmark, and Malcolm Timothy Mathews of Anacortes, Washington; a brother, Frank Bell Mathews of Charleston, West Virginia; a sister, Judith Schulze of Lewes, Delaware; and five grandchildren.

ROBERT H. PATTERSON JR., who was president in 1985–86, died July 12, 2012, at VCU Medical Center. He was 85 and had been in declining health for more than a year. Mr. Patterson grew up on Richmond’s Church Hill, the son of a railroad man and a nurse.

The *Times-Dispatch* noted that Mr. Patterson was chairman of McGuireWoods from 1979 until 1989. He spent his career with McGuireWoods, joining one of its antecedents as an associate in 1952. McGuireWoods lauded Mr. Patterson’s “commanding presence, his ability to marshal resources, his capacity to inspire, his knack for getting people to lay aside their personal concerns and unite to accomplish a common goal” as being

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essential to achieving his goal of setting McGuireWoods on the path to success. “Firm Remembers Bob Patterson,” 7/12/2012, www.mcguirewoods.com.

In the 1970s Mr. Patterson won what was at the time one of the largest antitrust settlements ever, a \$45 million settlement for Sergeants, the pet-products arm of pharmaceutical firm A.H. Robins Co., for anti-competitive practices by rival Hartz Mountain. During Mr. Patterson’s chairmanship, McGuireWoods also represented Robins in multistate litigation alleging that its Dalkon Shield birth-control device was faulty, causing injury and illness for as many as 200,000 American women.

He also led Virginia Military Institute’s defense of its 150-year-old, males-only admissions policy. VMI, from which Mr. Patterson graduated in 1949, won at trial, but the verdict was reversed and later affirmed by the U.S. Supreme Court, forcing the taxpayer-supported school in Lexington to admit women.

Mr. Patterson retired from the practice of law on December 31, 1999, shifting to volunteer work, including delivering the morning newspapers to patients at St. Mary’s Hospital in suburban Richmond.

Mr. Patterson interrupted his studies at VMI during World War II to join the Navy. After the war, he completed his degree at VMI and went on to graduate from the University of Virginia law school in 1952.

Mr. Patterson was predeceased by his first wife, the former Luise Wyatt. He is survived by his wife, Anne Marie Whittemore; a son, Robert H. Patterson III; two daughters, India Gregory and Margaret Mansfield; a stepson, Robert P. Whittemore, all of

Henrico; and seven grandchildren and a stepgrandchild.

WILLIAM B. POFF, who was bar president in 1981-82, died September 5, 2012, surrounded by family and friends.

He was born in Vickers, Virginia, on August 23, 1932. His father, John Poff, ran a country store and his mother, Pansy Boose Poff, was a school teacher.

The *Roanoke Times* reported that Mr. Poff graduated from Christiansburg High School at the age of 15 and then attended Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. He earned his law degree at Washington & Lee University where he was editor-in-chief of the *Law Review* and *Order of the Coif*.

He was commissioned into the United States Army, and taught at the Judge Advocate General school in Charlottesville. He joined the Woods Rogers law firm in 1959.

Mr. Poff was a mentor to countless attorneys throughout Southwestern Virginia, and a number of the attorneys he mentored went on to become judges.

He practiced law with Woods Rogers for more than fifty years and argued and tried hundreds of cases in federal and state courts in Virginia and beyond, winning cases before the Supreme Court of Virginia, the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals, and the United States Supreme Court.

In addition to serving as president of the State Bar, he was president of the Virginia Trial Lawyers Association, a member of the board of governors of the American Bar Association, and a founding member of the Virginia Association of Defense Attorneys. He received the Frank W. “Bo” Rogers Jr. Lifetime Achievement Award from the Roanoke Bar Association and also received a lifetime achievement award

from the Virginia Association of Defense Attorneys. Earlier this year he received the Roger Groot Professionalism Award from the Ted Dalton American Inn of Court, the Inn’s highest honor.

Former VSB president and Roanoke lawyer Phillip V. Anderson described Mr. Poff as a “a true legal legend who not only was exemplary at his trade but was a gentlemen and epitomized professionalism in his practice.”

He was a long-time leader in Roanoke’s Sister Cities program. He worked diligently in support of Republican Party politics. He served as director of local organizations such as Mill Mountain Playhouse, the Roanoke YMCA, and the Roanoke Valley Jaycees.

He was predeceased by his first wife, Magdalen (Mag) Barbara Andrews Poff. He is survived by his wife, Spring; and his stepdaughters, Virginia, Young, Sunn, Anne and her husband, Mike; and his grandchildren, Carter, Ryan, Victoria and Peyton.

Virginia’s lawyers were indeed fortunate to have these fabulous leaders in the law serve as presidents of the Virginia State Bar.