

The CLBA – Wearing Hawaiian Shirts to a Tech Savvy Future

by Eugene M. Elliott Jr.



The Conference of Local Bar Associations has existed for twenty-two of the last seventy-five years of rich history of the Virginia State Bar. In 1987, the VSB Council appointed a Special Committee on Local Bar Associations to investigate how the relationship between the VSB and the local bar associations could be enhanced and communications improved.

A VSB staff member facilitates these improvements.

In 1991, the VSB Council approved funding for a local and specialty bar association program, and the constitution and bylaws of the CLBA were unanimously approved. Local and specialty bars were surveyed to identify areas of interest including mentoring programs, continuing legal education, bench-bar relations, creating a resource library, and pro bono work. The CLBA worked to create and deliver programming to the local bars. In 1992, the CLBA created the Bar Leadership Institute (BLI) to serve local and specialty bar leaders with leadership training, organization management skills, and programming. BLIs have been held from Williamsburg to Abingdon.

In 1993, the CLBA distributed information about the new mandatory IOLTA requirements through local bar associations. In 1997 the CLBA published the first *So You're 18* handbook, which was and still is distributed to schools, bar associations, and courts. It is a broad brush explanation of the rights, obligations, and responsibilities of adults with respect to criminal and civil laws in Virginia.

In 2000, the BLI was held in conjunction with a regional State Bar meeting featuring a no-cost CLE. A couple of years later, *So You're 18* was translated into Spanish. In 2004, Chief Justice Leroy R. Hassell Sr. charged the VSB to offer free CLEs for solos and small firms. The

first seminar was in Abingdon in conjunction with a town hall meeting attended by the chief justice and Justice Cynthia D. Kinser. Since the inception of the solo and small firm seminars, the meetings have been held from the Eastern Shore to Big Stone Gap.

It was in 2007 that George Warren Shanks, as chair of the CLBA, introduced Hawaiian shirts as the standard dress for the annual breakfast meeting of the CLBA. Efforts to return to normal attire at the annual meeting have been met with strong opposition.

The CLBA will continue to provide leadership training to local and specialty bar leaders. The CLBA will no doubt continue to spawn VSB presidents, as several past chairs of the CLBA have matriculated to that position.

Legal technology information will be an important part of the services that the CLBA delivers to bar leaders and solo and small firm attorneys. This technology will be at the center of our instructional programming. Whether it's informing a small bar association on how it can distribute information about changes in local rules of court or informing an attorney concerning due diligence research on Facebook about an opposing party, technology will be at the forefront. Given the speed at which technology changes, the CLBA, as well as attorneys, will be challenged to keep up. It must be said that our president, Sharon D. Nelson, over the last several years has donated huge amounts of time and energy to CLBA programming in order to help keep us current.

The courts have come to many bar associations with concerns about new solo lawyers appearing before them without knowledge of the common practices in handling routine matters. While law firms provide such information to their new associates, it is clear that new solos need mentoring. The CLBA, as a



repository of programs to address these issues, will continue to assist with mentoring programs designed to assist large, medium, and small localities through BLIs. The CLBA disseminates information locally about what may work or what is less successful for mentoring. The Bar Leaders Institute will be held this year on Friday, November 15, at the Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden in Richmond. Consult the VSB website for details.

In addition, many courts are concerned over a perceived increase in the lack of professionalism among attorneys. While the lack of professionalism is not reserved to new attorneys or seasoned members of the bar, the CLBA is well positioned to address the issues in their Solo and Small-Firm Practitioner Forums and programs delivered to local bar associations.

Similarly, the lack of communication between the bench and the bar has been a concern. The CLBA is assisting the VSB to address bench-bar relations. Chief Justice Kinser and immediate past president of the VSB, W. David Harless, formulated and implemented a very successful program in Abingdon in 2013 to serve three judicial districts. This was combined with a town hall meeting between the local judges and the bar. The CLBA will continue this format in March 2014 in Danville and annually in selected venues.

In the past, local and specialty bar associations programming only assisted the lawyer members. Unquestionably, collegiality and legal education are critical roles for local and specialty bars. Collegiality was promoted by monthly meetings, golf tournaments, annual picnics, and the like. Legal education was promoted by local bar association programs. For various reasons, many bar associations are now involved in community service projects. Whether satisfying the needs of underprivileged children during the holiday season, feeding the hungry, providing educational scholarships, summer camps, blood drives, and disaster relief, local and specialty bar asso-

ciations are meeting the desires of their members to address these needs.

It is important that the local communities are aware of the time, effort, and funds that attorneys donate. The CLBA will continue to be a clearinghouse to share programming which meets these needs and to provide fundraising techniques, as well as legal technology assistance, to our bar associations.

The CLBA has been blessed in the past with members who have given richly of their time and talents. This tradition will stimulate future members to meet challenges with continued dedication and success.



Eugene M. Elliott Jr. was named Local Bar Leader of the Year by the Virginia State Bar in June of 2005. He is a fellow of the Virginia Law Foundation, past president of the Roanoke Bar Association, and past chair of the Roanoke Bar Association Foundation. He is a former president of the Virginia Museum of Transportation Inc. and has been a member of its executive board for 25 years.

