

# The SLC – Experienced Leadership and Mentoring Will Continue

by F. Warren Haynie Jr.



The Senior Lawyers Conference (SLC) was organized in 2001. It is the largest conference in the Virginia State Bar with a membership of 17,064 as of July 1, 2013. All members of the VSB in good standing who are 55 years and older are automatically members of the SLC. No dues are required. Two events, neither pleasant, result in losing membership: failing to stay in good standing with the VSB and the end of your earthly existence.

The mission of the SLC as stated in § 1.2 of its bylaws is as follows:

The purpose of the SLC shall be to uphold the honor of the profession of law, to apply the knowledge and experience of the profession to the promotion of the public good, to encourage cordial discourse and interaction among the members of the Virginia State Bar, and to pursue its Mission and Goals as follows:

The SLC shall serve the particular interests of senior lawyers and promote the welfare of seniors generally. In serving the interests of senior lawyers the SLC will plan and present programs and activities and produce publications of interest to senior lawyers, and coordinate activities for senior lawyers by, for, and with state and local bar associations. To promote the welfare of seniors generally, the SLC will study issues of concern to seniors, prepare and present programs and publications designed to explore and develop such issues, advocate appropriately on behalf of such issues and cooperate with other entities interested in such matters.

An annual meeting is required and there are meetings of the board of governors and officers held in September, December, February, and April. The board of governors consists of twenty-four members at large, elected by the SLC members, three non-voting honorary members, (usually active or retired

members of the judiciary), and the immediate past chair of the board (to serve as an ex-officio member without a vote). The officers of the conference consist of the chair, chair-elect, first and second vice chairs, secretary, treasurer, and immediate past chair. The chair of the SLC has a seat on Bar Council as well as on the Executive Committee.

Because no affirmative action at all is required to be a member of the conference, quite a few if not most VSB members did not realize that they had become members of the SLC—sort of like qualifying for reduced coffee at McDonalds when you turn 50. Chances are you won't know it unless you are told.

To rectify this situation, members of the VSB upon the month of their 55th birthday receive a letter from the conference chair extending birthday greetings and introducing them to the SLC. The letter outlines the conference's activities and provides relevant contact information. Accompanying the letter is a copy of the latest edition of the *Senior Citizens Handbook*, a valuable resource tool for senior citizens and their caregivers. Seventy to eighty of these letters are mailed monthly to new members.

## What We Do

So what does the SLC actually do to implement the rather lofty goals of its mission statement? What are the programs that actually make things work?

### *Senior Citizens Handbook*

Probably the most visible project is the publication of the *Senior Citizens Handbook*, which addresses the laws and programs affecting senior citizens in Virginia. The 2013 edition contains 114 pages of information and resources. The initial printing of 12,000 copies is flying off the shelves and will certainly require a second printing in the near future. While the handbook can be considered the "crown jewel," its publication does not require wide-spread participation from the SLC members because a few dedicated and hardworking



individuals have taken on responsibility for the product. Handbooks are provided online as a free PDF file download or at a modest cost in print.

### *Senior Law Days*

Senior Law Days are programs that are usually sponsored by local bar associations in cooperation with the SLC. The conference provides the local associations with details on how to conduct a program. The instructions, while extensive, are meant to be a guide only in organizing a Senior Law Day. Each program can be tailored to meet local situations.

Most programs are about a half day in length and are held in courthouses, schools, churches, or other easily accessible facilities. Generally, lunch is served and ample time is provided for questions and answers. Usually, a panel of experts speaks on topics of interest to seniors as well as their caregivers. Past programs have focused on Medicaid, estate documents, geriatric care management, elder abuse, fraud, hospice, and funeral planning. Funding generally comes from local businesses, and the local bar associations usually provide some financial assistance. Newspapers, radio, and flyers are utilized to promote the events.

Audience participation is from the public at large. However, many attendees come from local churches. Caregivers are well represented, most of whom are family members. In the past, Medicaid and funeral planning have been topics. We have often used a local funeral director as a speaker who insists on being the final speaker on the program, which seems appropriate. He always concludes his presentation by saying “You can always trust me; I’ll be the last one to let you down.”

The response from the audience has been overwhelmingly positive. I have heard only two complaints about local Senior Law Days: the program was too short and we ran out of homemade brownies at the Colonial Beach event.

Senior Law Days have been held in Richmond, Harrisonburg, Covington, Charlottesville, Smyth County, Westmoreland County, Northumberland County, Richmond County, Lancaster County, Farmville, South Boston, and South Hill. Each attendee was given a copy of the *Senior Citizens Handbook*.

Bill Wilson from Covington has chaired this program since its inception in 2005. In fact, Bill can be said to have birthed and nurtured the program. In his otherwise excellent article on Senior Law Days published in the June/July 2013 issue of *Virginia Lawyer*, he erroneously gave me too much credit for helping with the program. In reality I was just a member of a hard working committee from the Northern Neck Bar Association. Make no mistake about it, Bill Wilson — until his recent retirement as chair — was the driving force behind Senior Law Days.

### *CLE programs*

At the VSB’s annual meeting, the conference offers a CLE program that addresses pertinent legal issues for the bar in general and not limited to senior lawyers. Past programs have addressed estate administration issues, the valuation of financial assets, and cocktail party law (how to respond to off the cuff questions from casual acquaintances, friends, etc.)

The programs, which earn CLE credits, often include a panel discussion with enough time for questions and answers. The program in 2013 was featured as the Showcase CLE Seminar. Panelists from the SLC are featured along with experts from the particular field being discussed.

The SLC’s first chair, Frank O. Brown Jr., regularly presents a CLE approved program titled “Protecting Lawyers’ and Clients’ Interests in the Event of the Lawyers’ Disability, Death or Other Disaster.” The program is free and is approved for ethics credits. These Programs are often held at bar associations, and all that Frank expects in return is a chicken lunch. He has presented this program in many areas of Virginia, including Abingdon, Alexandria, Arlington, Big Stone Gap, Boyton, Charlottesville, Covington, Danville, Fairfax, Farmville, Fredericksburg, Gloucester, Harrisonburg, Henrico, Irvington, Keysville, Leesburg, Lynchburg, Luray, McLean, Melfa, Norfolk, Richmond, Roanoke, Salem, Smyth County, Stratford Hall, University of Richmond, Virginia Beach, Warsaw, Williamsburg, and Winchester. Frank is inexhaustible and I believe has no expiration date. A regular human GPS.

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### *Trees for Virginia*

A relatively new program is Trees for Virginia started by former SLC Chair John Tate of Marion and now chaired by Bruce Robinson of South Hill. John had a passion for seeing that hardy trees like oaks, maples, and bald cypress (crepe myrtles and Bradford pears need not apply) are planted throughout the commonwealth annually. In cooperation with the Virginia Department of Forestry, trees suitable for various areas in the commonwealth are distributed free of charge to interested groups and individuals. John Tate, who died in 2012, would be pleased to know that his pet project has survived him and is flourishing.

The funds to purchase the trees are from voluntary donations and no conference money is used. Interesting to note that the saplings are personal property, but once planted become real property. It reminds me of Mark Twain's comment on his time spent in his youth aboard a Mississippi river boat that his boat had so much dirt and grime on her that she was taxed as real property rather than personal property.

Bruce has a very interesting and touching article on the tree project in the June/July 2013 *Virginia Lawyer*.

### *Fifty Year Awards*

At the VSB's annual meeting the SLC honors those attorneys and judges who were admitted to the practice of law fifty years ago. A lunch is held in their honor with their family in attendance. Annually, an average of 80-to-100 people reaches this milestone. Each honoree is introduced and their pictures are mailed to the honorees to celebrate the occasion. It is a great time to renew old acquaintances and to catch up on the latest comings and goings. John Tate, noted earlier, would have received a fifty year plaque had he

lived; instead his widow and son accepted this award on his behalf. Ironically, John's birthday fell on the day of the awards ceremony. For those of us who had the privilege of knowing John, it was a powerful moment.

### *Senior Lawyer News*

The conference is quite active in the communications area. The *Senior Lawyer News* is published several times a year and is edited by Frank Brown. The SLC website is well worth checking out for practice materials and links to other sites of particular interest to senior lawyers. The SLC web site is: <http://www.vsb.org/site/conferences/slc> and is maintained by Frank Brown (yes, that Frank Brown). Periodically *Virginia Lawyer* features articles by members of the conference.

Members of the conference also contribute articles for the yearly SLC-dedicated issue of *Virginia Lawyer*.

### *Pro Bono*

With the personal example and gentle prodding of John Oakey, members of the SLC are encouraged to do pro bono work, either directly through their law practices (which is how most do it) or through legal aid organizations throughout the commonwealth. If you want more information on how you can help, call John Oakey at (804) 775-4336, or e-mail him at [joakey@mcguirewoodsemeritus.com](mailto:joakey@mcguirewoodsemeritus.com).

### **What We Might Do**

What will the conference be up to in the future? I feel certain that we will continue our flagship programs: updating the *Senior Citizens Handbook*, planting trees, presenting CLE programs, Senior Law Day events, etc. I hope that we will be able to expand the Law Day programs to many more local bar associations.

While the conference has always encouraged its members to participate in the pro bono field, I hope that a

clearer strategy will be developed to give this vital and deserving area more prominence. Technology and social media are areas of interest. I am especially anxious for medical technology to explain to me how I can remember the names, positions, and uniform numbers of the 1955 Brooklyn Dodgers starting lineup and still have trouble remembering where I put my car keys.

In the area of estate planning, in addition to the normal discourse on wills, trusts, and directives, I hope that an open dialogue can be conducted on end of life quality, including the Death with Dignity movement that is gaining some traction in other states.

Mentoring is an area that should be addressed and a plan developed to encourage senior lawyers to become involved.

The SLC welcomes and encourages active involvement from its members and ideas from those who will become members in the future.

Copies of the *Senior Citizens Handbook* are available by contacting the VSB's Stephanie Blanton in Richmond at (804)775-0576 and (804) 775-0501 fax or [blanton@vsb.org](mailto:blanton@vsb.org).



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