

Camaraderie and Concern Continue to Drive the YLC

by Brian R. Charville



Professional friendships that last a career. Networking that leads to job opportunities. Connections with lawyers in all corners of the commonwealth. More fun than you ever expected to have with a bunch of lawyers. These are many of the most common reactions that I hear when I ask current and former young lawyers why they are or were involved in the Young Lawyers Conference (YLC) of the Virginia State Bar. And the camaraderie that comes with YLC involvement isn't even one of the conference's stated purposes. It is, though, what often keeps our volunteers engaged and enthused.

In fact, conviviality might be one of the last things that comes to mind when you read the conference's mission statement. The conference was established by Bar Council in 1971 and had its first board of governors in the 1973–1974 bar year. The conference's bylaws state the YLC's goals: (1) to serve as a vehicle through which younger members of the Bar can exert a more direct influence on the Bar's activities so as to engage in activities to respond to needs among young and new lawyers in particular, and to the members of the profession in general; (2) to promote, uphold, and elevate the standards of honor, integrity, and competence in the profession; and (3) to assist Bar Council in discharging its duty to improve the legal system and the responsiveness of the profession to the public. Again, from these staid purposes you would not likely guess that the friendships that result from YLC involvement are the things that often compel young lawyers to remain involved in the YLC, to expand into other YLC activities, and to become involved in the “big bar” later in their careers.

Of course, the YLC's programs have been, are, and will remain our bread and butter and the things that continue to give us an important niche in the bar's pro bono public service. While I do not have personal knowledge of

the YLC's earliest programs, I am familiar with many of those that originated and grew in the last decade or two, and I can attest to the effects that they have had on the folks to whom they have been directed and the attorneys who have volunteered with them. The first programs with which I was involved were 2006 sessions of *Wills For Heroes* and *No Bills Night*, both in Danville and coincident with Law Day.

In a sense those two programs are the perfect epitomes of 21st century pro bono service because they both use technology to help maximize the provision of free legal services to the public. *Wills For Heroes* is of course the highly acclaimed program that began in South Carolina just after September 11, 2001, and enables attorneys to prepare estate-planning documents for first responders (police officers, sheriffs and deputies, fire fighters, and EMTs) and their spouses. The program is an easy-to-use, self-contained package for local attorneys, provides immense benefit to the clients, and gives us an opportunity to familiarize ourselves with wills and trusts practice if we haven't had occasion to think about the descent and distribution statutes recently.

No Bills Nights, our program that provides free initial legal advice to persons who call, similarly can benefit large numbers of clients if the program is well advertised and well-staffed with attorneys. The program's planners in Danville had successful programs because they enthusiastically recruited attorneys to participate and connected with local media to ensure that the public knew about the program and what number to call that evening. The callers' questions typically were of the domestic-relations and landlord/tenant variety, which made the *Night's* doings all the more important to the callers and interesting to the attorney volunteers.

But what I remember more clearly than the first-responder clients or the *People's*



Court-like vignettes from the folks who called No Bills Night are the interactions I had with fellow attorneys those evenings and the professional relationships that deepened as a result of spending quality time together. The programs were my first taste of volunteering as an attorney and I knew that bar involvement was for me when I saw how much our efforts helped the folks served by the programs and I struck professional friendships with colleagues that grew over the years. It was that initial volunteering in the conference's programs that led me to participate more actively in young-lawyer activities at the local level and to pursue leadership positions in the YLC. I was lucky to work for a law firm — Daniel, Medley & Kirby PC — that supports its attorneys' involvement in the bar, and one of my colleagues at the firm, Brent Saunders, encouraged me to become the 9th District Representative on the YLC's board of governors.

My first real statewide YLC involvement came when I attended the YLC's Professional Development Conference and met folks like Dan Gray, Jennifer McClellan, Bill Porter, Maya Eckstein, and Jimmy Robinson Jr. Seeing how these stellar attorneys (who aren't much older than me) contribute to the profession and the public through their bar service really impressed upon me the rewards that come from volunteering as an attorney. They were not volunteering in order to help themselves, but there was no doubt that the friendships and professional networks that came from their volunteerism were wonderful secondary benefits. It was a desire to help preserve and maintain these friendships and networks that led the conference's board to propose the YLC's Fellows program, which was created by Bar Council in June 2012. Already the YLC has elected the first slate of fellows and they have developed a directory and began planning how to help the YLC and the bar through their continuing involvement. The excitement that the program has tapped among the fellows is the latest and example of the amity that persists among young lawyer volunteers regardless of when they were involved or how they were involved.

As the Virginia State Bar celebrates its 75th anniversary, I think that it is important to recognize what a touchstone the YLC, and young-lawyer involvement in general, has been for VSB

members. Young lawyers have been finding a professional home, excellent community service opportunities, and vibrant camaraderie in the YLC and its predecessor organizations for decades, and that is not going to change in future years. There will always be enthusiastic new lawyers who are looking for ways to put their skills to use helping others and who enjoy the friendships and statewide, even nationwide, networks that result.

There also will continue to be an evolution among pro bono programs as they better harness technology to deliver pro bono services faster and easier. The YLC has become a better member-service organization in just the last two years by creating the *Professional Development Series* that makes videos and podcasts available online, by sending e-blasts to members between issues of our award-winning quarterly newsletter, *Docket Call* (which is distributed digitally), and by conducting our annual *Professional Development Conference* CLE program via videoconferencing between Richmond and Washington, D.C. This fall the PDC will include a Virginia Beach site as well.

The needs of the public, for which our profession exists, and those of our profession itself are significant and not abating, and the opportunities for young lawyers to address those needs and gain lifelong, fulfilling friendships in the process are vibrant and growing.



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