

Pro Bono Conference Features Powell Award, New Frankie Muse Freeman Award



This year's Virginia State Bar Lewis F. Powell, Jr. Pro Bono Conference and Ceremony featured not only the winner of the Powell award, but the inauguration of the new Frankie Muse Freeman Organizational Pro Bono Award.

Freeman, whose 100th birthday was in November, attended the October 26 event to receive the first annual award, which honors her contributions to the legal profession. She thanked the approximately 200 lawyers from across the state who attended. "I have tried for more than sixty years to do what this organization has been doing so well," she said. "You should be honored for all you are trying to do and I thank you, thank you, thank you."

Freeman was born in Danville in 1916 and graduated from Hampton University before receiving her law degree from Howard University in 1947. She served as co-counsel on a successful NAACP law suit against the St. Louis

(above) The guest of honor at the dinner was Frankie Muse Freeman (second from left). She was joined by (from left to right) her daughter Shelbe Freeman Bullock, and family members Andrea Muse, Cynthia Watkins, and Fred Watkins.

(right) VSB President-elect Doris Causey of the Central Virginia Legal Aid Society posed for a picture with Ms. Freeman and her daughter.

Photos by Deirdre Norman



Board of education, and in 1952 she was lead counsel on an NAACP case, *Davis v. St. Louis Housing Authority*, that ended legal racial discrimination in public housing there. She later won the Supreme Court appeal of that case.

The Lewis F. Powell, Jr. Pro Bono Award went to Hoover Penrod PLC of Harrisonburg. The lawyers at the firm

assist Blue Ridge Legal Services and have contributed more than 3,200 hours in more than 560 cases to date. The firm has provided more than \$820,000 in pro bono value over twenty-five years.

Also given special recognition at the ceremony for his long service to the legal aid community was Jack Harris, who recently retired as executive director of



(above left) The directors of many of the Legal Aid organizations in Virginia, including David Neumeyer of the Virginia Legal Aid Society (at the podium), presented Jack Harris (left) with a resolution recognizing his long service to the Legal Service Corporation of Virginia and the Virginia Poverty Law Center. Harris recently retired as the director of the Virginia Trial Lawyers Association.

(above right) The guest speaker at the dinner, Jeffrey Robinson, deputy legal director and director of the Center for Justice at the American Civil Liberties Union, gave a multi-media presentation that used quotes from Bob Dylan and Yogi Berra to illustrate the value of pro bono service.

(left) David A. Penrod, of Hoover Penrod PLC in Harrisonburg, accepted the Lewis F. Powell, Jr., Pro Bono Award from VSB Director of Access to Legal Services Karl Doss and Tara L. Casey, co-vice chair of the Access to Legal Services Committee.

the Virginia Trial Lawyers Association. Harris was among the founders of the Legal Services Corporation of Virginia in 1979 and the Virginia Poverty Law Center in 1980 and served on their boards throughout his career.

The guest speaker at the event was Jeffrey Robinson, deputy legal director and director of the Center for Justice at the ACLU. He lauded the assembled legal aid lawyers for the work they do on behalf of the poor and unrepresented.

Robinson began his remarks by praising the room full of legal aid lawyers for taking on clients despite not knowing what they are getting into. “You

have no clue who it is you’re helping. You have no idea who that person will turn out to be.” He ended his presentation by reminding the lawyers that, “We are the heroes we’ve been waiting for.”

Photos by Deirdre Norman

Putting a Life Back Together

by D. Bradley Kent

Rarely do we summer interns make a lasting impact with clients. The life of a lawsuit is long, spanning months if not years. The short three-month stint with a law firm allows an intern to see bits and pieces of a case. It allows the intern to draft a motion, answer discovery, or possibly argue a substantive issue. But this essay is about the rare opportunity for an intern to see a case through and to change a man's life for the better. This essay also is about why it is so important for lawyers to never stop fighting for their clients.

In the Spring of 2014, a man lost his mother. She lived in another part of the country so naturally the man went to mourn with the rest of his family and bury the woman who had given him life. After he arrived, he found out that his mother had died without enough money for a proper burial. Neither he nor any other member of his family was well to do, but he had enough money in his name to pay for an adequate memorial service and headstone. Unfortunately, paying for the funeral wiped him out. Lacking enough money to return home, he was forced to stay in his mother's city. He frantically called his employer back home and explained the situation. He was told not to worry; he would have a job when he returned. He also explained to the employer that he would be willing to transfer to a company location closer to his new city. His fear temporarily alleviated, he began looking for ways to assemble enough money to return home and return to work. Family members offered what they could. His church community collected donations.

When he finally saved enough money to return home, he was told he no longer had a job. What was worse, his employer was denying him unemployment benefits. The employer cited his failure to come to work as grounds

for his termination. Because he couldn't afford an attorney, he took his case to the legal aid office.

Luckily, the attorneys at my firm gave their time, attention, and energy to assisting the legal aid office. Quickly, my supervising attorney filled me in on the man's case. Researching the applicable law, I became convinced the Employment Commission made a mistake in denying the man's claim for benefits. My first appeal to the commission was a telephone interview involving me, the employer, and an examiner from the commission. Several days later, I received the first loss of my legal career. The commission again sided with the employer. The man would not receive unemployment benefits.

I continued to believe that the man's case had merit, that the commission was incorrect in its decision. I re-doubled my effort, pouring over the case law, combing through the regulations and decisions handed down by the commission looking for holes in its decision. Armed with my research, I informed the man that I still believed in his case. Days later I stood before the appeals commissioner. After what seemed like an hour of thrusting and parrying difficult questions, explaining and distinguishing the man's case from the thousands of cases that had come before, the man's fate was once again in the hands of the commission.

A month later, long after my internship with the firm had ended, I received a call from my supervising attorney. The commission had reversed its decision; the man would begin receiving unemployment benefits. More importantly, the man would receive benefits dating back to when his employer fired him. "Excellent," I told my supervising attorney, "let me know what the man says when you tell him." "No," my supervisor

said, "you fought for him, you tell him." The conversation that came next will stay with me until my last breath. After hearing the commission's decision, the man broke down into tears. Through his tears he explained that he had been living in a homeless shelter and that this money would allow him to get a place for himself again. This money would allow him to put his life back together.

As I type this, I can still hear the man's voice. As our desks pile up with files and our phones buzz seemingly every minute with a new e-mail, a new demand for our time and attention, it can be easy to forget that what we do can change lives. What we do can take a man living in a homeless shelter and give him a new lease on life. What we do can provide closure to a person whose darkest days are now behind him.

This essay is also a call to give some of your time to those less fortunate. Find an area of the law for which you have a passion and find a cause for which you can make a difference. For me, it was employment law. Your work, your clients' knowledge that they have someone on their side fighting for them, and the reaction when you become victorious on their behalf will have an impact on you that will last a lifetime.



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