

A Momentous Year Brings VLF into the Light

by Irving M. Blank

It has been my great honor to serve as president of the Virginia Law Foundation during this past year. 2016 was momentous for the VLF. In fact, I can say without reservation that 2016 was the most significant year since 1974, when the foundation was created to be the philanthropic arm of Virginia's legal community. Since its creation, the foundation has adhered to its mission statement in:

- Ensuring that no Virginian is deprived of meaningful access to justice;
- Raising awareness regarding the importance of the rule of law and how it is the cornerstone to the American judicial system; and
- Providing the best and most relevant legal education throughout the commonwealth.

My sense is that most of our lawyers do not know what the VLF is or what it does. In fact, our former Chief Justice, Cynthia Kinser, labeled us "the best kept secret of Virginia's legal community" when she honored our 40th anniversary.

I welcome this opportunity to explain what occurred in 2016 and before to position the VLF to become a much larger contributor to the three objectives of our mission statement. First, a little history and lot of credit needs to be articulated. The VLF has a little over \$12 million in its "endowment." Most of this money came from a bygone era of mandatory IOLTA accounts for Virginia's attorneys and meaningful interest rates. Today, most of our "income" is from return on investments. We have raised money in the past from special programs and contributions, most of which came from our distinguished and community-minded fellows. A total of more than \$24 million has been paid in grants since the creation of the VLF. For more information about who we support, our fellows who are so instrumental in supporting them, and how

you can help share in what we do by investing in us and with us, please go to our totally redesigned website at www.virginialawfoundation.org.

After many years of what I describe as passive leadership, the foundation found itself being led by Frank Thomas who recognized that we had to significantly change our governance if we were to remain relevant to our mission.

Frank was followed by Judge Manuel Capsalis who had been president of the Virginia State Bar. Manny was followed by Jim Meath, who was followed by John Epps, both former presidents of the VBA. These three leaders brought their history of leadership, creativity, and problem solving to the VLF. The results cannot be overstated.

First, the administrative function of the VLF was overhauled. Ray White, the executive director of VACLE agreed to take the same position with the VLF. We closed the office in Richmond and moved to the CLE building in Charlottesville. We acquired staff from VACLE, all of whom proved to be dedicated and creative. We were able to reduce the administrative costs to less than what was being raised. We focused on our fellows program under the leadership of George Shanks, improved the selection process, and began to look at more involvement by our fellows in the VLF. George has passed his chairmanship to Judge Capsalis who has already begun to remake the fellows program.

Under the guidance and leadership of Vice-President Steve Busch, we have spent over a year renovating our by-laws and methods of governance.

In April, 2016, we consolidated the VLF and VCLE, both the financial and workforces. This was clearly the most momentous achievement since the formation of the foundation. Under Ray White's leadership, guided by Chairman David Bobzien and longtime board

members Jim Cox and Jeanne Dahnk, VACLE has emerged from a very troubled few years to again claim its place as one of the nation's top CLE programs. The esprit de corps of VACLE instilled by David and Ray has spilled over to the foundation and the results will, no doubt, allow us to look at increasing our funding for some of our most important programs, such as access to justice and Lawyers Helping Lawyers. I am certain that the consolidation of the VLF and VACLE will result in the VLF becoming an industry-leading bar foundation.

The consolidation has already produced a new website with a state-of-the-art online presence. Try it out!

We are using a story-telling approach to our work. This should surprise no one who knows me, but the format includes testimony from grant recipients, fellows, donors, board members, and VACLE faculty, all to promote VLF and VACLE.

We gave our executive director the ability to make spot grants, a significant change that is already having an impact.

When the Virginia State Bar dropped its sponsorship of the Midyear Legal Seminar, after forty-two years, VACLE took over this very important and successful program. Its first International Travel CLE will be in London, where the lawyers of London have opened legal London to Virginia's lawyers.

We are bringing experience CLEs to Mt. Vernon, the Virginia Holocaust Museum, and baseball and basketball games, while engaging in new areas of fundraising through golf tournaments, concerts, and other creative events. All of which have been new, successful, and enjoyable.

We are solidifying our long-held relationships with LINC, the Hill-Tucker

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Institute, CAIR, Tahirih Justice Center, and, of course LHL and various access to justice programs.

All of this has been largely due to the increased financial stability of VACLE and reduced costs to the VLF.

As stated, it is my belief that 2016 will be remembered as a most significant year for the VLF, but also as a springboard for both VLF and VACLE. The future leadership is in place at the VLF with Pia Trigiani, Steve Busch, and Andy Morse set to enjoy and enlarge on the progress that we accomplished these past few years. David Bobzien will continue to contribute his steady hand and experience to lead VACLE. Both the VLF and VACLE will continue to benefit from the creativity, dedication, and thoughtful leadership of Ray White.

Lastly, I think we have continued the efforts of my predecessors in forging better cooperation and relations between the VSB and the VBA.

It has been a privilege and an honor to serve as president. When asked by Frank Thomas to do this, I first refused for fear of not knowing enough to lead the VLF. Now that I know I was right, I also know that when you have Capsalis, Meath, and Epps leading the way and Ray White making certain you keep the train on the tracks, ignorance is easily overcome.

Thank you again and remember, we have an obligation to do good as we do well and a contribution to the Virginia Law Foundation is a great way to achieve that goal.



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understanding exposure, and clearly allocating the risks. Part III explores insurance and bonding considerations. Part IV delves into the science of green and sustainable development practices and measures, specifically focusing on energy and water performance. The book concludes with an examination of litigation considerations for the project owner, the design professional, the prime contractor, as well as third-party claims.

As Sun Tsu declared, “The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.” Armed with the resources above, the construction law practitioner will be prepared to enter

or perhaps, more ideally, to avoid the courtroom.

Endnotes:

- 1 *Blake Const. Co., Inc. v. C. J. Coakley Co., Inc.*, 431 A.2d 569, 675 (D.C. 1981).
- 2 Kristan B. Burch, *The Effective Use of Jury Instructions in Construction Cases*, 64 VA. LAWYER 22 (2015).



Marie Summerlin Hamm is assistant director for collection development at Regent University Law Library, and an adjunct professor of law at the Regent University School of Law. She is a past president of the Virginia Association of Law Libraries.

Got an Ethics Question?

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