

Reality Show

In the fall of 2002, ABC announced plans for a new “reality” television show, entitled “The Will.” In this latest effort to capture the true essence of the American public, a wealthy benefactor would divide his estate among his friends and family. Instead of going through “tedious probate-court hearings,” however, family members “with a lifetime worth of baggage” would compete for a share of the estate and have the opportunity to vote one another out. The show’s producer noted, “This should give viewers a unique look at a real American family The vote-outs between relatives should be intense.” The final disposition of the estate would be decided not by the benefactor, but by the winner of the final challenge.

As bizarre as this ill-fated show may seem, its reality is not impossible. Many of us practicing trusts and estates law have encountered outrageous cases of family conflicts and challenges, where the client’s wishes are not honored. This issue of the *Virginia Lawyer* is devoted to current issues involving the trusts and estates practice. I hope that the following articles will be beneficial not only to practitioners focusing primarily on trusts and estates, but to the generalist as well, and will help you to help your clients avoid becoming unwitting participants on “The Will.”

I would like to invite any member of the Virginia State Bar whose practice includes trusts and estates to join our section. The section offers contact with other lawyers facing similar issues and problems in their trusts and estates practices, as well as educational opportunities. Section members also receive a semi-annual newsletter containing timely articles addressing recent developments and other matters of interest to the trusts and estates practitioner.

In addition to working with Virginia CLE to present the Trusts and Estates Seminar each fall, the section sponsors a workshop at the Virginia State Bar annual meeting at Virginia Beach. While we are still working out the details for this year’s workshop, which will again be cosponsored with the Senior Lawyers Conference, the workshop will likely feature trends in philanthropy and charitable giving.

For more information about the Trusts and Estates Section, or to become a member, see the VSB Web site at www.vsb.org/sections/index.html for a membership application. For further questions about membership, contact the Trusts and Estates Section liaison at the Virginia State Bar, Elizabeth L. Keller, at (804) 775-0516.



Phillip Carson Stone, Jr., is chair of the VSB Trusts and Estates Section.