

In the Words of Socrates



Kathleen M. Uston, 2003–2004 Young Lawyers Conference President

“Four things belong to a judge—

To hear courteously

To answer wisely

To consider soberly, and

To decide impartially.”

So did Senior Justice Harry A. Carrico impart the wisdom of Socrates to the YLC Leadership Conference.

Justice Carrico honored us with his wise words and counsel, born of decades of experience in the law, years of service to the commonwealth of Virginia on our highest court and countless hours devoted to courteous, wise, sober and impartial consideration of cases of the highest importance.

Justice Carrico talked about the importance of selecting the judges who preside over our trials. They often determine the course of our careers, and regularly decide the fate of our clients, on the basis of one thing and one thing alone—merit.

In Virginia, we are fortunate to have jurists who are devoted to the principals Socrates espoused. We can help select those who hold in their hands the fair and equal treatment of our client’s employees, the financial future of our client’s families and the custody of our client’s children. To recommend those who will sit in a position of such importance, who are better than attorneys—who regularly practice before the bench of their local jurisdiction? Attorneys know best the qualities of their fellow members of the bar, and know whom among them are uniquely situated to pass upon this most important attribute—merit.

Justice Carrico added to Socrates’ wisdom, imparting a fifth element to the qualities of a judge—humility. Each of these

qualities applies to attorneys as well. We all should aspire toward the traits of courtesy, wisdom, sober consideration, impartiality and humility.

In my years of service to the Young Lawyers Conference, I have seen and worked with the myriad YLC programs and volunteer projects that encourage, foster and cultivate these principles.

I cite a few examples: Following closely in the wake of Hurricane Isabel, YLC Emergency Legal Services chair, Brett Zwerdling and YLC board liaison, Shawn Copeland, put families, managing partners and coworkers on hold while they assisted citizens in Virginia who were hard hit by the hurricane. Firefighters and police officers in Arlington and Bristol will have wills, free of charge, to protect themselves and their families thanks to committee chair Carson Sullivan and YLC board members Maya Eckstein and Savalle Sims. Soon, Spanish speaking victims and potential victims of domestic violence will have access to the YLC domestic violence safety brochure, thanks to YLC board member Lesley Pate, who had the document translated.

To learn more about becoming involved with the YLC, please visit our Web site at www.VaYoungLawyers.org. And join us in Charlottesville on March 12–13, 2004, for our Professional Development Conference. It will feature CLEs and other programs for young lawyers.

As young lawyers become not so young lawyers, and move on to become senior partners and members of the judiciary, the five elements Justice Carrico discussed become all the more important. Justice Carrico is correct—in Virginia, where we are given a voice in the selection of our judges, the merit of each selection truly is the most important consideration.

I am proud that the YLC can stand among those groups working to develop and foster these important qualities in Virginia’s attorneys. ☺