

Fairfax Public Law Library *Pro Se* Workstations

by Bobbie J. Denny

Increasing Needs of *Pro Se* Patrons.

The Fairfax Public Law Library, located in the Fairfax County Judicial Center, serves over 75,000 patrons each year. The Law Library Committee is comprised of representatives from the Fairfax Bar Association, the office of the Clerk of the Circuit Court, the Circuit Court judiciary, and the Fairfax County public library system. Library staff members are employees of the Fairfax Bar Association. The Law Library Committee and library staff have made concerted efforts over the past three years to address the increasing needs of *pro se* library patrons. In 1998, the Virginia State Bar awarded a Certificate of Achievement to the Fairfax Bar Association for the establishment of *pro se* workstations in the library to serve the bench, bar, and people of Virginia.

Each year the public law library is used by increasing numbers of non-attorneys. In 1990, 14% of the library's patrons (2,895 out of 20,677) were *pro se* litigants, students, and members of the general public. As of the year 2000, more than half of the library's patrons (an estimated 37,500 out of 75,000) are non-attorneys. Law library staff spends more than twice as much time assisting non-attorneys as compared to members of the legal profession such as judges, law clerks, prosecutors, assistant county attorneys, public defenders, and practicing attorneys. In addition to *pro se* litigants, non-attorney patrons include prisoners, police officers and other law enforcement personnel, members of the business community, landlords and tenants, contractors and subcontractors, taxpayers, individuals charged with criminal and traffic offenses, property owners, employers and employees, students, and other members of the general public. Many citizens who have or are seeking legal counsel research the materials available in the law library in order to be educated consumers and acquire knowledge about their particular legal situations.

By providing information about laws and legal procedures to over 37,500 non-lawyer citizens each year, the Fairfax Public Law Library assists citizens in obtaining meaningful access to justice. David Trieloff, J.D., LL.M. (1966-1998), served as the library's Assistant Law Librarian for nearly two years and established the dedicated *pro se* workstations and public computer research facilities. He believed strongly that non-attorneys should have access to legal information. A memorial fund has been established to honor his memory and continue development of the library's *pro se* workstations. The library staff and the Law Library Committee implemented the "*Pro Se* Workstations" in order to make the law library more user-friendly to non-attorneys.

Pro Se Workstations.

In order to better serve non-attorneys, the Law Library Committee approved the purchase of additional reference materials and technology to set up and maintain workstations for patrons researching divorce and family law, immigration, employment, taxes, elder law, estate planning, and general legal forms.

The decision to purchase additional materials specifically designed for *pro se* patrons was made in spite of the library's limited financial resources. Many of these purchases were made possible because of county funding and donations from the Fairfax Bar Association, the Fairfax County Commission for Women, and contributors to the Friends of the Law Library campaign.

Written Materials. Five carrels contain written legal materials: two for divorce and family law and the remaining for employment, elder law, estate planning, and general legal forms. The two divorce stations are often both in use. All of the workstations are designed to be user-friendly and patrons often express their appreciation to staff. The written materials in the carrels duplicate materials contained in other parts of the library. However, by assembling related materials in separate carrels, it is much easier for patrons to research in those specific areas. Materials were selected from those materials most often used and found beneficial from the general collection. There is an emphasis on texts which include sample legal and litigation forms in the aforementioned areas. Each carrel includes a bibliography identifying the printed materials at the specific workstation as well as additional sources in print and CD-ROM format.

CD-ROM Materials. Four public computer terminals offer legal materials on CD-ROM including Virginia cases and statutory law, sample legal and litigation forms, *Shepard's Virginia Citations*, and tax law.

Staff Assistance.

Although library staff members do not offer legal advice, they assist patrons in locating sources for legal information and provide bibliographic instruction. Bibliographies of law library materials in specific areas have been prepared by staff and provided to patrons. When resources do not seem to be available in the law library, patrons are directed to possible sources on the Internet. The library's home page assists citizens researching Virginia law by hyperlinking them to legal information in Virginia such as Court of Appeals published and unpublished opinions, Supreme Court of Virginia opinions, Fairfax County Courts, Virginia Administrative Code, Virginia Attorney General opinions, and the Virginia General Assembly. The library's home page Internet address may be found at the following address: <http://www.co.fairfax.va/courts/lawlib/homepage.htm>. ☺

Bobbie J. Denny has been the law librarian at the Fairfax Public Law Library since 1996. She received her J.D. from American University, and her M.S.L.S. from Catholic University. She is a member of the Virginia State Bar, secretary of the Virginia Association of Law Libraries, and a member of its executive board.

PRO BONO Opportunities

The Dispute Settlement Center—Norfolk is one of nine regional members of the Virginia Coalition of (non-profit) Community Mediation Centers (*see the Coalition entry on this page under the "Resources" heading.*) The Norfolk program is interested in hearing from attorneys, certified as mediators through programs approved by the Supreme Court of Virginia, who are willing to accept pro bono or nominal fee referrals of low-income and special needs mediation clients. Please call program director Robert Glover (757/480-2777) if you have special language or communication skills or would simply like to be added to the referral list of qualified mediators.

The Virginia Project for Social Policy and Law, Inc. is a tax exempt charitable nonprofit corporation whose mission is to provide legal assistance to at risk populations. Its initial focus is on the legal needs of those in governmental custody, including prisoners, juvenile offenders, and institutionalized persons with mental disabilities. Assistance on a limited basis may be provided to individuals in these populations. The project operates on a volunteer basis currently, and is also looking for volunteer attorneys to provide advice and other assistance to these populations. For more information, contact David Rubinstein, President, Virginia Project for Social Policy and Law, P.O. Box 299, Fredericksburg, VA. 22404-0299 or call (540) 373-0558.

The National Capital Area Paralegal Association (NCAPA) is a voluntary, nonprofit organization composed of paralegals interested in furthering their professional development. The group promotes continuing legal education and encourages its members to use their time and skill to assist attorneys in the community with pro bono projects. NCAPA has a very active pro bono program. Its members are currently assisting with legal clinics that provide services in D.C., Northern Virginia and Suburban Maryland. Paralegals have opportunities to work with local bar associations and nonprofit agencies that provide legal services to low-income residents in their communities. NCAPA members are encouraged to join the *Annual Pro Bono Challenge* and meet the goal of providing 40 hours of service to the community.

NCAPA is also a founding member of the Virginia Alliance of Legal Assistant Associations (VALAA), a group of ten regional paralegal associations. Through VALAA, NCAPA can communicate with associations throughout Virginia that are also involved in pro bono or interested in starting a pro bono program. For additional information, contact Lori Thompson, chair, Pro Bono Publico Committee, (202) 898-3780, lthompson@FDIC.gov.

Resources

The Virginia State Bar features **Training Opportunities** for volunteers on its Internet pro bono page, www.vsb.org, click on "public information". Selections change frequently and often provide advance notice of programs. Attorney groups such as law firms, legal services providers, and bar associations seeking publicity for free or nominal fee non-commercial CLE's related to poverty law, public interest law, and related ethics issues are encouraged to inquire about listing opportunities. Call the VSB Pro Bono Office at (804) 775-0522 or 21 or e-mail petrini@vsb.org.

VSF's Annual Bar Leaders Institute, will be held in Richmond on March 6 and in Abingdon on March 10. Agendas are listed in this issue of the *Virginia Lawyer* magazine on pages 46–47. VSB Bar Council member Glenn C. Lewis chairs the bar's Access to Legal Services Committee. He will discuss model local programs and opportunities for further voluntary bar involvement in implementing pro bono at the Richmond program, where he will also moderate a panel on effective bar leadership within the bar and the community. Registration information is posted on the bar's Web site at www.vsb.org.

The Roanoke Law Library is located inside the Roanoke City Courthouse at 315 Church Avenue in downtown Roanoke. One of a number of such institutions in Virginia (*see the Fairfax story on page 41*), the law library is open to both the public and attorneys. It is staffed by two full-time employees who will assist patrons in their use of the library. Staff cannot perform legal research or give legal advice. The library serves the entire southwest Virginia region and is open Monday through Friday, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Computer workstations contain several CD-ROM products including Virginia Law on Disc, the United States Code Service, United States Supreme Court cases, the Code of Federal Regulations, Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals and Federal District Court opinions from Virginia. Numerous commercial research guides are also available to assist patrons. Call (540) 853-2268 for more information or visit the library's Web site at <http://www.ci.roanoke.va.us/depts/library/law.html>.

The Virginia Coalition of Community Mediation Centers has nine member offices (*see Norfolk entry on this page*) across the Commonwealth. The programs offer dispute resolution services to the public through certified mediators on a sliding fee scale. The Department of Dispute Resolution Services, Office of the Executive Secretary, Supreme Court of Virginia publishes a quarterly update, *Resolutions*, on these programs and on issues of interest to the mediation community. The publication also lists conferences and ADR training opportunities. For more information, including a list of the Coalition members and lists of certified mediators by circuit with levels and substantive area(s) of certification (i.e., mentor status, general and/or family, etc.), visit the Court's Web site at www.courts.state.va.us and click on "Mediation".

HomeFires, Ltd., is a new tax-exempt non-profit organization of investigative professionals that assists parents, the law enforcement community, and missing children organizations on a pro bono publico basis. The group of owners of licensed, bonded, and insured private investigation agencies collaborates through Internet communications to assist as volunteers in the safe recovery of a limited number of missing children who meet select stranger abduction, parental or family abduction, or certain juvenile abduction criteria. Information is available on the group's Web site at <http://www.homefires.org/main.shtml>.

National Leadership Grants for Libraries and Museum Collaborators: Lawyers whose pro bono work includes service to libraries or museums, see page 25.

Bar Associations and Legal Aid Recognize Outstanding Pro Bono Efforts

The following is a small selection of the pro bono work undertaken by Virginia Lawyers in the past two years. An album of photographs marking regional ceremonies for pro bono work was last published in the February 1998 Virginia Lawyer. The Bar's Special Committee on Access to Legal services

invites the legal aid community to send the magazine notices and photographs of similar ceremonies throughout the year. Look for this page and updates at the vsb Web site, (www.vsb.org), on its pro bono link.

Virginia Bar Association Names Pro Bono Publico Award Recipient

The Pro Bono Publico Award, which honors exceptional public service by VBA members, has been awarded to Nina Olson, founder and executive director of the Community Tax Law Project.

The Community Tax Law Project was established in 1992 to provide low-income Virginians with pro bono legal representation in tax disputes, to increase public awareness and encourage public debate about policy and practice issues affecting low-income taxpayers, and to educate low-income individuals about their rights and responsibilities as taxpayers. The project offers an annual CLE program and publishes *The Community Tax Law Report*, of which Olson serves as editor-in-chief.

Ms. Olson completed a two year term in June as Chair of the Virginia State Bar's Special Committee on Access to Legal Services.



Contributions of LINC Founders Noted

The Legal Information Network for Cancer (LINC) was co-founded by Richmond Attorney Phyllis C. Katz and University of Richmond Law Professor Ann C. Hodges in 1996. Housed at the University of Richmond Law School, LINC serves more than 300 cancer patients per year with legal and business problems that are related to their prolonged medical treatment.

LINC's legal service delivery plan, successful volunteer recruitment activities, and pioneering fundraising efforts are viewed as models by legal nonprofits across Virginia. Phyllis Katz, an attorney in the firm of Sands, Anderson, Marks and Miller was honored at a luncheon meeting by the Bar Association of the City of Richmond on January 21 for her work with LINC. She received the association's 2000 Pro Bono Publico Award.

Ms. Katz continues as a hands-on advisor to the VSB Access to Legal Services Committee in its efforts to promote dialogue between legal services nonprofits and community foundations and other potential grantors.



Roanoke area attorneys recognized

Piedmont Legal Services PAI Coordinator Anne Barlow (center) with Monica Taylor and Barry Fogel, were among 21 Roanoke area attorneys recognized for substantial pro bono contributions at a Law Day ceremony sponsored by the Roanoke Bar Association in May 1999. At the same ceremony, Victor S. Skaff, III of Gentry, Locke, Rakes & Moore was presented the Pro Bono Award for contribution of 244.7 hours of pro bono time to Legal Aid clients during the preceding year.

Blue Ridge Legal Services

In a *pro bono* case for Blue Ridge Legal Services that took six years to complete, Bill Shmidheiser (pictured to the right) successfully sued the Department of Education on behalf of his client. Both client and Shmidheiser were rewarded appropriately by the court. He was acknowledged with a *pro bono* award from BRLS at the local bar's Annual Professionalism Ceremony and Dinner in October 1999.



David Hatmaker has been an active volunteer for BRLS from its inception in 1982 until his recent retirement. As BRLS formed a successful partnership with the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Bar Association, Hatmaker served as one of four "team leaders," where he attended weekly case acceptance meetings and then assigned referrals to members of his team. He is pictured with BRLS Executive Director John Whitfield (left).

Northern Virginia

The Northern Virginia Pro Bono Reception was held on June 3, 1999. The event is sponsored by the Arlington, Alexandria and Fairfax bar associations and Legal Services of Northern Virginia. One attorney from each jurisdiction is specially honored for his or her outstanding work. This year's ceremony was hosted by the Arlington Bar Foundation. It was organized by its president, Betty Thompson. Honorees were: Tad Furlong for his work with Legal Services, teaching the monthly workshops in Fairfax; Richard Miller, for his work in Alexandria, handling pro bono consumer matters; and Mary Beach for her work on social security cases in Arlington. Shown, below, (R to L) are Virginia Chief Justice Harry L. Carrico, Betty Thompson, and George W. Campbell, Jr.



Henrico County Bar Association

Volunteer attorneys were honored on December 3, 1999 for their participation in the Henrico County Bar Association's pro bono project. Organized in conjunction with Hunton & Williams' Church Hill office in Richmond, the project assists the underserved in Henrico County with free or low cost legal services. Pictured (from left) are: John Mizell, Jr., Tracy Hamilton, Thomas Duffy, Edward Whitlock, III, Thomas Johnston, Johnson Kanady, III, Paul Georgiadis, Brett Zwerdling, George Hettrick, Sharon Horner, Cassandra Reynolds, Dan Rosenthal. Not pictured, but also honored for participation in the program were: Charles Adams, Donna Berkeley, Thomas Blue, Russell Booker, Janet Brown, Michele Chiocca, Judson Collier, E. Olen Culler, J. Brad Davis, Anne Dobson, Craig Dunkum, Kenneth Dickinson, William Francis, Jr., Timothy Freshly, Jeffrey Galston, Walter Hooker, Augustus Hydrick, Jr., Sharon Jacobs, Bryce Lambert, Robin Morgan, Stan Preston, Jr., Derrick Rosser, Rose Sampson, Arthur Shaheen, Victor Shaheen, Sherri Thaxton, Jr., T. Vaden Warren, Jr., Preston Wigner, Michael Weise, Matthew Zwerdling.