

Career Challenges, Mentor Prepare Dahnk for Bar Leadership



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At a council meeting of the VSB a year ago, then President-elect Jeannie Dahnk said that she felt her status with the bar was not unlike the feeling she had as a high school platform diver about to take the plunge—she knew where she was starting from and generally where she wanted to land.

Now, the new president says she knows exactly where she is because of the preparation and inspiration of retiring President Bernard J. “Ben” DiMuro. They both crisscrossed the state in the past year to meet with local bar leaders. Dahnk says that DiMuro “took all of the bullets”—when there was criticism of the bar and “shared the wealth”—when there were accolades for bar

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accomplishments. DiMuro, she says, acted like a “citizen-lawyer president” as her mentor.

Dahnk’s earliest impressions of lawyers were from television programs and from memories of attorneys in the community. Her parents pointed out professionals in and around Arlington, Virginia, where she grew up, noting that lawyers were good people—highly-regarded, thoughtful, active citizens.

Dahnk thought that she might make a good cop. When she took off a year after completing George Washington University and before entering law school at the College of William & Mary, she “gophered” for a law firm and saw a difference between policemen

and attorneys: Cops were almost always active on the “back end” of an issue, and attorneys could choose when to intervene.

“It struck me one day that what I really wanted to do was to be on the front end *or* in the middle *or* at the end—to have the flexibility of picking where I wanted to be; lawyers did make those choices, and it was appealing to me.”

Dahnk says that there was a period in law school when she thought that she was not going to make it. “This was at a point when every day I was under water, and I thought ‘Why am I here?’”

“Then, Virginia Powell, (a prominent Richmond attorney and past member of bar council) said, ‘You know, Jeannie, most of us become lawyers because we want to help people,’ and I thought, that’s why I’m here. I want to be a part of the solution. I want to be a lawyer.”

Her former law partner (now president-elect of The Virginia Bar Association)

Frank Thomas said of Jeannie’s ascent to the leadership of the bar, “She is a woman for all seasons. Jeannie is a remarkable combination of intelligence and a competitive spirit coupled with a wicked sense of humor.”

“Jeannie follows in the tradition of recent bar presidents: She is keenly interested in advocating on behalf of, and serving, Virginia lawyers—especially those in small firms. She brings to this position extraordinary energy and a strong dedication to our profession. Her enthusiasm is simply contagious,” DiMuro said.

Jeannie P. Dahnk was installed as the 65th president of the Virginia State Bar on Friday, June 20, 2003, at its annual meeting.

Jeannie P. Dahnk

On the Legal System

“Law is the basis on which we do everything. The system of justice that we have figured out and that we apply on a daily basis, as we fine-tune it, is the social contract that we have all agreed to follow.

“Democracy had some rough goes of it, but nobody ever—throughout the judicial system—threw it out. Apparently, it was a fairly-reasoned, balanced system. It really is made by the people, because, if it weren’t, you would have to be forcing it on the public. People may disagree with it, people may want to change it—but for the most part, it works well.”

On Platform Diving

Dahnk was inducted into the George Washington University Sports Hall of Fame for her diving records. What were her most challenging dives?

“It’s been so long and I hit my head so often diving that I am hard pressed to give a coherent answer. As I remember it, I was very good at pitching myself backwards and into reverse. My mother says this is no surprise to her. Probably my best dives, or as they say on SportsCenter, the “money dives,” were a back 1½ with 1½ twists from three meters, or a reverse 1½ with 1½ twists from three meters. I made a decent showing with a back 2½ somersault in tuck from three meters, but it was not as consistent as the other two. The back 2½ was my most difficult dive. I’m sorry I don’t remember the degree of difficulty; you could just say it was in the “extra hard” category (at least for me). The tower (10 meters), well let’s not go there . . . the tower was thrilling—just really tough, especially getting used to the ever so slight, but ever so very important, timing differences. This was an unexpectedly good training ground for the practice of law.”

Bar Service:

Dahnk has been actively involved in local and state bar service since 1989. She was elected to bar council from the Fifteenth Judicial District in 1996. She is currently a member of the VSB executive committee and is also a member of the Budget and Finance Committee. She served as the vice chair of the Task Force on Public Access to the Attorney Disciplinary System, as a member of the Mid-year Legal Seminar Committee as well as president of the Fifteenth Judicial District Bar Association. She is currently the representative from the Virginia State Bar Council on the Gender Bias Task Force. Dahnk is also a member of the American Bar Association and a Master in the George Mason American Inns of Court. She has been a faculty member of the bar’s professionalism course, a mandatory class for all new bar admittees.

Education:

Dahnk received her B.A. in 1981 from George Washington University and her J.D. in 1985 from the Marshall-Wythe School of Law, College of William and Mary.

Law Firm:

Dahnk is a member of the firm of Glover & Dahnk in Fredericksburg, Virginia. Glover & Dahnk is a civil litigation practice law firm.

Personal:

She is married to William E. Glover, and they have two sons: Samuel K. Glover and E. Maxwell Glover.