

Helping Our Communities Weather the Storms of Life

Adversity has the effect of eliciting talents, which, in prosperous circumstances, would have lain dormant. —Horace

Jimmy F. Robinson Jr., 2005–2006 Young Lawyers Conference President



Hurricane Katrina devastated areas of Alabama, Louisiana, Florida and Mississippi. Hopes and dreams of thousands have been shattered, lives changed forever. We have all been encouraged to give generously to humanitarian agencies helping in the relief efforts. We have witnessed the power of the human spirit as it responds to an unimaginable American tragedy. Nevertheless as lawyers—protectors of human rights and guardians of the American way—we can and must do more. I challenge all who are in a position to do so to volunteer to give pro bono advice and services to those in need who have evacuated the areas impacted by the storm and are relocating to Virginia.

For many victims displaced by Katrina, access to legal services will be a large part of their personal rebuilding efforts. For most, these services will start a normal life. The services that lawyers provide will enforce and protect their rights. Though access to legal rights and protections are important to all, these rights are critical for Katrina survivors who depend on legal entitlements for essential needs such as food, housing, education, clothing and medical care.

There are no words capable of describing the immeasurable damage to property, life and the human spirit that Katrina unleashed. This tragedy offers an opportunity for the legal community to respond to the needs of our fellow Americans. The legal profession can set an example to others in the private sector—as well as provide an opportunity to enhance the reputation of our profession.

The Young Lawyers Conference is no stranger to helping our communities. Last year, my predecessor and friend, Savalle C. Sims, challenged Virginia young lawyers to pick up the baton of service that has been a hallmark of our great profession. Savalle recognized that the rich legacy that lawyers have enjoyed in our society is based on our compassion and service to others. She embraced the accomplishments of our organization and its leaders and paved the way for initiatives designed to meet the needs of our community and profession. Our focus this year is to ensure access to the tools that have in the past and will in the future better our society. I am honored to have the opportunity to lead an organization that is committed to providing access to legal information that can strengthen our communities and better our profession.

This past summer, the YLC board undertook several initiatives to expand our communities' and profession's access to legal information. One task is to partner with the JustChildren program of the Legal Aid Justice Center in Charlottesville, to complete a handbook on youth rights. The handbook will identify and explain the rights of juveniles in three important arenas—schools, police custody and courts. Through this initiative, the YLC hopes to provide a guide to youth and their parents about basic rights and how to protect them.

The 2005–2006 initiatives will join the roster of YLC programs that were successful. These programs received awards including several awards in August 2005 from the American Bar Association's Young Lawyers Division. The VSB YLC received second place in the "We the Jury—A View from the Box" program; first place for the Voter Education Pamphlet; first place in the Oliver Hill/Samuel Tucker Prelaw Institute; and first place for the *Docket Call* newsletter. We are proud of these accomplishments that clearly show the YLC's dedication to strengthening our communities and bettering our profession.

I became involved with the YLC to ensure that legal tools are made available to all communities, including those far below the poverty line that resemble the one I was born and raised in. I am so proud to see the tireless efforts of young lawyers across Virginia who, through their volunteer hours and personal contributions, change lives.

For those of you who have not joined our efforts, the YLC stands ready to welcome you into the fold and to share the wonderful rewards that service brings. Our programs are outlined on the YLC's Web page at www.vayounglawyers.com. If you are no longer a "young" or new lawyer, I encourage you to support the YLC, to support our programs, to support young lawyers who participate in the YLC and to share the benefits of service with young lawyers in your community.

The YLC board and I hope to meet many young lawyers across the commonwealth. We are planning receptions with our meetings and programs throughout the year. I encourage you to attend, and I look forward to joining you in helping our communities. ☺