

REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT



JOHN A. C. KEITH

In the 1998–1999 bar year the Virginia State Bar continued to concentrate its efforts on preparing to insure that its primary mission of regulating the profession will be effectively carried out in the new millennium. As the reports that follow demonstrate, the operation of the Virginia State Bar is the product of splendid effort by many dedicated individuals, both full-time staff and volunteers. The following paragraphs summarize some of the accomplishments of the past year.

1. **Virginia Rules of Professional Conduct.** After years of incredibly hard work by our committee, the Supreme Court of Virginia granted our petition to approve the new Virginia Rules of Professional Conduct, effective January 1, 2000. The adoption of these new rules in the ABA Model Rule format is a major step forward for our disciplinary system and will provide a solid base for the continuing evolution of the ethical standards that govern our professional existence. The leadership, wit and indefatigable efforts of Denny Dohnal and Tom Spahn deserve special mention.
2. **Pro Bono Efforts.** Much attention was paid to our professional obligation to provide pro bono publico services to needy individuals as well as charitable and civic organizations. In response to a request from the General Assembly, a detailed and encouraging report of the many and varied pro bono activities going on in Virginia was compiled and submitted. The persistent efforts of the Special Committee on Access to the Legal System produced a resolution by Bar Council in February, 1999 encouraging and supporting the development of circuit and regionally-based initiatives to address unmet legal needs through pro bono legal services. The resolution pledges the support of the Virginia State Bar to nurture these nascent efforts. The Lewis F. Powell, Jr. Award went to Freddie Mac in recognition of its superlative pro bono contributions, and we hope that other corporate citizens will be inspired to follow this great example.
3. **Disciplinary Matters.** Our fine Bar Counsel, Barbara Williams, has done an admirable job in leading our Disciplinary Department during a time of scarce resources and increased workload. In addition to managing the press of business, as is detailed in her report, Barbara has successfully made the case that the VSB cannot effectively carry out its primary mission without additional resources. The possibility of further opening the disciplinary process to the public was studied again, and again no change was made. The bar will have to continue to grapple with the delicate balance between the public's need for information and the rights of those accused of professional misbehavior.
4. **Finances.** The Budget and Finance Committee, under the steady hand of Bill Cremins, has struggled this year with the ticklish issue of a dues increase. The surplus criticized by JLARC having been decimated by the dues reduction, the Virginia State Bar was faced with either drastically cutting back on our capability to regulate the profession, or substantially increasing dues. By year-end the committee had examined every nook and cranny of VSB finances with a "no sacred cows" attitude. While a dues increase seemed inevitable, the committee recommended that the membership be fully apprised of the height and depth of the situation and that it be given a full opportunity to register any and all reaction to every activity supported by dues dollars.
5. **Computer System.** Several years ago, we recognized that the Virginia State Bar had to upgrade our computer capability and that our inadequacy in that respect was having a serious impact on our ability to do our job. This year the Computer Committee, under Bill Wilson's fearless leadership, proceeded with the unexpectedly large task

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of listing in detail precisely what each department requires the computer to do, thus beginning to shape a new system that will meet our needs in every aspect of the bar's operation. A request for information went out to vendors, producing a response that was bewildering in that the cost estimates varied as wildly as did the technological solutions. I am hopeful that we are closing in on this very important target and will adopt a concrete plan in the coming year.

6. **Publications.** The Publications/Public Information Committee brought forward a public education campaign aimed at improving the image of lawyers, which was developed in cooperation with the Virginia Commonwealth University's Adcenter. The black-and-white ads were brilliantly designed to give examples of ways in which lawyers help people with the problems of life. I congratulate Tom Spahn, the chair of our committee, and Roger Lavery of the Adcenter and thank them for their hard and successful work.

I have thoroughly enjoyed my term as President. The work of the Virginia State Bar is important not only to lawyers, but to the public we serve, and that fact makes the work especially challenging and rewarding. The cooperation between volunteers and staff is one of the most remarkable features of bar work, and volunteers really do a tremendous amount of work at great personal sacrifice, but our wonderful bar staff is always there, working behind the scenes, keeping things moving along smoothly, and letting the volunteers take the credit. I close by expressing my thanks to the entire staff of the Virginia State Bar, especially Tom Edmonds, Executive Director; Mary Yancey Spencer, Deputy Executive Director; Susan Busch, Assistant Executive Director for Administration; Bet Keller, Assistant Executive Director for Bar Services; and Barbara Williams, Bar Counsel. ❀