

## Know Thy Enemy

by George W. Shanks, 2005–2006 Conference of Local Bar Associations Chair



From Sun Tzu to the modern corporate world, the admonition to those who would do battle has been to consider the opposition “the enemy.” I would like to suggest that the application of the military model to the practice of law has been as cancer to collegiality within the bar. It is said that those we would destroy we first must demonize. No wonder that interpersonal relations between practicing attorneys tend to be strained at best. At worst, they become matters of common currency in the public arena, perpetuating the image of lawyers as attack dogs.

I confess I do not laugh aloud at lawyer jokes (not that some of them aren't humorous in a dark sort of way), nor do I forward lawyer jokes e-mailed to me. In this day of political correctness, I view any attack on a group as mean-spirited and an indication of poor upbringing, poor education or both. Perish the thought that we engage in repartee which is the verbal equivalent of eating our own. Walt Kelly could have been speaking to our noble profession when he had Pogo say, “We have met the enemy and he is us.”

What does this have to do with the Conference of Local Bar Associations? Quite possibly, everything. As the one conference within the organized bar that reaches every geographical corner of the commonwealth, every area of practice and every size firm, we have it within our grasp to heal our image and ourselves.

In truth, the healing has already begun. The publication *Legally Informed*,

begun under the aegis of Bernard J. DiMuro when he served as president-elect of the Virginia State Bar in 2001, lists the civic works of local bars across the state, detailing thousands of hours annually of donated time, effort, knowledge and leadership. This level of giving is remarkable for both its generosity of time and spirit and its stunning contradiction of the popular image of lawyers as self-serving, money-hungry pariahs. And those who toil together for a common good create a reservoir of goodwill toward each other that outlasts the project's moment. Two ideas come to mind: First, if your bar's project, large or small, sustained or one-time, is not listed, it should be. In this context, the chestnut “no good deed goes unpunished” applies only if you fail to bring it to the public's attention. Second, make it an annual project of your bar to see to the distribution of *Legally Informed* throughout your local community to newspapers, libraries, schools, civic organizations, senior centers, chambers of commerce and churches. For copies, contact the Virginia State Bar at (804) 775-0521; e-mail [clba@vsb.org](mailto:clba@vsb.org); or download a copy from the VSB Web site: [www.vsb.org/site/publications/](http://www.vsb.org/site/publications/).

The conference is doing much more to promote understanding within the profession. Over the past two years, the CLBA has worked closely with the Chief Justice's Commission on Solo and Small-Firm Practice. The result of that cooperative effort has been the highly successful joinder of the Conference's Bar Leaders Institute with the Supreme Court's Solo and Small-Firm Forum

and Town Hall Meeting. This summer the CLBA was honored to accept the invitation of Chief Justice Leroy R. Hassell Sr. to become the permanent home of this bar program. These presentations focus on matters of special concern to solos, including law office management, lawyer impairment and ethics. They provide attorneys across the state with the opportunity to ask the Chief Justice about matters of professional concern.

This openness within the profession is unique to Virginia, and it could not have come at a more critical time. As we ply our skill on a daily basis, our society is a study in cataclysmic forces of change: preservation of civil liberties versus overt efforts to destroy our democracy; a transition from a majority population of Anglo-European descent to a heterogeneous, pluralistic society of unassimilated cultures; an economy subject to sharp dislocations because of global forces far beyond the control of individuals, states or nations. We need to see each other as allies in times of historic challenge, not as adversaries on a small stage. Indeed, in discussing the pressures which confront all of us, we as a profession develop an appreciation that we are more alike than we are different. That we are not enemies. We are colleagues.

This year the Conference of Local Bar Associations will travel to localities for information, inspiration and fellowship. I want you and your local bar to be part of the experience. ☪