

## President's Message

by Jon D. Huddleston



# What's in a Name? A Noble Idea

I HAVE MISPLACED SOMETHING and it seems like I have been looking for it forever. Don't you hate that feeling? You can describe it. You swear you saw it recently, but maybe it was longer ago than you thought. Actually, I don't think I am the only one who has misplaced it. I think many of us have. Perhaps most in our profession have. Has anyone seen the term "citizen lawyer"? It seems to have vanished.

I googled it and didn't get a whole lot of returns. I looked on Wikipedia. It's not there. There's a lot of great information on Wikipedia, but you won't find "citizen lawyer." Where did it go and what are we going to do about it?

When our country was in its infancy, George Wythe and Thomas Jefferson helped bring the teaching of law to the universities with the notion that law students should be educated not just in the law, but also as leaders in their communities, states, and country. Indeed, lawyers played a seminal role in the founding of our country, the development of our states, and the direction of our communities. Are we needed any less today than at our founding?

Certainly, the business aspect of our profession has shifted monumentally. My friend and good lawyer John Bredehoff tells me it was Emory Buckner, a New York attorney, who invented the concept of the billable hour several decades ago. To be sure, billing requirements have inexorably removed many attorneys from public service, from community involvement, and too often, from home and hearth. Have we lost our way? Have we lost our souls?

I don't think we have. Over the past several months, I have traveled across our commonwealth meeting good lawyers who epitomize the concept of the citizen lawyer. We have shown some on our Big Picture video series: lawyers like Bill Schmidt from Fairfax, who every Christmas season for seventeen years has been ringing the bell each holiday weekend for the Salvation Army; or lawyer legislator Jennifer McClellan, who makes a difference in her community and in her profession every day; or Petersburg lawyer Joe Preston, who is trying to help get a library built in a community that has waited too long.

Or maybe it's Clinton Clancy from Lawrenceville, who has done so much for access to legal services in Brunswick County. Imagine accepting more than eight hundred court appointments in one year, as Clinton did in 2008. Why don't more people know about the Santa in the Square project that the Roanoke Bar Association puts on each year? This past Christmas, they invited more than four hundred homeless children and their families, and ensured that all were fed and all left with presents. Thanks to the forty lawyers who made this possible. Do you realize what Judge Thomas Shadrick and the lawyers of Virginia Beach have accomplished with a program to mentor elementary students in a distressed school in that city?

I submit that the citizen lawyer is indeed alive and well in Virginia. So let's reclaim the concept. Let's promote not only the term but also the ideal of the citizen lawyer. What if we claimed

responsibility for writing the definition on Wikipedia? What if the shining examples of the citizen lawyer through history and today could be shown? Why can't an old-school concept catch up with today's technology?

Let's make it happen.

To do that, we must continue to tell the story. The Virginia Is for Good Lawyers project has proven to be an excellent start. But our roots go much deeper. Justice Harry L. Carrico's championing of the Professionalism Course for newly admitted lawyers has attempted to inculcate the highest aspirations of professionalism and the importance of civic involvement for more than two decades.

Our Conference of Local Bar Associations has for years recognized bar leaders and associations for excellent projects and programs in their communities. The CLBA also provides resources and contact information to share ideas between bar associations—big and small, urban and rural—to maximize the impact of the programs.

Virginia lawyers continue to live the concept that Wythe and Jefferson nurtured more than 250 years ago. So let's bring the term back to the everyday professional lexicon. Let it show up on Facebook, on Twitter, on YouTube, in our newsletters, and this time next year, on Wikipedia.

What do we have to lose but a great descriptor of a marvelous concept?