What’s Your Interest? There’s a Bar Association for You

In addition to local bar associations, there are twenty-seven specialty and statewide bar associations in Virginia. These range in size from the Virginia Bar Association and the Virginia Trial Lawyers Association to the smaller Virginia Creditor’s Bar Association and Local Government Attorneys of Virginia. A complete list of Virginia’s bar associations is available through the Conference of Local Bar Associations at http://www.vsb.org/site/conferences/clba/view/local-statewide-bar-associations/, with links to those that have websites.

Here is some information on Virginia’s statewide and specialty bars:

Virginia Trial Lawyers Association — Formed in 1959 to enhance the knowledge, skills, and professionalism of trial lawyers. Most members practice in small- or mid-sized firms and spend a substantial portion of their time in the courtroom. The VTLA provides continuing legal education for attorneys and paralegals. It sponsors a “Road to Virginia Justice” educational program about civil and criminal justice, a bike safety and helmet project, an Excellence in Journalism Award, and law student trial competitions.

The VTLA also represents members’ and their clients’ interests in the Virginia General Assembly.

Virginia Creditor’s Bar Association — Formed in 1990 to promote standards and understanding among persons involved in debt collection and a forum for exchange of ideas between their offices across the state. They publish Bill of Particulars and hold two conferences and local seminars every year.

The Virginia Creditor’s Bar Association was founded in 1990 and promotes the professional interests of attorneys engaged in debt collection; promotes standards and understanding among persons involved in debt collection; and encourages honor and integrity to client, the courts, and the community.

The American Academy of Elder Law Attorneys’ Virginia chapter maintains an e-mail discussion group and sponsors an annual CLE program. This year the program will focus on the role guardians ad litem play in contested guardianships. In addition, the VAELA has worked with the Virginia Bar Association’s Elder Law Section on the Uniform Guardianship Statute, and they previously worked on the recently enacted Uniform Power of Attorney Act.

The Virginia Association of Defense Attorneys was formed in 1968. It is a valuable source of educational opportunities, information sharing, and networking for Virginia attorneys who are dedicated to the defense of civil actions and the promotion of fairness and integrity in civil justice. Through its Journal of Civil Litigation and its CLE programs, the VADA tracks trends in litigation procedure and the law involving insurance policy coverage, medical malpractice, professional liability, workers’ compensation, product and toxic torts, auto and transportation liability, and corporate and commercial litigation. The VADA’s philosophy is to provide active support for legislation, primarily but not exclusively procedural in nature, that creates a level playing field for its members in the defense of their clients.

The Virginia Association of Commonwealth’s Attorneys and the Virginia Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers serve attorneys on both sides of criminal litigation. The VACA provides training and advocacy for Virginia’s 120 elected commonwealth’s attorneys and their approximately 645 assistants. The VACDL’s members include lawyers who provide criminal defense, one-third of whom
are public defenders and their assistants. They hold an annual CLE program and maintain an e-mail group where members can discuss issues, obtain sample pleadings, and ask procedural questions. The VCCDL also runs a mentor program through which new lawyers around the state are matched with experienced criminal defense lawyers who are familiar with the courts, prosecutors, and judges in their jurisdictions.

The Hispanic Bar Association of Virginia and the Asian Pacific American Bar Association of Virginia Inc. were both formed in the 1990s. The Asian Pacific Bar was formed to be a voice of the Asian Pacific American community and raise awareness of the changing faces of the legal community. The Hispanic Bar sponsors programs that enhance the professional development of their members and raise awareness of important issues facing the Hispanic and immigrant communities in Virginia. Its president, Juan E. Milanes, is a member of the CLBA Executive Committee.

Common threads run through all specialty bars: they are dedicated to improving the professional development of their members; they educate the community at large about law and the legal profession; they publish newsletters, bulletins, and magazines; they meet for education and fellowship; and many lobby the General Assembly. Each of our twenty-seven specialty bars — large and small — offers Virginia attorneys a place to find like-minded colleagues for education and camaraderie. Check them out and join one today.