

# Minority Membership and the YLC

by Daniel L. Gray, 2007–08 Young Lawyers Conference President



Before her formal appointment as executive director of the Virginia State Bar, I met with Karen A. Gould in Richmond. I was readying my agenda for the upcoming year and talked with Karen and Virginia State Bar President Howard W. Martin Jr. about the bar's priorities. During that meeting, Karen asked the Young Lawyers Conference to look at minority retention in the bar. While the YLC has very active involvement by minorities and women, this does not translate, apparently, into ongoing bar service once YLC members age out of the conference.

The YLC has commissions that examine legal issues and make recommendations. The Pro Bono Commission examined pro bono work last year, and reported its findings in *Virginia Lawyer*. The YLC also has the Women and Minorities in the Profession Commission, so I called upon Mollie C. Barton of Richmond to reconstitute the commission, study the issue, and report back to the YLC with its findings and recommendations on minority retention in the bar. We will be sharing those findings in an upcoming article.

My initial response to Karen's request was to reiterate the energetic work the YLC does to recruit minority lawyers. For example, its Minority Pre-Law Conference invites undergraduate students from all Virginia colleges to participate in a weekend seminar designed to expose students to law school and legal life.

## The Pre-Law Conference

- conducts panel discussions on traditional and untraditional careers in the law;

- presents mock law school classes;
- invites law schools to its law school fair;
- presents seminars on financial aid, the character-and-fitness requirement for bar admission, the law school admissions process, and the Law School Admission Test.

This may be the only program that helps students decide whether to pursue a legal career. Through these seminars and in social events during the conference, students talk with members of the legal elite who are generous with their time and money. The YLC recently expanded the pre-law conference, which took place in February 2008 at the George Mason University School of Law and was guided by Samantha Ahuja, and at the Washington and Lee School of Law on April 4 and was guided by chair Brooke C. Rosen.

The YLC also hosts a bench-bar celebration dinner that honors recent women and minority appointees to the Virginia bench. Honorees in Richmond this year were Judges Sarah J. Denke, Lauri L. Hogge, Karen V. Burrell, Roxie D. Holder, Janine M. Saxe, Lisa A. Mayne, and Cheryl O. Higgins. Senior Justice Elizabeth B. Lacy presided, assisted by chairs Alana N. Malick and Mollie Barton.

We reach younger students with the annual Oliver Hill/Samuel Tucker Pre-Law Institute, a week-long summer law camp aimed at minority high school students. It generally takes place at the University of Richmond, recently under the guidance of committee chairs Yvette A. Ayala and Rasheeda N. Creighton. The students have a law

school experience that culminates in a mock trial.

The YLC has been in the vanguard in recent years by actively pulling minority lawyers into our ranks. While the drop-off in retention likely is due to a number of factors (we'll wait to see what our commission reports), as a young lawyer about to age out of the YLC, I can certainly say that efforts to retain lawyers of my generation aren't what they could be.

In the winter 2008 *Docket Call*, our YLC newsletter, I gave our members ideas about how to become involved in the bar. Most of those ideas came from former VSB executive director Thomas A. Edmonds, who talked about continued involvement at our leadership conference in Richmond in September. I ended that article by taking our YLC members to task for any tendency to expect the bar to reach out and grab us. Instead, I exhorted them to make themselves known to their VSB Council representatives.

Young lawyers need to be better at "breaking in" to the bar after the YLC. That is not to say that the bar can't do more to retain former YLC members. Having sat in with the Virginia State Bar Council and Executive Committee, I can attest to their demanding work. Part of the council's job, though, ought to be making sure it can replenish its ranks with new talent and new voices. If the council is concerned about retaining minority members, it should make minority membership a priority. It has a group of lawyers ready and waiting to be retained.