

President's Message

by Manuel A. Capsalis



The Clubhouse Turn

THIS IS MY LAST PRESIDENT'S COLUMN. For whatever reason, it has proven the hardest to write. Perhaps it is because there is so much I could write about. Being president of the bar is a whirlwind tour. It offers a wonderfully unique opportunity to be a witness to nearly every facet of our profession. It presents the challenge of leading the twenty-eight thousand active members of the bar, as well as thousands more associate, retired, and judicial members, and dealing with a seemingly limitless number of issues, large and small. It is exhausting and exhilarating. It is demanding, and immensely rewarding. It is the ultimate privilege, and I still cannot believe my good fortune in being given the opportunity.

I have traveled the commonwealth, meeting and working with fellow attorneys and the bench from Alexandria to Abingdon, from Millwood to Norfolk. The caliber of practitioners and judges I have met across the state is undeniably impressive. They are proud stewards of the Rule of Law, defenders of justice, and strong leaders in their communities. I know of no other profession as committed to public service, or any which accomplish so much for the collective good.

Perhaps the most educational experience for me has been the opportunity to speak at various law schools, colleges, and high schools throughout the state. The students give me great faith that this next generation of leaders will do us proud. They are smart, and despite the problems the world currently presents, they are positive and full of hope. I always thought it was, at best a cliché to talk about how it is harder growing up now. I was

wrong. It is true. Life really was much simpler being a kid way back when. I look back now at the world when I was growing up, and I compare it to what our kids are facing, and it is a wonder how they will cope. After speaking at so many schools this year, and meeting so many students of every imaginable background, I have come to believe that they will do just fine.

It is particularly fascinating to witness how this younger generation accepts life on different terms. Generations before them, including mine, often saw people through the prism of race, or color, or heritage. I certainly experienced this growing up in North Carolina and Virginia, and if truth be told, it affected me on some level. But where older generations reacted to one's color or race, so many of these kids just see people. They have enormous potential, and if we are willing, perhaps we can learn something from them.

I have witnessed firsthand the excellence of bar staff. They are committed, efficient, and the unknown catalysts of our profession. Despite the economic hardship the bar has faced as a government agency, today it is run more efficiently and productively. We now have a balanced budget, with no diminution in services. Just as she proved as president of the bar two years ago, Karen A. Gould is an impressive and innovative executive director. She is a rock of stability, and the bar will thrive under her continued leadership.

Working together with staff are the many volunteer attorneys in bar service who selflessly give of their time for the greater good of our profession. We currently have forty-seven confer-

ences, sections, and committees at the state bar, not to mention task forces, working groups and subcommittees, all of which comprise these dedicated practitioners. They are truly inspiring in their commitment.

It is important to recognize the job of the office of bar counsel. Public protection is the core mission of the bar. We are the only self-regulated profession in Virginia. As the regulatory agency of the Supreme Court of Virginia, the bar is tasked with the obligation of protecting the public. Through hard work and innovation, bar counsel is handling more cases than ever before, with greater efficiency and with a consistent and desirable quality of service. At the beginning of my term, I challenged the bar to fully review our public protection efforts, and to determine how and where we could do a better job. The results of bar counsel's answer to this challenge are resoundingly clear. Ned Davis and his staff are getting the job done, and they are doing it quite well. Our core mission is being fulfilled.

I am proud of our renewed commitment to diversity, and I hope we will move forward with the simple goal of promoting the opportunity of inclusion and in seeking to make our profession and the judiciary more reflective of the demographics of our ever-changing society. This is a cause worthy of the effort, and I firmly believe we have it in our ability to make a difference and in turn, to best serve Virginia.

This year we enhanced our focus and efforts in providing accessible pro

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bono and otherwise affordable legal assistance to those who serve in our military and their families. I am very proud of our efforts in this regard, and it is clear that the results will be tangible and long-lasting. We also embarked on an amazing of efforts to provide assistance in the creation and development of the Afghan Bar Association. Upon the request of that bar, as well as our country's military legal team stationed in that war-torn country, our bar rose to the challenge, and there is now in place a team of more than fifty Virginia attorneys ready to offer legal advice and assistance when called upon. This is truly a wonderful opportunity that we embraced.

In the years to come, I look forward to the growth and vitality of the Virginia Law Foundation, the philanthropic arm of our profession. As a member of its board of directors, I see great promise for the future as it seeks out opportunities to enhance, through grant funding, access to justice, legal education, and the Rule of Law within our Commonwealth. It is a critically important component of our obligation as an honorable profession, and I believe it has the potential to substantially and positively affect many who are in need among us.

Much has been accomplished this year, of which I admittedly played a very minor role. Time and again our bar rose to the occasion. In a matter of a few weeks, I will hand the reins over to my friend, Jon D. Huddleston. I can tell you with confidence that he will do a great job, as will his successor, Irving M. Blank.

Until then, I thank you for the honor of serving. It has been a privilege. ■