

President's Message

by Doris Henderson Causey



Senior Lawyers Are the Heart of the Law

SENIOR LAWYERS KEEP everything flowing throughout every area of the law. Where would we be without senior lawyers? They are the protectors of our democracy. “We stand on the shoulders of giants,” says Judge Gerald B. Lee. We all know a more seasoned lawyer who took the time to teach us how to practice law, celebrate our victories, and listen to our defeats.

They are the true teachers of the practice of law, civility, and the do’s and don’ts of the profession. I remember when I first began to practice and how scared I was to go to trial. It was a more senior lawyer that pushed me out the door and said, “go — you’re ready.” When I won, my clients were so happy, and I was too. The senior lawyer and I celebrated, but it only lasted a few minutes because there was yet another case to prepare.

W.T. Mason has long been the heart of the Dominion Bar Association (ODBA). If you are an ODBA member, you know W.T. Mason and he has taken your picture. He has pictures of at least 40 years of history. He has led the way and taught many generations of lawyers so many invaluable lessons. Although he has no children of his own, many lawyers consider him the father of ODBA. There’s not an ODBA meeting where he is not present. He has preserved history through his pictures and stories. He is a giant. Every organization and every lawyer has their giant(s) — those that make

a difference and inspire you to make a difference.

Senior Law Day is a way for all bar associations to give back to the seniors in their legal community. You plan it and they will come. The Senior Lawyers Conference has a blueprint of the Senior Law Day program. Most of the work is completed. All a bar association has to do is host it. I would like to encourage all local bar associations to have a Senior Law Day program. Bob Hawthorne is the chair of the Senior Lawyers Conference for the Virginia State Bar and an excellent resource for those who are interested.

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Senior lawyers are the best mentors. Today, both the senior lawyer and the young lawyer have so much to learn from each other. The young lawyer teaches the senior lawyer all about technology and the latest gadget, while the senior lawyer teaches the fundamentals of law practice and what to expect when trying a partic-

ular case. Every law firm and every young lawyer should have a senior lawyer to learn from.

Judge Marilynn Goss is my seasoned lawyer mentor. As I began to practice, I could always count on her to guide me in the right direction when preparing for trial. And just like they did in law school, she asked me enough questions to spark my thoughts of what path to take with my case. She can truly tell you some stories about my early days of practice. Law school and the practice of law are two different animals. Marilynn knows of my grandiose victories and my embarrassing defeats. Nevertheless, she is always there to debrief me and listen to my arguments.

Marilynn has been a great mentor and has taught me so much about the practice of law. From early on, she took me to ODBA meetings and introduced me to everyone. They became my family. She made sure that I volunteered with legal aid and got involved with local and state bar associations. The VSB and the ODBA were mandatory. She kept me sane in times when I would freak out about the smallest thing. She would say calmly: “Well it’s not the end of the world. You made a mistake. It’s okay. Now you know not to do that again.” Additionally, she and Henry McLaughlin (former legal aid director) always knew the answer

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to the most arcane legal question and could always tell me exactly what to do and, most importantly, what not to do.

If you are a senior lawyer interested in pro bono, the new VSB emeritus rule allows retired attorneys to do pro bono work without the need of a supervising attorney. Emeritus status attorneys do not pay bar dues and can now do pro bono work without supervision. This rule went into effect on March 1, 2018.

As this is my last president's message, allow me to say that it has been an honor to serve as the 79th president of the Virginia State Bar. I would like to thank everyone for their support and kindness shown during my presidency. I hope that I have brought more attention to the needs of low-income Virginians and the need of all legal aid programs. Additionally, I am hopeful that the need for diversity and inclusion has gained some momentum within the profession.

It has truly been my honor to serve as the first African-American and the first legal aid attorney to be president of this historic organization. Hopefully, it will not be another 79 years before we elect someone else like me to serve as president. Thank you to those that took my challenge and volunteered to serve on committees and run for council. It's you that make the difference in the lives of the citizens of Virginia and the legal profession.