

What's Your Favorite Bar? It's Usually the Local One

by Deirdre Norman

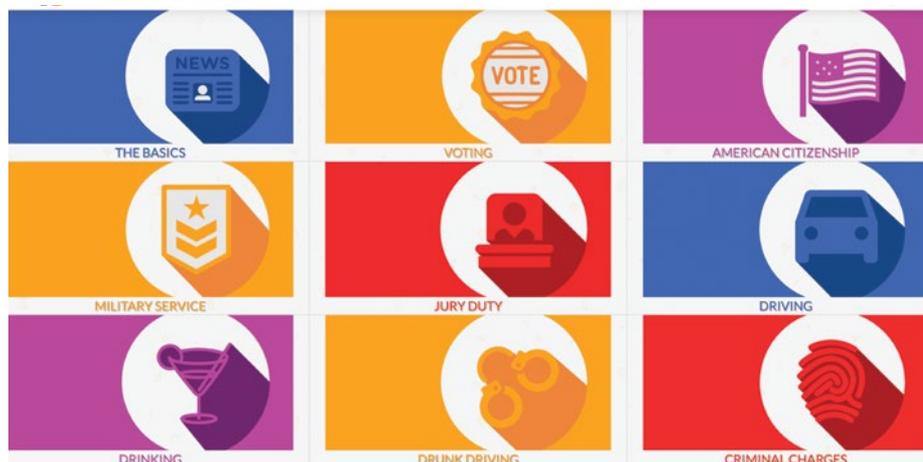
About 52,000 Virginia lawyers comprise the VSB, but it is often the smaller bars, ranging in size from just a few people to the couple thousand members of the Fairfax Bar Association, where lawyers make friends, network, share experiences, and get involved in their communities. Local bars are the grassroots, front-line organization of the legal profession.

The Conference of Local and Specialty Bar Associations (CLSBA) serves as the umbrella organization that helps to connect these myriad and far-flung bars to the Virginia State Bar. The current chair of the CLSBA, Bernard Alan McGraw of Altizer Walk & White PLLC in Tazewell, comes from the Tazewell County Bar Association, in the far western corner of the commonwealth along the West Virginia border. Says McGraw, "We provide a face for the Virginia State Bar to the rest of the commonwealth."

Paulette Davidson of the VSB has worked with the CLSBA for 21 years and says lawyers join local bars for varied reasons but common threads include networking, mentoring and making connections with your legal peers. "Some just get together for a holiday party once a year," she says, "while others meet regularly and are very active in their communities." Davidson mentions the South Hampton Roads Bar Association as an example of a bar that encompasses "young trailblazers, civil rights leaders, the judiciary, and private and public practice attorneys" amongst its ranks.

Davidson says that lawyers in local bars look out for each other and offer each other support as well. "I once had a young lawyer call me in tears. He felt like he had wasted his time and money going to law school and was so frustrated. I was able to connect him to the Chesterfield County Bar Association, his local bar, where there are people who

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are more than willing to help another lawyer find a job or work on a professional problem."

Not surprisingly, those that get involved with their local bars often contribute to the VSB as well. The CLSBA chair position has served as an incubator of sorts for future VSB presidents, including Manuel A. Capsalis of Arlington, Jon D. Huddleston of Leesburg, George Warren Shanks of Luray, and Edward L. Weiner of Fairfax among those who have served as heads of both the CLSBA and the VSB.

The CLSBA has also printed the *So You're 18* handbooks for over 20 years. These free handbooks are provided to local bars, schools, courts, DSS offices, and more to help young adults understand their rights and responsibilities. This year, the CLSBA created an interactive website that they hope will be another valuable asset to the program.

The CLSBA currently counts 124 bars in its membership, including numerous local and specialty bars, plus the Hispanic Bar Association of the Commonwealth of Virginia, the Asian Pacific American Bar Association of

Virginia, Inc., the Old Dominion Bar Association, and the Virginia Women Attorneys Association. Across the commonwealth, these bars devote countless hours to pro bono, outreach, professional development, and other programs that enhance the legal profession while helping their communities.

Examples of projects done by local and specialty bars:

- Access to Justice Summit
- Color of Justice Program
- Community Service Brochures
- Community Service Programming
- Jazz4Justice
- Mentorship Program with Young Attorneys
- Mentorship Program with Local School
- R.I.S.E. – Reading in School with Esquires
- Santa in the Square
- Toys for Tots

For more information on any of these projects, please contact Paulette Davidson at davidson@vsb.org.