

President's Message

by Jon D. Huddleston



Virginia is for Good Lawyers

Any time you have an opportunity to make a difference in this world and you don't, then you are wasting your time on this Earth.

— Roberto Clemente, Pittsburgh Pirates outfielder

LAST MONTH I HAD THE PRIVILEGE OF participating in the Virginia State Bar Admissions and Orientation Ceremony for newly admitted lawyers. My function was to sponsor the admission of the out-of-state candidates who had passed the February bar exam. This was my second opportunity to participate in this ceremony (third, if you count my own admission in the fall of 1986).

This ceremony is a grand and sobering occasion — an inexorable rite of passage from being a law student to being a lawyer. What is the future for this group of disparate individuals? Perhaps this will be a remarkable class. Certainly, it will produce some brilliant lawyers. I suspect it may have its share of judges and professors. Inevitably, a few may run afoul of our professional and ethical mandates, but I hope I am mistaken. What the new lawyers have in common is the promise that lies in their future. How will they shape their practice? What kind of lawyers will they become? Will they be able to maintain balance in their lives — between the competition of family and career, clients, and community? What kind of citizens will they be? Will they recognize what it means to be a Virginia lawyer?

For many years, I have had the honor to participate on the faculty for the Professionalism Course for Law Schools. This program, conceived and nurtured by Judge B. Waugh Crigler and championed by Judge J. Martin Bass and the late Judge David T. Stitt, takes lawyers and judges into each of our law schools to meet with first-year law students to introduce the concepts

of civility and professionalism to students at the beginning of their education. It is a wonderful program.

The difference between being a lawyer and being a law student is startling. From a personal accomplishment standpoint, is there anything better than being a law student? They are smart, dedicated, and destined for success. There is not a grandmother around who is not immensely proud. And then suddenly, upon passing one rigorous and comprehensive examination to earn admission to the bar, their public stature dissipates and they join the vilified. How does this happen?

My friend Robert E. “Bob” Battle, a noted Richmond lawyer and comedian, has posited that lawyer jokes have become so ingrained in our culture that we know the punch lines by heart: *A Doberman pinscher. Not enough sand. New Jersey got first choice. There are some things white rats just won't do.*

Apparently, attorney humor is not becoming passé. Recently, in a popular comic strip, I viewed another less-than-subtle bashing of our profession. The tag line was “How to get lawyers to smile for a group picture?” Pan to the photographer: “Say fees!” That one is sure to light up the room. Attorneys as mercenaries: an easy recipe for a chuckle.

We are an easy target for many reasons. We deal in conflict and chaos, misery and trauma. We seldom see people at their best. Often we see them in times of their greatest distress. We champion both popular and unpopular causes. We are appointed to represent the worst in our society. Sometimes we try to help divide per-

sonal property or establish custody of children for families that have crumbled. Sometimes high-profile, often mundane, we tackle many difficult and arduous tasks. Often, we are our client's only ally.

We dwell in an adversarial system that inherently causes friction. Conflict can sometimes appear to be a zero-sum game. It is easy to see why the public may perceive us as part of the problem. I concede that while some in our profession are problem-creators, the overwhelming number are problem-solvers.

The amoral and parasitic stereotype enshrined in comic strips and late-night talk shows are, simply put, not the lawyers I know. They are not the typical Virginia lawyer. Most attorneys are excellent stewards of our profession, are of high moral conscience, and dedicate themselves selflessly to their communities. Their stories should be the stereotype.

During the next year, I hope to introduce you to some of Virginia's good lawyers, who are unquestionably among her finest citizens.

A Doberman Pinscher

I know two prosecutors in my area who work every weekend volunteering with animal rescue. One has worked virtually every Saturday for five years, the other for nearly three and a half, after being recruited by the first. Imagine giving between 150 to 250 Saturdays to your community. They walk dogs. They do background checks and home visits for potential adoptions. They

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transport dogs to events such as Barktober Fest in hopes of helping animals find new homes. I cannot in a few sentences do justice to their commitment and passion to this cause or to their value to our community.

My hope this year is to introduce you to many of our lawyers throughout Virginia who are walking the walk.

Not Enough Sand

He is an excellent divorce lawyer. He is a formidable adversary, always highly prepared. He is one of the best attorneys in the Shenandoah Valley. And at least once a month his team staffs the soup kitchen in his area to help feed the homeless. He has done this for years. Hundreds of citizens of his area have benefited from his hands-on devotion to the community. Moreover, I can write pages about the benefits directly resulting from thousands of dollars he has helped raise for local scholarships.

New Jersey Got First Choice

For more than thirty years, a skilled Richmond lawyer has served the Boy Scouts of America. He is an Eagle Scout. During a recent eight-year stint as scoutmaster, he has helped produce thirty-seven more Eagle Scouts. He has served on regional, national, and international Jamboree committees. He has seldom taken a personal vacation that did not involve some type of scouting activity or outing. His scouting résumé alone far exceeds the length of this article. He has been recognized by the Defense Research Institute for his community service and commitment to scouting. Hundreds of youths throughout Virginia are the better for his efforts.

There Are Some Things White Rats Just Won't Do

...Like raising hundreds of thousands of dollars for local charities. My friend, a northern Virginia personal injury attorney, has devoted countless hours and energy to the betterment of the local community. For fourteen years, he and

his wife have raised money to support the Foundation for Recurring Respiratory Papilloma, an insidious life-threatening disease that attacks primarily children. For ten of these years, the chief fundraiser has been a hockey tournament at the Verizon Center. He also hosts a law day program that helps support his local bar foundation. For years, his Jazz for Justice program has benefited not only the local bar foundation but the music program at a local university. It doesn't end there. The local Jewish Community Center, the American Cancer Foundation — the list goes on. He recently joked that if he had the money he had helped raise for various causes, he would be wealthy. I submit that he is extraordinarily rich. We are likewise enriched for being his colleagues.

The Big Picture

These are a few vignettes of some of the members of our profession. There are many others. No other profession is as selflessly devoted to this community as ours. Lawyers invariably seek to give back. They serve on local boards. They build houses for Habitat for Humanity. They raise money. They coach our youth. They do it because they have a passion for this cause. They do it because

they feel it is the right thing to do. Invariably, they do it anonymously, seeking neither attention nor acclaim.

My hope this year is to introduce you to many of our lawyers throughout Virginia who are walking the walk. In July, we will begin sharing a series of interviews with Virginia lawyers. We have a YouTube site, <http://www.youtube.com/user/VirginiaStateBar>, for the display of their interviews. I hope you will enjoy meeting many of our best over the next year. I know but a small number of these dedicated community servants. If this describes a lawyer in your area, let me know. We'd love to try to tell his or her story.

I have also asked several lawyers to write essays about their lives as lawyers to be posted on VSB.org over the next year. I hope I can introduce our bar to many more attorneys who speak and write eloquently about their practice, their profession, their community, and what drives them as people. I hope you will find the message of these Virginia lawyers both interesting and inspirational.

Shortly before I graduated from law school, before my own passage from student to member of the bar, one of my professors noted that as lawyers we were being given the keys to the kingdom. He meant that we would have opportunities to help our communities and its citizenry in ways previously unavailable, simply by virtue of our admission to the bar. He envisioned that we would have the opportunity to make the difference in this world that Roberto Clemente deemed so essential. Join me over the next twelve months in meeting many Virginia attorneys who truly are "difference makers."

Virginia Is for Good Lawyers.