

Thank You, Tom

by Howard W. Martin Jr., 2007–08 VSB President



Men make history, and not the other way around. In periods where there is no leadership, society stands still. Progress occurs when courageous, skillful leaders seize the opportunity to change things for the better.

—Harry S. Truman (1884–1972)

It is a fact that Harry Truman never knew Tom Edmonds. But Truman's words above accurately and completely foreshadow the value of Tom Edmonds's tenure at the helm of the Virginia State Bar. For more than eighteen years, Tom has defined the word "leadership," and not for a moment under his guidance has our legal "society" in Virginia stood still. With courage, skill, integrity, vision, and professionalism, Tom has indeed seized opportunities to lead the bar toward change for the better. I am one among many who consider it a privilege to have served with him. His retirement on December 31 this year will mark a significant milestone in the life of the bar, which, coincidentally, was created the year that Tom was born.

If I tried to tell you everything that Tom has accomplished as Executive Director of the bar, I could fill many pages of this magazine. But I must mention several hallmarks of his career as an agent of change. These signature items were accomplished under Tom's guidance, through the efforts of the volunteer bar leaders and the bar staff:

- Collaborative work with the Supreme Court of Virginia to implement educational programs for solo and small-firm practitioners as well as lawyers who represent indigent defendants in criminal cases
- Implementation of an online legal research tool for use by all members of the bar
- Growth of the professional regulatory staff to respond to increased disciplinary workloads
- Reorganization of the disciplinary system to open hearings to the public and to include lay members on all hearing panels
- Quadrupling of the dollars in the Clients' Protection Fund and increasing the individual award maximum that can be paid by the fund
- Progressive moves to improve efficiency and productivity in carrying out the work of the bar, including relocation and expansion of the bar's Richmond offices and installation of a modern and improved computer system that has led to better use of technology
- Accomplishing a beneficial change of the bar's endorsement to a new professional liability insurance carrier

While serving the three primary missions of the VSB (professional regulation, public access to legal services, and improving the legal and the judicial systems), Tom has made the

Virginia State Bar a model across the nation. Just a few weeks ago at a Southern Conference of Bar Presidents meeting, two other state directors told me that if they had an idea for their own bars, they always checked to see what Virginia was doing on the issue before moving ahead. Virginia has benefited from Tom's calm, thoughtful, prompt, and intelligent assessment of the issues that needed attention. Tom will leave the Virginia State Bar in far better shape than when he arrived here in 1989.

As many of you know, Tom's career successes have not been confined to his native Mississippi nor his adopted state of Virginia. From his Marine Corps days to school at Mississippi College and then Duke Law School, into the rarified world of academia as professor, administrator, and dean, he has excelled and performed so well that institutions and positions have sought him out. He has really never applied for a job! His command of all things bar-related propelled him to the top of the National Association of Bar Executives, which he led with distinction as president in 2005–06. In recognition of his national and state leadership, Tom was awarded NABE's prestigious Bolton Award at the annual meeting of the American Bar Association in San Francisco earlier this year.

As much as we will miss Tom, I must not allow this opportunity to pass with-

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out mentioning perhaps the most attractive of Tom's attributes, one whom we will sorely miss: his wonderful, engaging, articulate, and lovely wife, Martha. The two of them have been such a positive influence on the VSB and its stature, in Virginia and across the nation. They leave our bar well-positioned for the future, and well thought of.

Tom's shoes clearly will be difficult to fill. However, I am delighted to report that at the VSB Council meeting on October 19, 2007, the Executive Director Search Committee, ably led by past president Phil Anderson, recommended selection of Karen A. Gould of Richmond as the next Executive Director. The council enthusiastically and unanimously approved Karen, the Supreme Court of Virginia approved the selection, and Karen started work on December 1. We are excited to have Karen aboard.

On the evening of October 18, the bar council hosted a dinner in honor of Tom. There were a number of moving tributes, including one by Justice Donald W. Lemons of the Supreme Court of Virginia. Justice Lemons very graciously in addressing Tom said, "You were always accessible; you were always responsive; you were always competent; you were always professional." These are wonderful characteristics to which all of us, as lawyers, should aspire.

Tom, you have devoted the best part of your career to your work for and with the Virginia State Bar. You have been an inspirational leader and a great



At Thomas A. Edmonds's retirement party, Justice Donald W. Lemons conveyed the Supreme Court of Virginia's appreciation for the almost nineteen years Edmonds served as executive director of the Virginia State Bar.

"You were always accessible; you were always responsive; you were always competent; you were always professional," Lemons said. "For your service to the commonwealth, . . . the citizens of Virginia and, more particularly, the bench and bar owe you a debt of gratitude."

mentor to the bar-officer volunteers who, selected anew each year, arrive on your doorstep every June. I personally want to express my sincere appreciation for the contributions you have made to the Virginia State Bar, to me,

and, over these past eighteen years, to those who preceded me. Thank you. We wish you "fair winds and following seas" as you enter the next phase of your very remarkable life. ☪

Bar Council Honors Outgoing VSB Executive Director

Thomas A. Edmonds, the Virginia State Bar's executive director for more than eighteen years, was celebrated for his service by the Virginia State Bar Council on October 18 during its meeting at the Norfolk Marriott Waterside.

Edmonds will retire on December 31, 2007.

The party was attended by justices and judges from the Supreme Court of Virginia and Court of Appeals, Congressman Robert C. "Bobby" Scott and Delegate Jennifer L. McClellan, many past VSB presidents Edmonds has worked with over the years, family

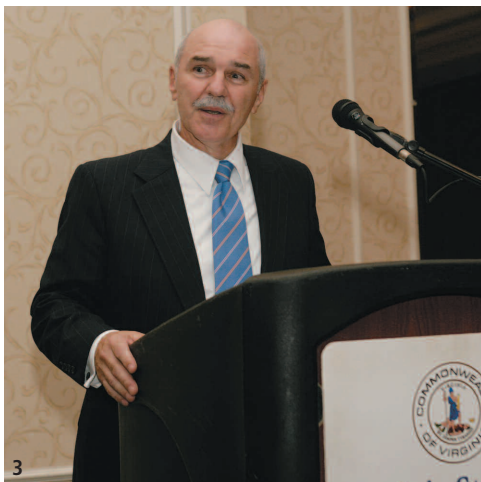
and friends of Edmonds, and members of the VSB executive staff.

McClellan (photo 1), president-elect of the VSB Young Lawyers Conference, presented Edmonds with a resolution from the General Assembly. The resolution stated that Edmonds has served the bar "with great vision and purpose and has unequivocally strengthened its mission to regulate the legal profession of Virginia, advanced the availability and quality of legal services provided to the people of Virginia, and assisted in improving the legal profession and the justice system."

John A.C. Keith of Fairfax (photo 2) and Joseph A. Condo of Vienna (photo 3) were among the past presidents who attended.

Edmonds's friends and family members (photo 4) included (from left) his wife, Martha Edmonds; his former pastor, the Reverend Joseph S. Harvard, and his wife, Carlisle Harvard, now of Durham, North Carolina; and Edmonds's son-in-law, Scott Thompson, and daughter, Amy Thompson.

Edmonds's reflections on his years with the Virginia State Bar are on page 8.



photos by Trevor A. Wrayton