I cannot help but believe the reason most of us chose the law as our life’s work is to help make a difference in the administration of justice in our communities while bettering the lives of our clients, our neighbors, and our loved ones.

Practicing law provides us with a unique opportunity to be good people and a special platform for doing great things. Accordingly, among the many reasons I am especially proud to join the Virginia Law Foundation (VLF) as its executive director is it gives me a chance be good and do great in important ways.

In fact, the VLF gives us all a wonderful opportunity to share our collective passion for the multitude of causes the foundation supports, while also sharing ourselves in ways that mean so much to so many and that can also be uncommonly fulfilling.

For example, throughout our first forty years as the philanthropic arm of Virginia’s legal profession and the parent organization of Virginia CLE, the VLF has provided sizable grants to a number of critical law-related projects across the commonwealth, including:

One Barn at a Time
(Being Good and Doing Great)

by Raymond M. White
• Central Virginia Legal Aid Society – Immigrant Domestic Violence Survivors Project
• CASA of Central Virginia – CASA Big Brother/Big Sister Collaborative
• Blue Ridge Legal Services – Legal Assistance for the Elderly
• ChildHelp Children’s Center of Virginia – Kids Court
• Greater Richmond SCAN (Stop Child Abuse and Neglect) – Child Advocacy Center
• Hispanic Committee of Virginia – Immigration Services Program
• Legal Services of Northern Virginia – Domestic Violence Pro Bono Program
• Offender Aid & Restoration of Richmond – Prostitution Rehabilitation Program
• Southwest Virginia Legal Aid – Community Training to Protect Victims of Domestic Violence
• Asian Pacific American Legal Resource Center – Asian American Equal Access Project
• Virginia State Bar Young Lawyers Conference – The Oliver Hill-Samuel Tucker Prelaw Institute
• The Women’s Center – Domestic Violence Audio-Visual Project
• Virginia Bar Association – Capital Defense Workshop
• Virginia State Bar – Spare The Child Video (Protecting Children of Divorce)
• Virginia Law Schools – Public Service Internships
• William and Mary Law School – Veteran’s Assistance Project
• Virginia Bar Association – Rule of Law Project
• Greater Richmond Bar Foundation – Justice Server Project
• Virginia Holocaust Museum – Nuremberg Courtroom Project

The VLF gives our legal community a chance to be good and do great as we try to make a difference in the lives of those without meaningful access to justice, and in the lives of those who may somehow feel that they have been left behind by the rule of law.

What personally grounds me in this concept comes from a simple story about my late father-in-law, John Bartel. A dairy farmer from the time he was in his teens, Mr. Bartel loved his work more than life itself. Still, the ups and downs of family farming brought him to a point where he eventually had to sell several acres at a time simply to pay the bills. And if that wasn’t enough, one summer night as the bills continued to mount, up the hill and out of nowhere a flame shot through the sky as the barn he helped build years ago burned to the ground. There was nothing left; this was the only time my wife had ever seen her father cry.

That next morning, as word of the fire spread across the county, a small army of farmers got off their tractors, left their milking parlors, and stopped baling hay. They grabbed hammers and saws, and started carting lumber in dusty pickup trucks as they gathered together to do whatever it was going to take to rebuild that barn.

They worked day and night to rebuild that barn, and when they were done, with hardly a word spoken, as none were needed, they patted my father-in-law on the back and made their way home. They didn’t need thanks; they didn’t need praise; they didn’t need a front page story telling the world how special they were. To them, what they did wasn’t special. They were simply good people doing something great — because that’s who they were.

This story matters so much to me because it shows the goodness of who we really are as a people, and how that goodness shines through when given a chance. It represents how we rise to the occasion for all the right reasons, and this is precisely what the VLF represents to me.

Our system of justice is second to none. But is it perfect? Let’s just say I think we all might agree there are still a few more barns that need to be rebuilt along the way to that perfection. That is why I am here, why I am writing this piece, and why I hope you find a way to join with us as the VLF crosses the commonwealth to help rebuild the occasional barn that needs fixing.

Yes, the VLF will always be there to support our own, and it is comforting to know that in the past we have been able to count on so many of you to be in there with us, hammering away until the job is done.

We are particularly proud that over the course of our forty-year history we have provided more than $23 million in grants to promote the rule of law, access to justice, and law-related education. We are prouder still that beginning last year we embarked upon an ambitious plan to expand our outreach to better assist even more Virginians with critical legal needs.

To that end we believe that through passion, people, and partnerships we can continue to make a difference, and along the way we are looking to old and new friends who share our passion and who would like to join with us — to stand together like those dairy farmers did — whether through financial donations, donations of time, or donations of expertise, so together we can fix what needs fixing as we strive to perfect our legal system, and help our communities and neighbors one barn at a time.

Raymond M. White is the executive director of Virginia CLE and the Virginia Law Foundation. He previously worked as a prosecutor and in private practice in New York, as chief operating officer of the National Institute for Trial Advocacy at The Notre Dame School of Law, for the Michie Co., and as a screenwriter in Los Angeles and songwriter in Nashville.