

Experience Worth Honoring

by George W. Shanks, 2007–08 Senior Lawyers Conference President



Being a senior lawyer confers distinctions. Principal among them is recognition by the bar that you have attained fifty-five years of age. While some might view this as unworthy of special note, the alternative is sufficiently stark by contrast to make for a moment of quiet rejoicing. The unfortunate corollary is that more often you find yourself saying the final goodbye to your colleagues.

And the distinction also is one of honor. Longevity tends to be equated with experience. In this profession, experience worth honoring can only be acquired by years of diligence and perseverance. Experience is a commodity to be savored and shared. While it can be imparted on an individual basis, lawyer by lawyer, town by town, county by county around the commonwealth, that is an inefficient system to share this most precious of gifts: the gift of knowledge.

The Senior Lawyers Conference is more than just a group of congenial lawyers and judges, more than just a collection of knees and hips and shoulders that don't work quite right, more indeed than the sum of its parts. The Senior Lawyers Conference is the group within the bar that, more than any other, can focus its voice and its resources for the benefit of the bar and the community it serves.

Consider what the Senior Lawyers Conference and its members are doing: The *Senior Citizens Handbook* is the most requested publication of the Virginia State Bar. It is a collection of articles and discussions of the areas of the law that affect our graying society. Topics include Social Security,

Supplemental Security Income, pensions, veterans benefits, Railroad Retirement Act benefits, the Food Stamp Program, federal tax relief, and real estate tax issues for the elderly. The book offers information on health care, housing, planning for the future, and protection of legal rights that affect finding a lawyer, consumer issues, age and disability discrimination, grandparental visitation and custody, elder abuse, and scams that target the elderly. Finally, the publication includes links to governmental and private agencies and organizations that assist the elderly with their needs.

The *Senior Citizens Handbook* not only serves the public. It belongs in each law office as a desk-side reference for the needs of every client who is a senior citizen, who contemplates becoming a senior citizen or who has family or friends who are senior citizens. It is a publication for all of us.

The Senior Lawyers Conference has not been content simply to publish this premier book. The conference also has developed a **Senior Citizens Law Day Program**. Conceived and spearheaded in 2005 by William T. Wilson of Covington, the program began with a picture-perfect demonstration by the Allegheny-Bath-Highland Bar Association and has since been replicated around the state. Using a panel presentation format, lawyers, judges, attorneys, and agency experts give in-depth information and answer attendees' questions. The program is excellent for any local bar that wants to put on a community-service project. And it is perfectly scripted by a blueprint drawn up by Bill Wilson.

But that's not all the conference is doing. The Senior Lawyers Conference can proudly claim the Herculean efforts of Frank Overton Brown Jr., the first to chair the conference. He is now the SLC's Web site and newsletter editor, and he has single-handedly made **planning for lawyer disability** a hot topic within the bar. Brown's program, "Protecting Your and Your Client's Interests in the Event of Your Disability, Death or Other Disaster," is available on request for presentation to local bars around the state. This is quintessential Frank Brown: Give him a call and he will happily schedule a continuing legal education-approved program for your local bar association, complete with computer-ready forms and a smooth delivery style that is as easy on the ears as it is on your wallet. He embodies what the Senior Lawyers Conference is all about: experience, collegiality, education, and professionalism.

And we do more: See our Web site—www.vsb.org/slc/index.html—for **more publications**: *Health Care Decision Making*, *Wills in Virginia*, and *Guardianship and Conservatorship Proceedings Regarding Incapacitated Persons*. The last, a twenty-nine-page downloadable booklet, contains all the basics a general practitioner requires to assist clients with the appointment of a guardian or conservator for a disabled adult.

Not bad for a collection of senior lawyers, proving once again that there is no substitute for experience.