

# NEWS Letter

ADVANCING THE INTERESTS OF VIRGINIA *Women* ATTORNEYS

## Improve your Virtual Presence!

### WebWeavers 2009 (or should we say 2.0 ?)

Mark your calendars for the second annual WebWeavers event on **Friday, September 25 and Saturday, September 26, 2009**, at the Lansdowne Resort in Leesburg, Virginia. This is a networking event designed to improve your social networking skills, marketing efforts, and website. Learn from the professionals regarding how best to leverage technology to develop and acquire new clients. Learn how to market effectively using **Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn**. Learn how to drive clients to your website and captivate them. Learn the tools necessary to successfully market your business in any economic climate. This will be a jammed packed and fun event, so save these dates.

**Going National...** The WVAA has joined the National Association of Women Lawyers ([www.nawl.org](http://www.nawl.org)) and the National Conference of Women's Bar Associations ([www.ncwba.org](http://www.ncwba.org)).

Specific information on benefits that flow through to the WVAA membership may be found on the respective web pages. These benefits include national networking opportunities by way of events, listservs, newsletters and conferences. Individual membership, when offered, is at a discount. All WVAA members are encouraged to take advantage of these memberships.

## *VLW recognizes, WVAA congratulates . . .*

The WVAA congratulates our members:

**Elaine Bredehoft   Anita Poston   Kristina Spitler   Barbara Williams**

For their achievements and service to our community and the recognition justly awarded to them as the

*Influential Women of Virginia*

by Virginia Lawyers Weekly

## CHAPTER UPDATES & NEWS . . .

The **Hampton Roads Chapter** of the Virginia Women Attorneys Association has membership from Newport News and Hampton on the Peninsula to Virginia Beach, Norfolk, Chesapeake and Suffolk on the Southside. This year we reached out, as we do annually, to the Regent University Law students. Lunch was provided as well as a question and answer session on practice choices. Six new members were added to our organization.

Submitted by *Virginia Brown*

On December 5, 2008, the **Northern Virginia Chapter** held its annual holiday reception at Meadowlark Gardens in Vienna, Virginia. Over 200 people attended this event which was held to honor those members of the local federal and state judiciary who were invested in their judgeships in 2008. We held our Ethics CLE on March 18, 2009 in Fairfax, Virginia. This popular breakfast CLE is known for its informal and interactive discussion among the participants and the panel which was moderated by Judge Paul Sheridan, who has supported this event for many years. We were delighted to have our panelists, Judge Karen Henenberg of the General District Court for Arlington County, Judge Teena Grodner of the Juvenile & (cont. page 2)

**President**, Kathleen J.L. Holmes, Esq.  
**President-Elect**, Chandra D. Lantz  
**Secretary**, Barbara M.R. Marvin, Esq.,  
**Treasurer**, Catherine M. Reese, Esq.  
**Immediate Past President**,  
 Sheila M. Costin, Esq.

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 Virginia Brown, Esq.

**Loudoun Chapter**

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**Northern Virginia Chapter**

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## If I Knew Then What I Know Now... *Bye bye, big law firm*

Almost exactly one year ago, I quit my job at a big law firm where I had practiced for over eight years. That was just months after my third child was born. Returning to work after maternity leave, I knew my time there was short. Life with three small children was not compatible with the billable and nonbillable obligations, and I was really tired of being in a completely male-dominated environment. Moreover, I had watched several of my male peers leave over the preceding months, some of the ones who joined the firm just before I did. I wondered if they left, why should I stay? I also had a friend (and former associate at my firm) who was a constant voice in my ear – when are you going to leave?

When I looked around at my options for other jobs, however, I decided I would never want to work at another big firm; in-house jobs were not readily available in my area; and although I thought I had many skills, I wasn't sure what kind of non-legal jobs might be out there.

One afternoon I had a crazy thought – open my own office. Crazy because I am not

exactly the rainmaking type. I remember telling my husband, "I think I'm going to do it." From that moment on, I was trying to figure out mal-practice policies, meet the yellow pages advertising deadline and set up a PLC. I never looked back. The day I resigned was one of the happiest days of my life, and I felt the weight of the world off my shoulders.

And guess what. With the help of a few clients that I brought with me, and an ever-growing base of new clients, I immediately succeeded. People – clients – actually came. I was turning a profit. At first it was just me and my laptop. Now I've doubled my office space and hired an assistant as well as a part-time bookkeeper. My only bumps in the road have been dealing with administrative issues like what kinds of software do I need to run my practice, who can fix my printer and how do I figure out payroll taxes?

I am completely energized and interested in the practice of law again. I have focused my practice on only a few areas – estate planning and administration, elder law as well as small business issues. And guess what. Being a woman has actu-

ally been an asset for me. In my prior big firm life, it never occurred to me that being a woman could be an asset. Turns out, when people are talking about estate and family matters and issues like dying, a woman attorney is an attractive option. My self esteem is through the roof, and I feel like I am really helping people.

So if I had known then (during the years with the big firm) what I know now, I wouldn't have stayed as long as I did. This morning before work, I played and read books with my toddler. I had time to snuggle my second grader. Today I took my five-year-old to lunch at his favorite restaurant. Those are the things that are important to me. Oh, and I also worked nine to five in my jeans. Take that, biglaw.

...*Robyn Smith Ellis* formed Robyn Smith Ellis PLC in 2008. She practices law in Salem, Virginia only one stoplight away from her home.

(cont from page 1) Domestic Relations Branch of the District Court for Fairfax County, Attorneys Beth Bittel and Kathy Holmes, recount and discuss certain ethical issues that had occurred in their respective careers involving clients, the courts and other counsel which helped to amplify and highlight the Virginia State Bar materials on this subject.

Most recently, the Northern Virginia Chapter held its legislative reception at the law offices of Venable, Baetjer, Howard & Civiletti, LP on April 29, 2009 in Tyson's Corner. The topic of discussion for our distinguished panel members, including Judge Jeffrey W. Parker of the Circuit Court for Fauquier County, Chief Judge Dennis Smith of the Circuit Court for Fairfax County, Chief Judge Kimberly Daniels of the Juvenile & Domestic Relations District Court for Fairfax County, Virginia House Delegate Vivian Watts and Virginia Secretary of Commerce Patrick Gottschalk, was the impact on the recent budget passed by the Virginia General Assembly on Court services. We were also fortunate to get the federal perspective on this issue from U.S. House of Representative Jim Moran.

*Submitted by Cynthia Kaplan Revesman*

The Loudoun Chapter has had a very busy and productive year- we have increased our membership by over 10%! All of this was accomplished through incredible and dedicated teamwork by all of our chapter members.

### CHAPTER UPDATES cont.

This year our chapter changed the format of the third annual Adoption Day program. Rather than doing the Adoption Day Ceremony and Information Fair all on the same day in November, the event was divided into two separate events. The Adoption Day Ceremony was held in November of 2008 but the Information Fair was expanded and moved to the Dulles Town Center Mall where there was more access to the public. The Adoption and Foster Care Information Fair took place on February 7, 2009. Ten adoption agencies and adoption-related organizations participated, including the co-sponsor, Loudoun County Department of Family Services. The Banneker Elementary School Chorus performed during the fair and a face painting artist provided wonderful smiling faces on children who stopped by.

In February we hosted a members only luncheon with Virginia State Bar President Manuel A. Capsalis. Manny came to speak to us about his "Diversity in the Bar" initiative. We had large turnout including most of our local judges. Manny's remarks were well received. He spoke about diversity as being inclusive of all members of our society and encouraged everyone to write letters in support of his initiative before the next Bar Council meeting in June. VWAA President-elect Chandra Levy took the time to drive up from Richmond to join us at this event. Thank you Chandra.

In March we began a new series called Lunches with the Loudoun Judges. Each of the three Circuit Court judges was invited on a separate date to speak to VWAA and Loudoun Bar members about best practices before the Court, ways to improve the functioning of the Court's work, and to engage in open dialogue with the members present. The lunches have been well received both by our local judges as well as by members of the bar.

In March our chapter nominated our founding member, Barbara S. Williams, to be named an Influential Woman of Virginia, an honor sponsored by the Virginia Lawyers Weekly. We are very proud and pleased that Barbara was chosen, along with 25 other women from the Commonwealth, as one of the inaugural class of Influential Women of Virginia. The honorees will be recognized at a lunch on May 14th at the Jefferson Hotel in Richmond. Barbara was President of the VWAA in 2000-2001.

Virginia Appellate Court Judge Jean Harrison Clements retired on January 1, 2009 and our chapter participated (cont. page 3)

**We're on the web  
at  
[www.vwaa.org](http://www.vwaa.org)**

## President's Message... Kathleen Holmes



Spring is once again upon us and in the VWAA, as in many other statewide bar associations, it is time to plan for the peaceful transition from one administration to another. Chandra Lantz, president-elect this past year,

has already been busy planning the Annual Meeting which will take place June 19 at Virginia Beach. In addition to voting in a new slate of directors, Chandra has also planned a reception and presentation by Caryn Foster Durham and Leslie T. Haley on the topic of "Web 2.0: Business Tool or Black Hole." If you don't know why you should attend, you should probably plan on being there. It promises to be informative about the opportunities and pitfalls of advertising your practice on the web. The reception that follows is always a wonderful opportunity to meet VWAA members from across the Commonwealth.

The Virginia State Bar Council will be voting on a Diversity Initiative proposal. In brief, the proposal before the Council is for the creation of an additional Conference – the Diversity Conference – to be added to the Young Lawyers Conference and the Senior Lawyers Conference. The Diversity Conference will have a seat on the Executive Committee and a vote at Council. Presently, voluntary bars like the VWAA are invited to Council meetings, but have no vote. Under the new proposal, if enacted, the VWAA could participate in the Diversity Conference and would share a (very diluted) vote with other

participants. The purpose of the Diversity Conference is to assure that the experiences of the broad swath of individuals who practice law in Virginia are available and accessible to Bar Council, and vice versa. The avenues for meeting that purpose would be through the direct participation in Bar Council, but also by serving as a clearinghouse for pipeline projects across Virginia.

The VSB's Diversity initiative, and Council's consideration of a Diversity Conference, is not uncontroversial. At a very simplistic level, it may be objectionable to permit members of voluntary bars will have "double" representative votes – one through local council representatives and one through the Diversity Conference. This structure is already in effect for the Young Lawyers Conference and the Senior Lawyers Conference. As with those precedents, it is highly unlikely that a single Diversity Conference vote among the many that are cast by all the representatives to Bar Council will be determinative of any matter.

It should also be fair to ask whether the creation of the Diversity Conference is an "affirmative action" type program. Its purpose is unabashedly to promote participation in Bar Council and in Bar committees of lawyers who historically have not participated at levels commensurate with their presence in the Bar as a whole: women, Asian-Americans, Blacks, Hispanics, and the disabled. The assumption by the Diversity Committees promoters is that by making diverse voices heard, and having diverse faces seen, the Bar as a whole will benefit by taking into account viewpoints that may not have been previously considered or given much weight. The hope is that Bar Council will be better informed when it makes decisions

and that the work of Bar Council will have meaning for more Virginia lawyers. More to the point, anyone is permitted to be a member of this conference.

There may be a concern that the willingness to undertake such a change now signals that prior Bar Councils were less well informed or that its activities did not hold the interest of some portion of the Bar. The Diversity Initiative should not be viewed in this way. Without doubt, the Bar has historically reflected the composition and concerns of its membership. But that membership has been changing and will continue to change in the future. Within the last two generations, change has come fast. Rather than wait to see if the overall composition of Bar Council representatives change overtime to reflect the diversity of the membership, the VSB is instead choosing an option of proactive inclusion to make sure that the many voices of the many lawyers in the Commonwealth are heard now. It is a bold step, but not a radical one. It is an initiative that should be embraced.

Bar Council will be voting on this initiative at its meeting in June. I encourage VWAA members to get in touch with your Council representatives and let them know your position.

Kathleen J.L. Holmes  
kholmes@williamsmullen.com

## CHAPTER UPDATES cont.

in arranging a retirement dinner for Judge Clements on April 4, 2009. VWAA also sponsored the dinner with a generous contribution. Judge Clements served in Leesburg for 14 years as a Juvenile and Domestic Relations Judge, then on the Circuit Court for the 20th Judicial Circuit for two years, then for 8 years on the Virginia Court of Appeals. She continues to serve as a senior appellate judge.

Submitted by Elizabeth Pendzich

The **Richmond Chapter** Holiday Party took place on Dec 18 and was a smashing success. We had @ 100 guests including 10 judges. The party honored all the female judiciary with special honored guest Cleo Powell. More details on our chapter website.

On May 1 we had a Law Day celebration. It made the news on the VLW Blog. From the blog... "Law Day had a happy ending for one law student at the close of a Law Day program that pitted Hollywood against "reality." University of Richmond law student Tiffany Ford is the winner of the first annual public-interest stipend offered by the Richmond chapter of the Virginia Women Attorneys Association. Ford plans to work on "health equity issues" at the Virginia Department of Health this summer. Originally from Richmond, Ford became interested in public policy issues related to health equity when she lived in a

low-income neighborhood in New York City, and saw the limited options residents had for following a healthy diet. A rising 3L, Ford expects to receive her law degree and a master's in public administration in 2010."

Darrel Mason spearheaded this event and did an awesome job. We are having a membership drive and have about 10 new members so far.

Submitted by Courtney Van Winkle



VWAA President-elect Chandra Lantz with Tiffany Ford at Law Day

Here in **Prince William** we are in our second year, and have accomplished the following:

We have regular well-attended monthly meetings and steadily growing membership; held a very well-received reception for the new law clerks for Prince William Circuit Court, all of whom promptly joined

our chapter; continued our practice of inviting judges for luncheon meetings; held a legal seminar last fall to raise funds, and have at least one more in the works for this September; will be orchestrating a silent auction again this year at the local Bar's Beat The Odds Presentation; will continue to try to find ways to raise funds and develop our membership.

Submitted by Mary McGowan

Cleo Powell  
Honored guest  
at Richmond  
Chapter  
Holiday Party



More photos on page 4...

## Contact Our Board of Directors

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## Virginia Women Attorneys Association

*The mission of the VWAA is to assist women attorneys in developing their professional practice and in achieving their potential, to bring about changes in the law and to affect public policy for the benefit of the women of the Commonwealth of Virginia.*

### W E L C O M E T O A F E W O F O U R N E W E S T M E M B E R S

Patricia P. Nagel	Office of the Appellate Defender	Richmond Chapter
Michele A. Mulligan	McSweeney, Crump, Childress & Temple, P.C.	Richmond Chapter
M. Farrah G. Deleon	Hirschler Fleischer, P.C.	Richmond Chapter
Kathleen M. Llewellyn-Duncan	Allen, Allen, Allen & Allen	Richmond Chapter
Suzanne Wade	Boleman Law Firm	Richmond Chapter
Sonya Duchak	Sage Solutions Group, Inc.	Northern Virginia Chapter
Patricia Ann Millett	Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP	Northern Virginia Chapter

## More news...and accolades

VWAA congratulates member **C. Kailani Memmer**, who was recently inducted as a Virginia Law Foundation Fellow. VLF Fellows are recognized as attorneys of integrity and character who have maintained and upheld the highest standards of the profession, are outstanding in the community and distinguished in the practice of law.

The Virginia State Bar Council passed a resolution on June 18th recognizing member **Darrell T. Mason**. From the resolution . . . "The Council of the VSB hereby recognizes the contributions that Darrel Tillar Mason has made to the legal profession in Virginia, commends Darrel Tillar Mason for her service as a Virginia lawyer and thanks Darrel Tillar Mason for her many years as a volunteer in the Virginia State Bar."



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*The VWAA was formed in 1981 to advance the interests of women attorneys in Virginia, to encourage their mutual improvement and social interaction, and to promote the interests of women under law.*

*The VWAA remains the only statewide bar association dedicated to the needs of women attorneys in Virginia as professionals and as women.*



Photos from the Northern Virginia Chapter's Legislative Update event... (left, bottom)



Tiffany Ford, Darrel Tillar Mason and C. Deneen Carl, Assoc. Director of Career Services at Univ. of Richmond during Law Day celebration

Adoption Day:  
 Loudoun County  
 Department of Family  
 Services booth with  
 Ebony Wright and  
 Francie Beverage



Loudoun Chapter's Carine Moegling, Christine Mougín-Boal and Karen Law at Adoption Day