



The Docket



Newsletter of the Association of Clerks of the District Courts of Virginia

Web page: www.vadistrictclerks.com

June, 2017

Thoughts on Public Service

By: *Laura Griffin*
Clerk, *Chesterfield J&DR*

National Public Service Recognition Week was celebrated May 7-13, 2017. Across the Commonwealth, Governor McAuliffe declared, "Virginia's public service employees dedicate much of their time, talent, and energy to serving our Commonwealth as teachers, police officers, judges, military personnel, health care providers, political leaders, and employees of various federal, state, and local government agencies." As judicial branch employees, we are lumped into the "employees of various..." category, which begs the question, does anyone know what court administrators or court employees actually do? How can we thank someone for their service if we aren't exactly sure what we're thanking them for?

Many of us go to work each day and come home without being able to truly discuss what we did that day with our family and friends. In small towns, if we began to describe our days, it might give away who we were talking about (even in a large town this might be true thanks to the media!). So, we go through our days, careers, and no one we interact with outside of work really understands what we do. People ask, and we can give generic descriptions (for example, "Do you know that person that sits by the Judge in a courtroom? Yeah, that's me."). After we've worked here a while, we begin to realize that *no one* really understands what we do other than the Judges, lawyers, deputy sheriffs, and each other....

Perhaps *this* is why we are still so ridiculously underpaid as a profession. If we are relying on an increasingly non-lawyer legislature to set our salaries, and they are no more informed than the general public, then they have no idea the myriad of duties we are expected to perform on a daily basis.

Cont. page 2, col 1

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 1 Thoughts on Public Service
- 1 Pay
- 2 Public Service, cont.
- 3-5 Association Officers, Committees and Reps.
Helpful Links
- 6 News/Conference Highlights/Awards
- 7 Overview of Judge Jarvis' presentation

Pay Raises

A 3% pay raise for all state employees goes into effect on July 10th and will be reflected in the August 1st pay check. The Association continues to work closely with the Office of the Executive Secretary to determine the best use of the additional \$3.5 million that was approved by the legislature.



For information about Public Service Recognition week and State employee discounts, visit these sites:

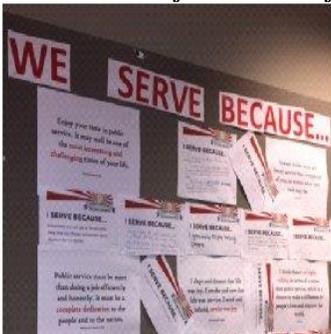
<http://publicservicerecognitionweek.org/>,
<http://www.dhrm.virginia.gov/employeeediscounts>

Continued from Page 1

As a profession, we need to do a better job educating the public about what we do. If your locality has a “citizen’s government academy,” ask if you can get on the agenda. Put your face out there and let them know what we do! Your locality surely has a media/public relations office. If your office has done something extraordinary, let them know (for example, current on expungement? Send them an email and tell them how many files you expunged. Do you know how many hearings your judge(s) heard last year or how many cases your office processed? Let them know! Get the word out there!). If your chief judge will allow you to have a social media presence (I suggest Twitter), tweet interesting things/facts about your Court.

So, back to the original point of this article: we are public servants. We serve an increasingly complex citizenry who demand increasingly advanced service. More and more litigants are self-represented, requiring more and more time at our customer service counters and on our phones. They want information at their fingertips as we have all come to expect in this age of immediate gratification via smartphone. Unfortunately, while our technology capabilities have increased greatly over the years, they are still light years behind other professions. Suffice it to say, it is more difficult to serve the public today than it has ever been. One of my personal favorite quotes about service is from Rabindranath Tagore: “I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and behold, service was joy.” When we have folks weeping in front of us, screaming in our ears, incensed that we cannot give them that information over the phone or email them that document, how do we find joy in public service? If you truly have a servant’s heart, then it comes easy (and you get used to the abuse!). But, for others, appreciation is key.

Chesterfield J&DR Office Project



Cont.

If no one thanked you during the week of May 7-13, 2017, then on behalf of the Association of Clerks of the District Courts of Virginia, I sincerely thank you for your service to the Commonwealth’s judiciary. Thank you so much for all that you do to serve the public and provide access to justice. Think about why you serve and why you do what you do. I asked my staff why they serve, and we made a bulletin board in the office to remind us on those hard days. The answers were extraordinary and made me even prouder to work alongside such devoted public servants. We celebrated with Jersey Mike’s subs for lunch one day, and had Krispy Kreme doughnuts for breakfast another. It wasn’t as much as I’d liked to have done, but it was relatively inexpensive split 9 ways (6 Judges, 3 managers). We also celebrated service milestones in 2017 with gifts ordered (at the Commonwealth’s expense) for those ending in a five or zero. It was a nice week.

Thank you, thank you, thank you to all of the members of this Association. Membership and participation are completely voluntary and there are a lot of people who work very hard to make things run smoothly and improve the lives of district court employees. Thank you to all district court employees for working so hard to run Virginia’s Courts, large and small. Public service is performed under a lens of intense scrutiny, and we only have each other to lean on. It makes tension in the office even more difficult to bear when we can’t lean on each other. Please think about this when you want to take offense the next time someone irks you in the office! Furthermore, when you think about why you serve, if your paycheck is the first thing you think of, then you are in the wrong profession. If you can’t think of any reason at all, then you are in the wrong profession.

In closing, this can at many times be a thankless job. Coupled with low salaries, high turnover, and increased expectations, we begin to feel like bolting for the doors! But, without you, the wheels of justice would grind to a screeching halt. Without you, the person needing protection might not get it as quickly. Without you, that person needing access to justice might not receive it. Thank you for all that you do, keep your chins up, and remember why you are serving. Your Association appreciates you immensely!



Association Officers and Representatives (July 1, 2017-June 30, 2018)

President:	Terri Rea, Clerk, trea@courts.state.va.us Harrisonburg/Rockingham J&DR
President Elect:	Rick Kahl, Clerk, rkahl@courts.state.va.us Roanoke City GDC
Vice President:	Laura Griffin, Clerk, lgriffin@courts.state.va.us Chesterfield JDR
Secretary/ Treasurer	Debra Hill, Clerk, dhill@courts.state.va.us Norfolk J&DR
Past President	Beneatha Simmons, Clerk, bbsimmons@courts.state.va.us Petersburg J&DR Court
<hr/>	
Region 1:	Aimee Plocar, Deputy Clerk, aplocar@courts.state.va.us Norfolk J&DR (Accomack, Norfolk, Northampton, Portsmouth, Virginia Beach)
Region 2:	Gail Fulcher, Clerk, gfulcher@courts.state.va.us Mathews/Middlesex GDC (Charles City, Gloucester, Hampton, King William, King & Queen, Mathews, Middlesex, New Kent, Newport News, Williamsburg/James City, York)
Region 3:	Mariah Belcher, Clerk, mbelcher@courts.state.va.us Franklin City Combined Court (Brunswick, Chesapeake, Emporia, Franklin City, Greensville, Henrico, Hopewell, Isle of Wight, Prince George, Southampton, Suffolk, Surry, Sussex)

- Region 4: Rhonda Daley, Supervising Deputy Clerk, Rdaley@courts.state.va.us
 Prince William GDC
 (Caroline, Essex, Fredericksburg, Hanover, King George, Lancaster, Northumberland, Prince William, Richmond Manchester, Richmond, Spotsylvania, Stafford, Westmoreland)
- Region 5: Stella Seaborne, Supervising Deputy Clerk, sseaborne@courts.state.va.us
 Petersburg GDC Court
 (Amelia, Appomattox, Buckingham, Charlotte, Chesterfield, Colonial Heights, Cumberland, Dinwiddie, Halifax, Lunenburg, Mecklenburg, Nottoway, Petersburg, Powhatan, Prince Edward)
- Region 6: Lindsey Short, Deputy Clerk , lshort@courts.state.va.us
 Page J&DR
 (Albemarle, Charlottesville, Clarke, Culpeper, Fluvanna, Frederick/Winchester, Goochland, Greene, Harrisonburg/ Rockingham, Louisa, Madison, Orange, Page, Shenandoah, Warren)
- Region 7: Ashley Gatchell, Clerk, agatchell@courts.state.va.us
 Fauquier GDC
 (Alexandria, Arlington, Fairfax, Falls Church, Fauquier, Loudoun, Rappahannock)
- Region 8: Tawny Hays, Clerk, tghays@courts.state.va.us
 Lynchburg GDC
 (Alleghany, Amherst, Augusta, Bath, Bedford, Botetourt, Buena Vista, Campbell, Craig, Highland, Lexington/Rockbridge, Lynchburg, Nelson, Roanoke, Salem, Staunton, Waynesboro)
- Region 9: Kimberly McKittrick, Clerk , Kmckittrick@courts.state.va.us
 Montgomery GDC
 (Bland, Carroll, Danville, Floyd, Franklin County, Galax, Giles, Grayson, Henry, Martinsville, Montgomery, Patrick, Pittsylvania, Pulaski, Radford, Wythe)
- Region 10: Kathy Vance, Clerk, kvance@courts.state.va.us
 Russell Combined Court
 (Bristol, Buchanan, Dickenson, Lee, Russell, Scott, Smyth, Tazewell, Washington, Wise/Norton)



Contacting Your Representative

As the Association continues to work on behalf of the District Court Clerks in Virginia, we'd like to remind you to contact your representative with any questions or concerns you would like us to bring up at the committee meetings. We are not always able to change things immediately but it is only with the input that we gather from you that we can determine which things are impacting your courts on a regular basis. Issues that come up again and again provide information about the types of things the Association should address. Please see the attached list of representatives for your area and feel free to contact your representative with any questions or concerns.



Committee Chairs

Budget & Finance Committee	Debra Hill, Norfolk J&DR, dhill@courts.state.va.us
CATS Committee	Barbara Shaw, Chesapeake, GDC, bshaw@courts.state.va.us
Historian	Stephanie M. Swift, Washington GDC, smstewart@courts.state.va.us
Legislative Committee	Barbara Shaw, Chesapeake GDC, bshaw@courts.state.va.us Ginger Webb, Buena Vista Combined, gwebb@courts.state.va.us
Membership Committee	Rick Kahl, Roanoke City GDC, rkahl@courts.state.va.us
Mentorship Committee	Vicki Tate, Wythe GDC, vtate@courts.state.va.us
Nominating Committee	Beneatha Simmons, Petersburg JDR, bbsimmons@courts.state.va.us
Parliamentarian	Christina Davis, Danville JDR, csdavis@courts.state.va.us
Programs & Education Committee	Rick Kahl, Roanoke City GDC, rkahl@courts.state.va.us Connie Comer, Tazewell GDC (Chair), ccomer@courts.state.va.us
Publications Committee	Jane Tyler, Prince William GDC, jtyler@courts.state.va.us
Resolutions Committee	Dean Sprague, Arlington GDC, dsprague@courts.state.va.us
Special Issues Committee	Amy Burnham, Arlington JDR, aburnham@courts.state.va.us Terri Rea, Harrisonburg/Rockingham J&DR, trea@courts.state.va.us
Ways & Means Committee	Crystal Crouse, Tazewell GDC, cyoung@courts.state.va.us
Technology Committee	Laura Griffin, Chesterfield JDR, lgriffin@courts.state.va.us

Website

For more information on activities of the Association of Clerks of the District Courts of Virginia, please go to the website at www.vadistrictclerks.com. To order merchandise, please go to <https://www.vadistrictclerks.com/merchandise1>. For information on the Recognition Program, please go to <https://www.vadistrictclerks.com/recognition>.



Judge Jacqueline Talevi on Presenting a Professional Image and Professional Development.

Conference Highlights

Attendees of this year's annual conference were treated to a range of speakers who lectured on a variety of topics that included planning for succession and dealing with social media as well as future challenges in the courts and ongoing issues with DMV and VSAP.

In addition to the break-out sessions, the attendees enjoyed informative lectures by both Judge Jarvis and Judge Talevi, as well as an update on legislative issues by Karl Hade and Paul Delosh.

The Association truly appreciates the wealth of information shared by these professionals and all the hard work that went into organizing their presentations.

The Executive Committee is busy organizing next year's conference so if you have any suggestions for future topics or speakers, please feel free to contact your representative and pass along your suggestions.

Recognition of Clerks

The Association also recognized several clerks for their service to the District Courts. Congratulations to all Clerks and Deputy Clerks who were nominated and those who were recognized with awards.



Awards Coordinator, Rick Kahl presents Sandra Blount with the 2016 Clerk of the Year citation.

Cont.

Sandy Blount of Richmond General District Court, Civil Division was selected as the 2016 Clerk of the Year. Beginning as a deputy clerk in 1976, and rising through the ranks to become Clerk of Court for the Richmond GDC Civil Division in 2003, Sandy has performed every function of a Civil clerk's office, including becoming the first female deputy clerk to become a courtroom clerk in Richmond. Over the years, Sandy has shared her expertise as a member of this Association. Congratulations Sandy!

Congratulations also to **Amber Knight**, Greene County Combined District Court who was selected as the **Deputy Clerk of the Year**.

The Association recognized the following deputy clerks with **Certificates of Excellence**: Wythe General District Court - **Theresa M. Adams, Cindy Bassinger, Patricia S. Crockett**; Virginia Beach General District Court (Criminal Division) - **Cindy Elmadani, Mary E. White**; Montgomery General District Court - **Patricia McCall**; Newport News General District Court - **Audrey C. Smith**. Congratulations to all!



Incoming Association President Terri Rea presents Outgoing Association President Beneatha Simmons with a plaque recognizing her service to the Association.

News from Around the State

From Arlington GDC: Welcome to new staff deputy clerks; Katrina Leeks, Luciana Quispe, Edna Burns, David DiAscro and congratulations to Christina Thompson on her promotion to Bookkeeper.

From Prince William GDC: Congratulations to Rhonda Daley on her promotion to Supervisor of the Traffic & Criminal pre-court division. Welcome to new employees Melissa Arce and Lissette Collado-Lively.

Louisa GDC: Gail Proffitt retired after 42 years and Brandy Alexander is now the Clerk. Congratulations Gail and Brandy!

Legal Advice and Legal Information

Editor's Note: Judge William E. Jarvis of the Prince William County General District Court was the keynote speaker at this year's annual conference. Below is an overview of his presentation.

The demands placed on clerks' offices across the state are numerous and increasingly complex. Most clerks and deputy clerks genuinely want to offer assistance to people who find themselves navigating the often murky waters of the legal system, and that's a good thing! The difficulty becomes knowing when that assistance crosses the line from offering legal information to offering legal advice.



To help make that determination, keep the following in mind:

Examples of Legal Information:

- Publicly available and contained in dockets, calendars, case files, indexes and other reports.
- Reciting common, routinely-employed court rules, court procedures, administrative practices, and local rules, and explaining generally how the court and judges function.
- Explaining the meaning of terms and documents used in the court process.
- Referring self-represented litigants to a law library or the court's website for statutes, court rules or forms.
- Answering questions concerning deadlines or due dates (without calculating due dates).

Cont.

Cont.

Examples of questions that require Legal Advice:

- What should I do next?
- How can I do _____?
- Do I have to do anything else?
- What's the best way to _____?
- How can I avoid _____?
- What witnesses do I need?
- How can I get this off my record?
- Who should I sue?
- Who should I serve?
- What's the statute of limitations?

Questions that have multiple answers or depend on the circumstance are often complex issues that require legal advice. When faced with a situation that requires information beyond the scope of the court, it helps to have resources handy that you can provide to the customer to assist them in finding the correct answer. Examples of these resources include local timesavers, websites (including www.selfhelp.vacourts.gov; see flyer on next page), bar association contact information, lawyer referral, legal aid, or any pro-bono resources available in your area.

Although we all want to render assistance to people in need, we still have to be mindful of wading into areas that may be more complex than we realize and cross the line into providing legal advice.



Judge William E. Jarvis discusses Legal Advice vs. Legal Information.

How We Can Help You

Court employees and librarians must be neutral and impartial,
and can give **legal information**.

Only a lawyer representing you can give you **legal advice**.

WE CAN:

- Provide you with the number of a local lawyer referral service, legal services program or other service where you can get legal help.
- Give you information about law libraries and online resources.
- Explain and answer questions about how the court works.
- Give you general information about court rules, procedures and practices.
- Provide you with available court forms and instructions.
- Provide court schedules and information on how to get a case scheduled.
- Provide you information from your case file.
- Answer some basic questions about court deadlines and how they are determined.
- Provide additional assistance in some circumstances to aid you if you have special needs.
- Provide information, brochures and contact information about mediation and ADR programs in your court.

WE CANNOT:

- Tell you whether or not you should bring your case to court.
- Tell you what words to use in your papers. We can, however, check your papers for completeness before you file them.
- Tell you what to say in court.
- Give you an opinion about what will happen if you bring your case to court.
- Talk to the judge for you.
- Let you talk to the judge outside of court.
- Change an order signed by a judge.
- Give you information about a judge's decision until the judge makes that decision public.
- Give you information that we would be unable or unwilling to provide to the other side in your case.
- Interpret court documents or tell you what you "should" do.

Visit selfhelp.vacourts.gov
Help is just a link away!



VIRGINIA
Access to Justice
COMMISSION

Promoting equal access to justice in Virginia