

## Annual Report 2017-2018

It's a pleasure to report to you about VBA activities during 2017-2018.

Thanks to the generosity of so many lawyers and judges who are willing to share their expertise, the VBA was able to offer a full smorgasbord of **CLE Programs** covering the gamut of legal topics. Over 2,500 of you attended 248 live programs and watched 559 digital programs this past year. Many thanks to the amazing VBA section chairs who organized at least one CLE during the year at the Annual Meeting in September, at the Mid-Winter Thaw in January, at the Mid-Year Meeting in March, at the VBA Tech Conference in May, or during the numerous stand-alone programs held throughout the state. Please don't hesitate to let us know what CLE offerings you'd like to see offered, or if you'd like to present!

We're honored to work closely with all three branches of the Vermont Government, to ensure that your and your clients' interests are well-represented. The VBA also serves as a resource when needed. Towards that end, we were pleased to co-host "**Legislators' Days**" with the Judiciary in each of the fourteen counties throughout the Fall. County legislative delegations were invited to their local state courthouses to observe court hearings, and to meet with judicial officers and lawyer "ambassadors" from each division. Those events were followed by a VBA Legislators' Reception in January and a VBA Legislators' Breakfast in March that we hosted at the statehouse. The 2018 VBA Legislative Overview gives a summary of relevant legislation that was passed during the last legislative session, and is available on the VBA website. We're grateful that VBA Government Relations Coordinator Bob Paolini will continue in that role in 2019. Many thanks also to the ambassadors, to the section chairs, and to many other members who offered invaluable testimony during the legislative session, when needed.

A continuing focus in the arena of public education was to encourage lawyer presentations in conjunction with **Constitution Day** in September. The VBA has now provided over 3,500 copies of "Pocket Constitutions" for lawyers and judges to distribute at presentations they give to school and civic groups throughout the state. We were pleased to organize a third annual Constitution Day Panel Presentation, with an esteemed panel of five justices, judges and a Vermont Law School Constitution Law Professor, moderated by VBA President Gary Franklin. The panel presented a one-hour basic overview of the Constitution, with a focus on Separation of Powers, at Vermont Law School in September. Links to the videos of each Constitution Day presentation are on the VBA website. The VBA is happy to provide this and other resources to whomever would like to make a presentation in their community this year.

The Young Lawyers Division and the VBA Diversity Section organized a **Martin Luther King, Jr. Poster-Essay Contest** for Vermont middle-school students in the Fall. Governor Phil Scott presented awards to the winners at the statehouse in January; the students and their families also toured the statehouse and the Vermont Supreme Court Building, where their winning posters and essays were on public display for the month of January. Materials for the 2019 MLK, Jr. Poster-Essay Contest are going out soon!

The VBA and the Vermont Judiciary co-hosted a **Centennial Celebration** of the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Vermont Supreme Court Building in May. Entitled "Celebrating the Role of the Bench and the Bar in Preserving the Rule of Law", the event included a well-attended outdoor ceremony with remarks by Governor Phil Scott, Chief Justice Paul Reiber, and State Representative Maxine Grad, Chair of the House Judiciary Committee. The presiding judges and county bar presidents from each county presented historical accounts from their respective counties, and each received an historical marble plaque commemorating the occasion, hewn from marble from the Court's original construction.

Lawyer/historian Paul Gilles wrote the historical accounts, as well as a fascinating essay about the building's history. The event culminated with a re-enactment of an oral argument from the Court's first term in the then-new building.

VBA Members have automatic access to **Casemaker**, a leading legal research services provider with intuitive search capabilities. Many enhancements have been added in the past year to Casemaker features. The website includes detailed information about the latest enhancements, and benefits of Casemaker for your research.

VBA membership includes unlimited access to section activity through our on-line communication platform "**VBA Connect**". Developed in response to members' requests for the ability to archive and to search the invaluable information that's shared among section members, VBA Connect allows section members to control the frequency of received posts, and to easily search and retrieve whatever information has been shared in all communities to date. If you haven't yet experienced the benefits of VBA Connect, please call or e-mail the VBA office at any time for personal training.

We were pleased to offer the **Second Annual Trial Academy** at the Vermont Law School in July. This day-long intensive trial practice program featured ten Vermont Supreme Court Justices and Vermont Superior Court Trial Judges, who ran ten different "courtrooms" throughout the day. They, and participating Vermont Fellows of the American College of Trial Lawyers, offered individual critiques of the 70 participants' opening statements, direct and cross examinations, and closing statements. Members of the VBA Young Lawyers Division served as volunteer witnesses, and VLS students served as timekeepers. Stay tuned for the Third Annual Trial Academy in the Summer of 2019!

Our Vermont **Lawyer Referral Service** continues to work well for clients in need of Vermont counsel, and for the 157 LRS panel members who earned more than \$1,200,000.00 in LRS revenue this past year. The VBA fielded 7,182 LRS calls, averaging 598 calls per month. We printed and distributed VBA business cards with the LRS 800 number, the VT Free Legal Answers website, and the "Modest Means" website to all of the Vermont state courthouses, numerous public libraries, and many veteran centers throughout Vermont. If you're not already an LRS member, consider joining for the low cost of \$70.00 per year. Your next big case could be an LRS referral!

Regarding **Access to Justice** initiatives, the VBA is grateful to the Vermont Bar Foundation for funding the seven different County Bar Legal Assistance Projects covering nine counties, which provided legal representation to over 130 low income Vermonters who would have otherwise been without legal assistance in their civil, probate and family cases. Participating lawyers also contributed a total of 200 pro bono hours to the cases. With our share of a US Department of Justice Victims of Crime Act grant, the VBA provided low bono payments to lawyers who represent crime victims in legal matters arising from their victimization. In the VOCA project last fiscal year, we placed 54 cases with low bono attorneys, and the attorneys collectively donated 42.2 pro bono hours over and above the hours they billed. Effective January 1, 2018, the Vermont Supreme Court awarded two grants to the VBA to continue and expand statewide low bono legal representation in two categories of cases. With one grant, the VBA pays low bono lawyers to represent respondents in adult involuntary guardianship cases. With the other grant, private attorneys are paid a low bono stipend to assist foster/adopting parents as they negotiate and enter into post adoption contact agreements with relinquishing parents. If you would like to be added to the rosters of participating attorneys, please contact VBA Legal Access Coordinator Mary Ashcroft at [mashcroft@vtbar.org](mailto:mashcroft@vtbar.org).

As always, we strive to bring you the latest membership products and services, as evidenced by the numerous sponsors and exhibitors at our major meetings, and as detailed in the **“Affinity Partners”** section on the website. Be sure to take advantage of the substantial discounts available for consulting, credit card processing, practice management, health insurance, personal insurances, retirement program, marketing software, professional liability insurance, rental cars, and shipping services. Our newest partners include Red Cave Consulting, TurboLaw, healthiest you, and Sugarbush Ski Area.

None of the above accomplishments would have been possible without the hard work and complete dedication of the **amazing VBA staff**. I am deeply indebted to them, as well as to the VBA Board of Managers for providing excellent leadership for your Vermont Bar Association. Please know that we are all at your service, and appreciate whatever recommendations you might have to bring even more value to your VBA membership.