

April 2009 NEWSLETTER



COME CELEBRATE LAW DAY ON FRIDAY, MAY 1ST !

On Law Day, Friday, May 1st 2009, Weiner, Rohrstaff & Spivey, PLC will be hosting the **9th Annual Law Day Weiner Roast** to benefit the Fairfax Law Foundation. The Foundation performs many civic functions, including numerous outreach programs in the public schools, providing pro bono legal services for those who cannot afford legal representation, and numerous outreach programs in the local community.

WRS' Annual Law Day "Weiner Roast" starts at 4:30 p.m. on Friday, May 1st and will go until 8:30 p.m. Last year approximately 700 people attended, including judges from Fairfax, Arlington, Alexandria the Eastern District and the Court of Appeals; local and state legislators; other civic dignitaries; and folks who love to have fun, while supporting a great cause.

Featured highlights are the **Honor Guard** presenting colors, musical performances by the 20-piece **George Mason University Jazz Ensemble**, the Irish Band "**Edsel Road**", and performers from the award-winning **Boyle School of Irish Dance**.

Also featured is an **old fashioned shoe shine stand** providing professional shoe shines in exchange for a donation to the Fairfax Law Foundation. The Fairfax City Police send

"**Mr. Law**," a 12-foot inflatable police officer, to "mingle" with the crowd.

The party is outdoors and very casual. It's a Weiner Roast, and that means five varieties of hot dogs and brats. No burgers . . . no chicken . . . just weiners. There is an "ol' time" feel to the whole event: root beer floats, popcorn, cotton candy and a 20-foot projection screen to run silent Charlie Chaplin movies.

We hope you will join in helping to support this meaningful day filled with great music and food for a worthy cause. **Please RSVP • bgarcia@WRSattorneys.com • 703-273-9500.**

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7th Annual Hockey Night

On Friday, March 27, 2009 Team USA hosted its 7th Annual Hockey Night at the Verizon Center in Washington, D.C. to benefit the RRP Foundation.

Recurrent Respiratory Papillomatosis (RRP) is a disease that causes rapidly growing tumors on the larynx, vocal cords or in the lungs of infants, children and adults.

Since 2002 Team USA is proud to have raised over \$60,000 to fund research for a cure to help fight this debilitating disease. Assistant Team Captain, Ed Weiner presented this year's ceremonial check to Maurissa Burke Weiner, who is winning her battle against RRP.

To donate to the RRP Foundation in writing: RRP Foundation, P.O. Box 6643, Lawrenceville, NJ 08648.

Help Us Help the Food Bank! Comments for Cans

Sandra has posted a blog on our Website – www.WRSattorneys.com – about a promise we have made to donate \$100 for every 100 comments we get to our blog about the stress on food banks across Virginia caused by the economic downturn.

Please take a minute to go to our Website, read the Community Service blog “Comments for Cans” and comment on it. It will take just a minute of your time. And, **we’re going to donate \$100 for every 100 comments we get to the blog post.**

You can also help by passing on the message to others you know and asking them to post comments.

We’ll let you all know how much money we raise for Virginia food banks. Thanks so much.

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A Mother's Day Gift Idea



Stumped about what to get that special someone this Mother's Day? Honor the extraordinary women in your life and support a local nonprofit at the same time. Doorways for Women and Families is an Arlington organization that offers safe shelter to

abused, homeless, and at-risk women and families. Their mission is to end homelessness and family and intimate partner violence by offering safe shelter and housing, life changing support services and community advocacy. You can help them achieve their goals this May; for a minimum contribution of \$15, Doorways will send a card with Mother's Day greetings to a woman you choose to honor. The greetings are heartwarming, and you'll enjoy the giving as much as the recipient enjoys the receiving.

Mother's Day is Sunday, May 10. The purchase deadline is Thursday, May 1. To make your Mother's Day contribution, visit the [Doorways website](#) today.

Welcome SARAH CHUBA

We are happy to introduce our newest associate – Sarah Chuba. Sarah was born in New York but has lived in Fairfax County for 15 years. She graduated from Virginia Tech and then she went to law school in New York (where she got her J.D. in 2007). When we first met Sarah, we were impressed that she has such a big heart for and commitment to helping people like our clients. In college and in law school, Sarah spent much of her spare time volunteering and fundraising for the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of American and coaching girls high school and travel softball teams. We know you will be seeing a lot of Sarah around the courthouse and in our office.

Spring showers bring flowers but may dampen visibility!

Spring showers bring May flowers, but it should also be a reminder to check and replace worn wiper blades on your vehicle. Poorly maintained windshield wipers can hamper visibility in poor weather. As part of its National Car Care month in April, the Car Care Council recommends checking tire treads and windshield wiper quality in preparation for spring driving conditions.

Spring rain can also dampen visibility so it is important to check all vehicle lighting including headlights, taillights, back-up lights, turn signals, parking lights and brake lights. These lights are important not only because they help you to see, but also serve as a way to help you communicate clearly with other motorists.

Change batteries on smoke detectors!

We want to remind you to change the batteries in your smoke alarms. It's a change that could save your life.

VIRGINIA LAWYERS WEEKLY

COMPLIMENTARY

www.valawyersweekly.com

March 13, 2009

Sandra Rohrstaff becomes new president of the VTLA

Growing up in the 1950s and early 1960s in a small town in Texas, Sandra Rohrstaff never thought about working at anything other than the jobs educated women had at the time: nurse, teacher or secretary.

"It never occurred to me that I could go to law school," she recalled. "I had never seen a woman lawyer."

After graduating from the University of Texas in 1968, she moved to Northern Virginia, where she worked first as a secretary in a three-lawyer personal injury firm and then as a pre-school teacher in a private school.

She returned to work in a law firm as a secretary for Bernard S. Cohen, a now-retired Alexandria lawyer and former state delegate, who "nurtured, supported and encouraged" her in her ambition to become a lawyer. She earned her law degree in 1990 by attending classes at night at Catholic University while working full time at the firm.

She joined the firm, since dissolved, as an associate and later as a partner and says she has found the practice of law to be everything she hoped it would be "and more."

Rohrstaff will be installed this weekend as the president of the Virginia Trial Lawyers Association during its 50th anniversary. Only two other women – Betty Thompson of Arlington and Mary Lynn Tate of Abingdon – have been president of the organization.

She has been a partner in the four-attorney Fairfax firm of Weiner, Rohrstaff & Spivey PC for what she says are "a couple of very happy years."

Rohrstaff said she knew from the start of her legal career that she wanted to represent people and do trial work.

As a result, "I was committed to VTLA from very early on" and "did whatever I could to participate in it," she said.

"It really gives you access to smart lawyers all over the state and elsewhere," she said. She has never asked for help from a member that she didn't get it, she said. "It's one of the most generous groups I've ever had the pleasure of knowing."

Her early career included criminal law, domestic relations and commercial litigation for small firms, but her work now is exclusively personal injury and medical malpractice.

She said one of her most satisfying cases remains her representation of an Ecuadoran national who was charged with passing counterfeit money. He was with a group drinking beer at a bar when one of the men handed the wait-

ress a phony hundred-dollar bill.

Her client, who had lost an arm and a knee cap in an electrical accident, was unaware of the counterfeiting and was the only member of the group who was acquitted, she said.

Nevertheless, he was detained as an illegal immigrant pending trial and spent months in prison, much of the time in solitary confinement.

After his acquittal she apologized for the treatment he had received. "You don't understand," he told her. "In my country, I never would have made it to trial."

"His family sent me a little bouquet of flowers," she said.

Her interaction with other lawyers and clients such as the immigrant are rewarding parts of her work, she said, but the opportunity to learn new things – how the pump that raises the bed on a dump truck works, for example – add to her enjoyment of it.

Providing the opportunity to learn new things is an important aspect of VTLA, she said.

The organization offers "exceptional educational opportunities for lawyers... We have a lot of people who are not VTLA members coming to us for training" through such programs as its seminars and the Virginia College of Trial Advocacy, for which she has served as a faculty member since 2002.

Working with those non-VTLA members and with other bar groups is essential, she said. "If we don't work with others, we're going to harbor the seeds of our own demise," she said. "I'm a teacher at heart. I came to the law in an inclusive way."

That inclusiveness can take the form of partnering with groups such as the Virginia Bar Association in the Virginia Family Law Coalition and in indigent criminal defense reform, she said.

She noted the Just the Beginning Foundation, an organization with a goal of encouraging ethnic groups who are underrepresented in the legal profession to consider the law as a career, as an example of another group working to broaden the legal tent.

That spirit can spill over to cooperation with organizations more often considered adversaries of VTLA, such as casualty insurers and the Medical Society of Virginia and other healthcare organizations, she noted.

Of course, the cooperation sometimes is coerced, as it was in this session of the legislature on two longstanding issues – the cap on medical malpractice awards and what trial



SANDRA M. ROHRSTAFF

lawyers view as the lack of incentive for carriers of underinsured motorist coverage to participate fully in the negotiation and trial of a claim.

The message from legislators to both sides of those issues was to work it out among yourselves between now and the next General Assembly session or one or both of you might get a solution you don't like.

That type of back and forth with legislators is fine with Rohrstaff. "How else are they going to figure it out if we don't help them?" she said.

She said she believes the VTLA's lobbyists "are listened to because we are well informed and articulate" and willing to negotiate with those who have different interests.

Rohrstaff acknowledged concern about the dwindling number of jury trials in the state – barely a quarter as many as there were as recently as 15 years ago.

She said she is not sure whether the decline "changes the focus or whether it should. ... We're not the Virginia Mediation Association."

She said she still believes the starting point should be: "We go to trial. That's the best way to get the issue resolved."

On the other hand, she said, "We are trial lawyers who also can use the mediation tool on behalf of our clients."

—BY ALAN COOPER

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK OF US

It's hard for people – even us – to talk about ourselves. It's also hard for people – including us -- to see ourselves the way others see us.

So, you can do us a BIG favor by letting us know *IN ONE WORD* what you think of us. Just one word that comes to mind that to you defines our firm. Then, tell us what that word means or how you experience that word.

Here's our bold promise: *we'll publish ALL the results!* And, we'll publish them anonymously so you can tell us what you really think.

To tell us what you think of us, send an email to srohrstaff@wrsattorneys.com, or go to our website www.wrsattorneys.com, or call and leave a message at 703-273-9500, or drop us a line at 10605 Judicial Drive, B-6, Fairfax, VA 22030, or send us a fax 703-273-9505.



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