

## **The Commonwealth's Attorney's Office**

*Based on an interview of Paul B. Ebert conducted by Alissa N. Hudson in February 2000*

Paul Ebert received his undergraduate degree in business administration from Virginia Tech. Already married, and trying to determine what career path to follow, he first considered farming, then turned down a management trainee position with Ralston Purina, and finally, on the advice of a cousin, decided to go to law school. He attended night school at George Washington Law School, while clerking for a law firm, serving as the Justice of the Peace for the City of Falls Church, and performing a variety of odd jobs to both pay for his education and support his young family. He graduated in 1963, and went to work for the law firm of Gibson, Hicks, Milsap and Hamsberg. While there he met Bill Murphy, (now, Retired Judge Murphy.) Murphy had been a high school principal in Manassas for several years before pursuing a career in law, and felt Manassas was a good area in which to open a law practice. Murphy and Ebert convinced Gibson, Hicks, et.al., to open a branch office in Manassas which later became the law firm of Ebert & Murphy. Ebert remembers there only being 15 or so attorneys in the area at the time.

In 1963, Selwyn Smith was Prince William County's Commonwealth's Attorney. The two Assistant CAs were Jim Davenport and Frank Hoss. (There were only two court rooms in the old court house, so three attorneys in the CA's office was sufficient.) Paul Ebert joined the CA's office to gain some trial experience. He found himself, two years later, being encouraged by the local deputies to run for Commonwealth's Attorney, when Smith decided to run for Senate. Ebert ran in that first election against Floyd Bagley and in 1965, at the age of 28, became the youngest CWA in Virginia. Nearly 35 years later, the CA's Office is vastly different from when he joined.

The PWC Commonwealth's Attorney used to also serve as the County Attorney for the Local Board of Supervisors. The dual role for Ebert continued until 1972, when Floyd Bagley became the first County Attorney. Until 1980, attorneys serving the Commonwealth were considered part-time employees, and allowed to work in private practice. Ebert continued his private practice, (as did everyone else), until doing so was prohibited, and indicates that it was not an easy decision to go full time for the Commonwealth. (Many attorney's left the CA's office in 1980 upon it's becoming a full time job) Checking for conflicts of interest was necessary in those days, but because the area was small, not a difficult task. At that time, attorneys for the Commonwealth could prosecute in Prince William County, defend in other jurisdictions and maintain a civil practice as well. With the change from part-time to full time, Ebert began consolidating the ACAs under one room, which happened to be in an office building he owned on Peabody Street, though for a brief time, there was also a satellite office in Woodbridge. Upon completion of the Judicial Center in 1984, the CA's office moved to its present location, and gradually began expanding its ranks to adequately manage the now 14 court rooms and ever expanding docket.

During his tenure, Ebert has had the pleasure of seeing many former Assistant Commonwealth's Attorneys take the bench: Judges Millette, Travers and Hamblen came directly from the CA's office while Judge Robeson served as an Assistant CA prior to going into private practice. One should not forget that Judges Smith, Murphy and Hoss also served for a time in the CA's office. Ebert truly enjoys his work and commented, "Just when you think you've seen everything, something else pops up." He said he felt more comfortable working on the side of the Commonwealth, and added "...[I've] been fortunate to have some real good people working for [me]."