

An Open Mind Led to the Law...And it was Good

Based on an interview of Norb Beville by Don Coulter in February 2016

Norborne Beville was born in Richmond, Virginia and attended the University of Richmond as a history major. The military called him and sent him to Vietnam where he removed mines from roads. As a youth he kept an open mind and was undecided about his future but decided to attend law school at UVA, graduating in 1968.

After a short job in Alexandria he came to Manassas and joined Owens, Underwood, and Beane. Judge Percy Thornton earlier left the firm to become a Circuit Court Judge. Bob Coppock was an associate and Ron Eakin later joined the firm. Stanly Owens was semi-retired at that time and Underwood and Beane ran the firm. Underwood represented Piedmont S & L while Beane focused on real estate. The less lucrative work went to the associates. Initially all attorneys were required to accept court appointed cases. Then as now pay was low but it did provide great trial experience. The cases were interesting even with the poor pay. When acceptance of court appointed work became optional, Norb removed himself from the list.

The PWC Bar was small and, you knew everyone. No one was unhelpful but there were no mentors. Selwyn Smith was president of the Bar and in 1968 there were 25-30 members. Jim Davenport represented Commonwealth S & L. C. Lacey Compton Jr., Doug Bergere, George Gullette, and Floyd Bagley were active in the Eastern end. Practicing in front of judges Thornton and Sinclair was interesting as both were highly intelligent. Judge May, in District Court which included juveniles, was big on short hair. Male defendants who cut their hair seemed to get better results. Beville held various Bar offices but was not President. Women attorneys were rare and none were in the Bar. This was not surprising as there were only two women in the UVA law school when he attended.

In 1975 he and Ron Eakin formed Beville and Eakin and practiced together for many years before each went into solo practice. Ron was very good with taxes and Norb was the litigator. For twelve years VDOT was a client. He made two close but unsuccessful runs for Delegate. Democrats ran the County. Harry Parrish started as a Democrat and switched to the Republican Party.

IBM arrived before Beville, and the town of Manassas was moving to become a City. These preparations included annexing the airport and the IBM location (now Lockheed). Manassas became a City in 1975. Manaport shopping center was the location of the original airport before it moved to its present location. Sudley Road, Route 234, had just been expanded to four lanes. Lacey Compton, Sr., who influenced the development of the western end of the County more than any other lawyer represented many of the farmers. VDOT would try to value their property as farms and Lacey would point to the recently built Manassas Mall to show the development value.

In the early 1970's local politics became interesting as the "Four Horseman", (Ralph Mauller, Scott Winfield, Roy Doggett and Don Turner), on the County Board of Supervisors resisted all rezonings such that the Circuit Court judges (which included those in Fairfax as the counties comprised one Circuit) effectively did the rezonings. For a period of time there were two school boards competing for control of the schools. Tom Beane represented the one that fortunately prevailed.

The Goldfarb case, which held that the minimum fee schedules propounded by the various Bar Associations, violated the Sherman Anti-Trust Act knocked many firms out of the settlement business. Community participation was a manner in which lawyers advertised. Norb was active in Kiwanis (which led the way in the establishment of Prince William Hospital), the American Legion, VFW, and the Democratic Party holding many leadership posts. Word of mouth was the other method as the County grew from 100,000 to 400,000 during his career.

The law was good to Norb and he has few complaints. The profession allowed him to support his family, send his daughters to schools of their choice and have some left over.