

## **Professionally and Personally Active in the Community**

*Based on an Interview of Sharon Pandak, by Deborah Siegel in January 2016*

Sharon Pandak was born in Rochester PA, about 20 miles outside of Pittsburgh, PA but her family relocated to the Commonwealth when she was nine months old. She spent her childhood in Staunton, Virginia, where her father was a coach and later Athletic Director at the Staunton Military Academy until the school closed in 1975. During high school, Pandak considered becoming a doctor or following her passion and becoming an actress, but later decided that she could be productive in the community as a lawyer. She worked summers to pay for her college and graduate school education, attending the College of William and Mary for both her undergraduate and law school degrees. After graduating from William and Mary School of Law, Pandak moved to Falls Church and worked as a law clerk for former Judge Luke Moore in the District of Columbia Superior Court. Judge Moore was an important mentor to her.

Pandak joined the Prince William County Attorney's Office in 1980 as an assistant county attorney and began her long and accomplished career in local government law. Terry Emerson was the County Attorney and John Foote was the Deputy County Attorney. Pandak's early law practice, with the County, included zoning enforcement, writing ordinances and assisting the other attorneys by second chairing trials. She later became Deputy County Attorney and in 1989 was appointed the Prince William County Attorney, the first woman to serve in that capacity. She served in this position until 2004.

Since 2006 Ms. Pandak has been a partner in the firm of Greehan, Taves, Pandak and Stoner. In 2010 she was appointed General Counsel for the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments. During her career, Pandak saw the County Attorney's Office grow substantially along with the growth of the County. When she first joined the County Attorney's Office there were only five other attorneys in the office. Pandak recalls that when she first began practicing in Prince William, the County Attorney's Office was in Manassas and there was an airport in the area that is now Lakeridge, and as she would drive to work, small planes would be coming right over her windshield.

Pandak moved to Prince William County in 1987 and has been active civically ever since. When she first joined the County Attorney's Office she tutored children at juvenile detention, but had to stop doing this when she began handling personnel matters for the county. Among other projects she has worked with Project Mend-A-House, was on the board of Habitat for Humanity, was on the Prince William Parks Foundation, and is currently working with the Historic Preservation Foundation and Didlake.

A huge issue for the Prince William community during Pandak's career has been growth, what to do about the growth and what that means for the County in terms of available facilities. At the time she began her career with the County, the County was starting to show signs of growth and the practice of local government law was also transitioning into a specialty that required a definite focus.

When she first started practicing in Prince William, the legal community was quite a bit smaller and "you could almost know everybody who was a fellow practitioner." Pandak recalls that the legal community was very pleasant and you that could call on anyone to provide advice. On her first day, John Foote walked her around Old Town Manassas taking her to Court and various law offices and introducing her to members of the bar. At that time most of the law offices in the county were centered in Manassas. In discussing whom she admired and considered a mentor during her early days of practice, she recalls John Foote as being an incredible resource both then and now, even though now, they are frequently on opposite sides of the court room. Pandak also remembers Judge Sinclair as being a great mentor in terms of "how one should practice in the courtroom, the relationship between judges and attorneys." The first time she remembers appearing before Judge Sinclair was on a sovereign immunity case. After the Judge ruled, Pandak turned to speak with the other attorney. When she looked around, she realized Judge Sinclair was standing behind her. At that time Judge Sinclair's routine was to walk off the bench and shake hands with the attorneys after they argued.

Similar to the growth of the County, Pandak says the membership of the Prince William County Bar Association has increased significantly since she first became a member. Pandak was President of the Prince William County Bar Association in 1992 and at that time there was no professional staff for the Bar Association. Ms. Pandak attributes the growth in membership not just to the growth of the county but the professional staff who has been able to help cultivate the membership. It seemed to her that when she joined the Bar, most of the members practiced just with in

the community, but now more attorneys seem to practice all over Northern Virginia and the state. The Prince William County Bar Association is doing things now that they dreamed about in the late '80s. Many more attorneys seem to be connected to the community and serving the community through the Bar Association. After leaving the Prince William County Attorney's Office in 2004, Pandak has had the opportunity to practice in other areas of the state and finds that there is a different level of comradery in the Prince William legal community than in some other localities that the Bar has been able to maintain despite its growth.