

By: Wade Davies

*Ritchie, Dillard, Davies & Johnson*

# THANK YOU FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO LEAD IN 2014

I've never been prouder of anything in my professional life than becoming President of the Knoxville Bar Association. I love and respect the members of this organization, and I will try my best to keep it in as good a shape as Heidi leaves it.

Some things you hear over and over sound like bull, but end up being true. One of those sayings is that the Knoxville Bar is a special place. I kept hearing that when I first started practicing, and I figured people like to think highly of themselves. Now that I have had the chance really to get to know you all, and to practice in other jurisdictions, I know for a fact that the Knoxville Bar is a unique and wonderful place. We try our best – push each other, sometimes fight like hell, but we also care about each other. We teach one another, check up on each other, and mourn each other's losses. So, it seems ok to me for our organization to be a bit self-congratulatory.

Another thing I've learned serving on the Board for the past six years is that our staff is also extraordinary. Take a look at the number of events Marsha organizes and attends every week and you get a sense for how well organized she is, but I have to tell you it is difficult to fathom how much she does for us. Marsha doesn't get all the credit, though. **Melanie Connatser, Tammy Sharpe, Tracy Chain, Whitney Hue** and **Jesse Oakes** put in extraordinary effort to create the smooth-running machine that is the Knoxville Bar Association. One thing we do as a Board is to look at how other similar bar associations are staffed. Let me just say that our people are doing a lot more with smaller staff than many of our fellow bars. I want to thank our staff for making the work of the Board easy and productive. Believe me, I know that my main job as President is to keep them happy.

When I look at where we can make a difference, one of our major challenges is to help lawyers who are just starting out become productive and happy members of this profession. When I started twenty years ago, it wasn't that hard to get started. Almost everyone from our class who passed the bar had a legal job by Fall. Most of us had jobs either in firms or in government positions where our bosses felt like it was part of the deal to teach us what to do. It isn't like that anymore. Two years ago Steve Johnson and I had five good Clinic students, and at the end of the year only one of them had a job. There are a lot of people starting out now who could use some good, informal help. The Bar Association can function almost as a large law firm, providing a place for professional growth, development and support. We also need to convince new lawyers that this Association has value to them. People who are used to getting information from a screen need to be taught how much you learn from getting in a room with other people and talking about practice. The KBA CLE is fantastic, but my favorite part of a Lunch & Learn is sitting with other lawyers and talking about lawyering.

I was lucky to have fantastic mentors. In addition to the incredible role model I have in my father, when I began practicing I was with **Bob Ritchie, Charles Fels, Tom Dillard, David Eldridge** and **Ken Irvine**. I took advantage of it. I still do. To this day, almost every day I walk in to Tom Dillard's office and say, "what do I do when ...." We need to be

those people for lawyers who are just starting out and don't have such formal support. And we need to communicate that people generally like to be asked for advice. The Bar Association is more important than ever.

The staff and leadership of the Knoxville Bar Association understand that there have been significant changes in the legal profession over the past few years, and while we think that our traditions are very strong, we also want to adapt to make sure the Association stays at the forefront of helping lawyers in modern practice. Please help us with that. If you see issues that need to be addressed or have ideas for new programs, let us know. Another way to serve and to learn is to serve on a committee. Again, we have great volunteers, and the committees make things happen. I really appreciate **Mike King** who was President when I started on the Executive Committee. Mike really encouraged us to go to various committee meetings, and I learned how much dedication our members have and also how enjoyable a lot of the meetings are. I'd encourage each member to pick a committee – you don't even have to join formally – just go to a meeting and check it out. Surely with all the schedules Marsha sends out, it isn't hard to find one.

I am very mindful of the Presidents who have come before me, and I will try to honor their legacy. Right now I am particularly indebted to our friend and Past President, **Don Paine**, who provided an example of the love of the law that we can all emulate. He lived for helping other lawyers the way I have been talking about. I miss him. If you knew him, honor him by trying to help someone figure out a thorny legal issue. If you didn't know him, ask someone about him.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to serve the Knoxville Bar Association. Please let me know if you see any additional needs or see anything we could be doing better.

