

VIRGINIA JUVENILE JUSTICE ASSOCIATION

History Part 2: 1976 – 1986

The Wonder Years

(This is the second in a four part series on the history of VJJA.)

VJOA's second decade started out on a positive note with professional and associate membership at 484 and 27 respectively. Each District was establishing committees which paralleled the standing state committees; and each District was to submit quarterly reports to the State Board regarding its activities. Then, a special meeting was called by VJOA President Bill Elder on February 23, 1976. In calling this meeting, Mr. Elder advised the Board that he was resigning his position as Supervisor with the 16th District Court Service Unit effective February 29, and "by the bylaws of the Association, I may no longer be a professional member either to hold office or vote." The meeting was called for "the reorganization of leadership of the Association."

It was an orderly transfer of authority within the Association: Vice-President David James became President; Secretary Dean Kidwell assumed the position of Vice-President; and Scott Harlow was appointed Secretary. Orderly, that is, until the next issue of the *Advocate* (April, 1976) carried the unbylined front page headline: "Board Forces VJOA's 'Best President' To Resign." The front page article, written by Editor John Faircloth, was critical of the VJOA Board in general and new President David James in particular over Mr. Elder's departure from the VJOA Board. Over the next few months, according to Mr. Faircloth, responses came in like "never before in the short history of the publication of the *Advocate*." "Responses to the publication of the article came from varied sources," Mr. Faircloth wrote in his July, 1976 column, "from members who hold no office in the Association all the way to the Board of Directors. Most of the responses received were, admittedly, unfavorable toward the ideas presented in the article and the manner of presentation." In a front page correction contained in the July, 1976 issue of the *Advocate*, Editor Faircloth apologized to the readership for: "Not clearly labeling the article as editorial; and not publishing this editor's name as the author of the article."

The controversy quickly subsided, and in 1976 the Tidewater District began two long-standing traditions: their first Spring Institute (held at the Omni with 150 participants); and the creation of the newsletter known as the *Court Jester*. The Fall Institute, the only statewide institute held in 1976 due to financial problems, was attended by 218 members at the Lake Wright Motor Lodge in Norfolk. Award winners for 1976 were: Vince Picciano, Administration; Cleon "Pop" Crymes, Institutions; Dean Kidwell, Probation; and in a newly created category, Dr. Peter Powell, Community Service. The *Advocate* was published four times during the year and contained a wide variety of articles on the rights of mental health patients, status offenders, women in criminal justice, family systems, confidentiality of juvenile court records, diversion, detention, and residential placement practices.

The following VJOA officers were elected in 1976: Dean Kidwell, President; Bettie Adams, Vice President; Donn Irby, Secretary; and Les Tignor, Treasurer. It was in 1976 that the VJOA Board took action to improve communication with its members by having District Chairs post all Board meeting minutes in offices where VJOA members worked; a far cry from today's www.vjja.org. Additionally, each District Chair was required to provide a written report to the State VJOA Board on a quarterly basis. At the January 16, 1976 meeting, it was announced that for the first time an independent private auditor would be retained to audit the VJOA finances.

1977 opened with a two-day Board meeting in Richmond. At this meeting, the six Districts were given names to replace their Roman numerals. Those names are still used today: Blue Ridge; Capitol; Highlands; Northern; Southwest; and Valley. The Board also voted to change the membership year from the calendar year to July 1-June 30. Of greater concern was the fact that the Association was financially in crisis. The 1976 Conference had left the VJOA coffers with a deficit of \$793.86. Coupled with a declining membership, the deficit forced the Board to authorize Treasurer Les Tignor to obtain a 60-day note for \$2,500 from the Bank of Virginia in Salem on behalf of the Association. The bank loan was renewed for 90 days in March of 1977.

The annual conference was held in September of 1977 at the Holiday Inn Downtown in Richmond. Approximately 200 people attended. The Annual Business Meeting held in conjunction with that conference on September 30 is remembered by Donn Irby as “probably...the most hotly debated meeting in VJOA history.” The controversies centered around three proposed changes. First, it was proposed that VJOA dues be increased to \$12 for professional members and \$6 for associate members. While this measure passed on the floor by a vote of 54 to 45 thus allowing the question to be mailed out to all members, the mail ballots numbered 87 to 60 against the dues increase.

Next was the issue of changing Articles I and IV of the Bylaws. The change to Article I called for changing the name of the Association to something more reflective of the membership. This was voted down 79 to 46. The proposal to eliminate the associate membership and give all VJOA members the status of professional member (Article IV) was considered and actually passed by a vote of 81 to 61. However, since a two-thirds majority was required, the motion failed. According to Irby, “Several members resigned because they felt the vote indicated a desire to have a closed, elite membership.”

Award winners for 1977 were: Gordon Turner, Administration; and William Porch, Probation. No awards were given in the categories of Institutions or Community Service.

Indeed, 1977 was not a good year for VJOA. The Association had gone into debt and was struggling to get out. The *Advocate* was only able to publish two issues during the year; and members had openly squabbled over VJOA’s direction and who could hold full membership. Things would get worse.

In January of 1978, Kathryn A. Haughan was appointed the new Editor of the *Advocate*, after John Faircloth resigned to finish his graduate studies. Thanks to a grant from the Division of Justice and Crime Prevention and the endorsement of the Department of Corrections, VJOA held their 1978 Spring Conference in May at Charlottesville’s Ramada Inn. Again, the proposals to change the name of the Association and to allow all members professional status lacked the two-thirds majority to proceed. The dues increase to \$12 for professional members and \$6 for associate members was, however, finally passed by the membership. The Fall Conference was held at the Sheraton Hotel in Fredericksburg and featured Georgia State Senator Julian Bond as the Keynote speaker. 273 people attended. F.A. “Bud” Hare received the Meritorious Service Award in the category of Administration, and Bob Callahan took home the Probation Award. Once again, no awards were presented for Institutions or Community Service.

In July of 1978, Bettie Adams resigned as Vice President of VJOA. In her resignation letter dated May 12, 1978, Ms. Adams wrote in part: “I have believed in the Association and have worked toward making it stronger and more responsive to the needs of the membership for four years. However, as I do not see any move by the Association in this direction, I no longer desire to invest my time and energies in VJOA.” Ms. Adams went on to say, “At this point in time, VJOA is so constricted by apathy and internal dissention that I feel helpless in achieving any of the campaign goals I supported. I have lost my enthusiasm.”

With the resignation of Ms. Adams, Secretary Donn Irby assumed the role of Vice President and Bill Fleming became Secretary. Shortly thereafter, as his two-year term was coming to end, VJOA President Dean Kidwell resigned. Having recently taken the Bar Exam, Mr. Kidwell was anticipating leaving the field of juvenile corrections. His departure under normal circumstances would have left the Board without a Past President, a position which cannot be filled by appointment. By stepping down before his term ended, Mr. Kidwell allowed Donn Irby to become VJOA President, and, therefore, Immediate Past President upon the completion of his term. A hotly contested election followed with 60% of the ballots returned, the largest response ever up until that time. The results were that David James defeated Donn Irby for President by 121 to 100 votes; and Bruce Briggs defeated Bob Callahan for the office of Vice President by 118 to 103 votes. Secretary Jane Wilson and Treasurer Paul Harris ran unopposed. Mr. Irby remained on the Board as Immediate Past President.

As 1979 began, things were still not looking up for VJOA. Membership was down, Committee and District participation was low, and the Department of Corrections (DOC) refused to support a Spring Conference. Only one *Advocate* was published in 1978 and 1979. In March, Paul Harris resigned as Treasurer leaving a three month vacancy until Ron Belay could assume the duties of the position. VJOA President David James wrote a letter to the Virginia State Crime Commission in 1979 offering VJOA's "grateful support and endorsement of (their) ...completed report *Children and Youth in Trouble in Virginia-Phase II.*" Copies of this correspondence were sent to many high-ranking officials in state government. Mr. James' letter also contained the following comments: "... steps to resolve many of the problems have been lost in the existing bureaucracy..." and "... the bureaucracy may tend to meet its own needs in reorganization, and fail to give adequate attention to child advocacy..." Needless to say, these comments did not sit well with "the bureaucracy," particularly with Mr. T. Don Hutto, Director of Virginia's DOC. In a letter to VJOA President James dated November 27, 1979, Mr. Hutto wrote, "... I regret that you and the Association have not chosen to express in sustentative terms any concerns you may have prior to taking the position you have taken."

On top of all of this, VJOA was looking over its collective shoulder in 1979 to see the Virginia Correctional Association (VCA) rapidly emerging. A major advocate for membership in VCA at that time was DOC Director T. Don Hutto. In September, 1979, VCA President Frank Bishop met with the VJOA Board to explain that VCA wanted to work closely with VJOA and not be in conflict or competition. Despite Mr. Bishop's assurances, many VJOA members did feel the competition from VCA and wondered if VJOA was strong enough for the fight.

Legislatively in 1979, VJOA proposed establishing a Family Court, a study on the feasibility of a separate Department of Youth Services, a mileage rate increase, and compensation for on-call intake duty. The Fall Conference was held at the Donaldson Brown Center on the campus of Virginia Tech, and attendance was far below normal. Meritorious Service Awards were given to: Dorothy Cianioso, Community Service; Debbie Roache, Institutions; and Bettie Adams, Probation.

In 1980, John Faircloth returned to his position as Editor of the *Advocate*. Bill Stephenson resigned as Conference Chair and Donn Irby accepted that position. The 1980 Conference was held at the Cavalier Hotel in Virginia Beach on September 7-10, Sunday through Wednesday. The Meritorious Awards for 1980 were presented to: Alick Moody, Administration; and Stonewall Jackson, Community Service. No awards were given in the categories of Institutions or Probation.

261 people attended the 1980 Conference which had three Keynote speakers and received rave reviews. Featured among the speakers were Judge Sol Gothard from New Orleans, Jean Pickering representing Virginia Satir's AVANTA organization, Mamie McCullough from Dallas, Director of Positive Life Attituides, Ord Matek from Chicago, and Mark Thornhill, Associate Director of Volunteers in Criminal Justice. The Conference also featured a President's Reception on Sunday night, a social and disco on Monday night, and a cookout and disco at the Cabana Club on Tuesday night. Looking at the 1980 Conference in historical perspective, it may well have been the spark that rejuvenated VJOA. The quality of the training along with the quantity and creativeness of the social events caused the membership to become more relaxed yet more focussed on the Association's mission.

1981 began with a slate of new Officers who had run unopposed: President Donn Irby; Vice-President Tom Currier; Secretary Caroel Selby; and Treasurer Ron Belay. At their first Board meeting held in Waynesboro, January 22-23, 1981, the new Board, seemingly energized by the success of the recent Conference, got down to business. The VJOA Board established four specific goals for the Association: increased membership; the provision of professional training; improvement of VJOA's legislative impact; and the review and evaluation of standards and employee benefits. The Board also began to clearly define the duties of Board Members and the President. Membership was increasing (to 314), and interest in committee assignments was on the rise. VJOA went on the record early in 1981 as being

strongly in favor of H.B. 543, legislation that would separate juvenile services from the Department of Corrections and create a new Department of Children's Services.

In February of 1981, however, VJOA President Donn Irby said he "had to make one of the most difficult decisions" he ever had to make. Effective March 27, 1981, he resigned as VJOA President to take a job in the private sector. This action elevated Vice President Tom Currier to the position of President, and Mike Sawyer was appointed Vice President.

The remainder of 1981 was relatively stable for VJOA. The Board decided that terms of office would run from July 1 through June 30, and that the Annual Conference would be held in the Spring beginning in 1982. Membership records were computerized and the duties of the Membership Chair fell to VJOA's Vice President. The *Advocate* was able to publish its four quarterly issues, two of which contained Donn Irby's *History of VJOA* covering the years from 1966 to 1974. The 1981 Fall Conference was held at the Marriott Inn at Tyson's Corner August 30-September 2, where Donn Irby served as Conference Chair. 259 people attended. While H.B. 543 did not pass the Legislature, DOC had reorganized and created the Division of Youth and Community Services within the Department. In a marked change from previous years, DOC Director T. Don Hutto was present at the Conference and praised the high quality of training. Newly appointed Deputy Director for the Division of Youth and Community Services, Doris DeHart, was also on hand and made a favorable impression on the membership. Both Mr. Hutto and Ms. DeHart offered their support for VJOA.

Winners of the 1981 Meritorious Service Awards were: Bill Weaver, Administration; Martha Smith Schneider, Institutions; and Bill Christian, Community Service.

The 1982 Conference was held March 29-31 at the Bonhomme Richard Inn in Williamsburg with 230 people in attendance. By then, membership had climbed to 400 and the Association was on a much better financial footing. Winners of the Meritorious Service Awards for 1981 were: Frank Kern, Administration; Julian Bell, Community Service; Bill Schoof, Institutions; and John Curl, Probation. Because the bylaws had been changed so that elected officers of the Association would serve terms of office which began on July 1 instead of January 1, all officers resigned their positions effective June 30, 1982. A new slate of officers ran unopposed and took office July 1, 1982: Ron Belay, President; Alick Moody, Vice President; Carol Selby, Secretary; and Susan Woolf, Treasurer.

At the new Board's first meeting, held at the Holiday Inn Midtown in Richmond on July 24, they learned there would no longer be funding available through LEAA for future conferences. In addition, the new DOC Director, R.K. Procnier, was not particularly supportive of professional associations, and the Department was having budget problems. This did not bode well for having a VJOA Conference in 1983. Moreover, while membership was at 420 at the time of the Board meeting, it had dropped to 162 by October. Just one issue of the *Advocate* was published in 1982 due to the drop in membership and the lack of funding.

At the prompting of *Advocate* Editor John Faircloth and others, the Board adopted more efficient procedures for notifying members of their membership renewals in early 1983. Mr. Procnier left the DOC and with the financial help of the Department's Training Academy, a VJOA Conference was held May 16-18 at the George Washington Inn in Williamsburg. 160 people attended the 1983 Conference, and by that time membership had rebounded to 349. Meritorious Service Award recipients for 1983 were: Administration, John Moore; Community Service, Bob Shepherd; Institutions, James Ball; and Probation, Susan Woolf.

Legislatively in 1983, VJOA : issued a statement strongly discouraging the jailing of juveniles; supported the concept of emancipation; and supported a study of CHINS. In the Summer of that year, the VJOA Board called upon help from a facilitator, Dr. Joseph Witteman from MCV, to assist in developing a Mission Statement, goals, and objectives for the Association. Two *Advocates* were

published in 1983, with the December issue containing eight pictures from the Conference and the first ever VJOA President's Column.

At the first Board meeting held in 1984, the following Mission Statement was approved:

The Mission of the Virginia Juvenile Officers Association is to advocate and promulgate alternative approaches to resolving Juvenile and Family problems within the Commonwealth of Virginia.

To achieve this mission, the following goals were established:

1. To develop and maintain effective communication strategies between and among the membership so that its needs are met in an ongoing way.
2. To provide learning opportunities to its membership on pertinent topics in a timely manner.
3. To research, develop, and present legislative recommendations to the General Assembly.
4. To develop alternative communication strategies in order to enhance the relationships between the VJOA and related Human Services Organizations.
5. To explore, investigate, and report innovative methods in the delivery of services.

By the time of the annual Conference in Charlottesville, April 10-12, membership was at 377 and there were 213 conference registrants. Keynote speaker Dr. Joseph Witteman went over VJOA's new Mission Statement and goals. Meritorious Service Awards went to: Regional Administrator James Smith for Administration; Catherine Schinittker, 17th District CSU, for Community Service; and Curtis Porter with the 31st District CSU for Probation. Dues were increased to \$15 Professional and \$8 Associate effective July 1, 1984.

VJOA supported several legislative changes in 1984, including: support of giving Intake Officers discretion in issuing an emancipation petition; suggesting a position paper on the jailing of juveniles; some minor changes regarding the administration of Courts; an expansion of 16.1-261 that made all statements at intake inadmissible in Court; the lifting of the prohibition of Adult Probation and Parole from dealing with cases before the J&DR Courts; and the creation of a Youth and Family Administration.

1984 was also an election year for VJOA, and the Nominating Committee put forth the current Board for re-election: Ron Belay, President; Alick Moody, Vice President; Carol Selby, Secretary; and Susan Woolf, Treasurer. Amanda Wimberly was nominated for Vice-President from the floor, and defeated Mr. Moody by 102 – 88 votes. Mr. Moody, however, contested the election on the following grounds: the ballots were not embossed with the official VJOA seal; the ballots were not mailed in adherence with the time frames of the by-laws; and the ballots required a signature. Ballots were mailed again and Ms. Wimberly won by a total of 136 to 68.

On January 1, 1985, VJOA had a membership of 401, which increased to 455 by March 15. John Faircloth resigned as the *Advocate* Editor to start his own business. Tidewater Detention Home Superintendent Bob Truitt became Editor and would hold that position for the next 15 years. 295 people attended the 1985 "Pursuit of Excellence" Conference held at the Marriott Hotel in Richmond, March 19-21. DOC Director, Allen Sielaff, presented Meritorious Service Awards to: Carl Beyler, Arlington CSU Director, Administration; Rev. James A. Payne, Volunteer Emergency Foster Care, Community Service; Pat Flax, Chesapeake Boys Group Home, Institutions; and Jim Cornett, 28th District CSU, Probation.

The Keynote speaker for the Conference was Anthony Trivisono, Director of the American Correctional Association.

1985 ended with the VJOA making plans to return to Roanoke to celebrate its 20th Anniversary in 1986.

VJOA's second decade can rightfully be called the Wonder Years, because it is a wonder the Association survived. Between 1976 and 1986, VJOA faced major financial crises, internal squabbling, lack of financial and moral support from the Department of Corrections, hotly contested elections, the rivalry of the Virginia Correctional Association, apathy, turnovers on the Board, and struggles to define its identity and mission.

In the next issue of the Advocate, we will take a look at: Part 3: 1986-1996.