

# VIRGINIA LAWYERS WEEKLY

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## SANDS ANDERSON

*celebrates 175 years*

### SANDS ANDERSON AT 175:

## Firmly focused on the future

The Richmond-based law firm of Sands Anderson is celebrating its 175th anniversary this year.

Even by Virginia standards, that is quite a milestone. In 1842, John Tyler, a Virginian, was president. There were only 26 stars on the American flag. And Alexander Hamilton Sands moved to Richmond and started a law practice that still bears his name.

Sands cut quite a figure in his day (see story, page 3), arguing many important cases and authoring two widely used books - a form book and a treatise on chancery practice.

Talk to lawyers who work at Sands Anderson today and you'll get an appreciation for Sands and his many successors at the firm over those 175 years.

But you'll hear more talk about the future and how the law firm will continue to help clients resolved their business and legal matters.

Margaret F. Hardy, who was elected president of the firm earlier this year, said, "We will continue to respond to client needs."

Looking ahead, existing areas of practice will expand to address clients' complete legal needs, she said. For a business client, for example, that might mean advising a client from formation, through risk management, to litigation and then to succession planning.

The firm stays current by anticipating what areas will become important. Cybersecurity and privacy issues are coming to the fore, Hardy noted. "We will be expanding on our strengths," she said.

Cullen D. Seltzer, a shareholder at the firm, was similarly enthusiastic about what lies ahead. "It's a time of real growth and change for us," he said. There is an evolution in law practice going on. "Technology has changed, and

with it, client expectations," he said. "Best practices have changed."

In days past, a big client might need a file or data the firm has, and that would mean a trip of a warehouse full of dusty boxes. No longer. A client such as that wants the file immediately and in electronic format.

And it's not just big clients - clients of every size expect connectivity with their lawyers, Seltzer said.

Given that challenge, Sands Anderson is "determined to be a leader in that - leveraging technology and remaining on the cutting edge," he said.

Clients indeed have different expectations about communicating with their lawyers, especially millennials as they take their place as leaders in the business world, said W. Ashley Burgess, head of the the firm's Business Group.

Sands Anderson is investing in technology to make sure the firm anticipates and meets those changing expectations. "We're being very intentional about this," Burgess said. "You have to be an early adopter."

Seltzer concurred with Hardy that cybersecurity will be a big concern.



Margaret F. Hardy

"There is no business that is not apprehensive about hacking and cyber-threats," he said. "We will be managing people through crises. It's a growing challenge for us all."

All three lawyers look forward to the role Sands Anderson can play in the legal landscape and how the firm can make a difference for clients. Seltzer put it this way: "There's an ongoing evolution and I'm excited by our efforts to keep up with that and shape that going forward."

“ There’s an ongoing evolution and we’re excited to shape that going forward.”

## Firmly focused on clients

When someone retains Sands Anderson as its law firm, what can they expect?

Clients can expect “experienced, talented, committed professionals working on their matters,” said shareholder Cullen D. Seltzer.

They “can expect respect,” he continued. “We will tell them straight what’s going on, lay out the risks and options and give our best and most honest advice.”

“One of our strengths is communication with clients,” said firm president Margaret F. Hardy. “The days of handling a matter then telling the client what to do are over,” Hardy said, add-

ing that “It’s much more satisfying when you partner with the client.”

Clients like involvement. They want someone who listens, not someone who directs them, she said.

Hand in hand with ready communication is responsiveness. W. Ashley Burgess, chair of the firm’s Business Group, noted that clients have high expectations, given the speed and ease of access of technology today.

But for Sands Anderson lawyers that responsiveness is something “we keep top of mind,” Burgess said.

Burgess observed that he often is working in the role of a client’s outside general counsel. “I make sure I

understand the business needs along with the legal needs of clients.”

“We want to know the client’s needs and goals, no matter what kind of client,” Hardy said.

Part of Sands Anderson’s work on behalf of clients is anticipating what problems might be and advising ways to avoid minefields.

This approach is proactive, said Faith A. Alejandro, counsel at the firm. As an example, she cited her work as an employment lawyer, and she noted that she and her colleagues keep an eye on changes and tell clients, “This is coming up.”

She added, “It’s having their back and knowing how to help them be best” at running their business.

“Clients are grateful for our being their partners,” Alejandro said.

And the service is personal “The

person who is answering the phone and talking about a matter is the same person who will show up in court,” she said.

Clients can count on lawyers at the firm to work as efficiently as possible. “We’ll never be a cut-and-paste, off-the-shelf operation, but we want to handle things as quickly and efficiently as possible,” said Seltzer.

If the client has other legal questions or issues, Sands Anderson stands ready to help. “We encourage clients to think of Sands Anderson as their one-stop shop for legal services,” said Alejandro. “We’ll help the client find the right professional.”

That assistance might be another lawyer down the hall, or even someone outside of Sands Anderson. Getting the right answer for clients is the key, noted Seltzer.

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## A culture based on collegiality and involvement

One legal observer has noted that the lawyers at Sands Anderson are gentlemen and gentlewomen, in the finest Virginia tradition.

Firm president Margaret F. Hardy concurred in that assessment. Collegiality at the bar is important.

“If the other side asks for something that’s not going to disadvantage your client, you give it to them,” she said.

Respect for other lawyers is paramount. “We place a high value on our reputation,” she said. “No one issue is worth risking our integrity.”

But anyone who confuses respect and manners for weakness is making a mistake. Gentility “doesn’t mean that we aren’t going to be tough and fight for our clients,” Hardy said.

The sense of collegiality pervades the office as well.

The firm doesn’t have a hierarchy, counsel Faith A. Alejandro said, and there is “no tiptoeing through the halls.”

There is a firm-wide open-door policy, said shareholder W. Ashley Burgess.

The overall approach to work is collaborative. “We don’t have little silos in the office,” Alejandro said.

“There is a sincerity in the relationship here,” she said. “These people actually care about each other.”

The degree of support extends to a lawyer’s personal life as well. Alejandro said the firm was very helpful and understanding when she had her two children and is very supportive now that she juggles “being a mom and being a lawyer.”

Once an associate comes on board, the firm allows him or her to find the area of law that is their passion. “I called it declaring my major,” she said when she chose employment law as her field.

Burgess elaborated on that point. “We want lawyers in the firm to have a passion for what it is they would be doing. They need to be really good at what they do, because clients



Sands Anderson’s 2016 holiday book drive donated more than 1,800 books to literacy outreach organizations.



expect it.

But all work and nothing else makes for a dull group. The firm actively encourages its lawyers to have passions outside the office and to be active in the community.

Community service is not something that Sands Anderson requires, Hardy said, but the fact that lawyers are so involved is a “reflection of who we are.”

Shareholder Cullen D. Seltzer noted that community service is “baked into the DNA here.”

Seltzer saw working in the community as part of “what it means to be a professional.”

The firm recognizes the need for balance, Hardy said. “There is an expectation that each of us will have a life,” she said. If “you have that balance, you’re a better person and a better lawyer and more valuable to the firm,” she added.

And there are big benefits to being attuned to the community. “Those experiences have informed how I think about cases and about clients. We are going to do well by doing good,” Seltzer said.

The types of organizations to which Sands Anderson law-

yers commit their time and energy are many.

But one project is worth mentioning, and it is tied to the 175th anniversary.

The firm adopted a literacy campaign this year to encourage children to read and explore books.

Lawyers are volunteering to read to children in local schools.

“We understand that we work within a highly educated industry, and literacy is a fundamental to our daily lives,” said Hardy. “Not everyone in our communities has equal access to books and opportunities to foster literacy.” She added, “We want to do our part to support community members lacking literacy opportunities, abilities, or access.”

Since the launch of the campaign, lawyers and staff members have donated more than 2,000 books to organizations and have volunteered in several outreach events, like reading in schools.

The amount of time all firm members will collectively invest in the literacy project? 175 hours.

## SANDS ANDERSON AT 175:

# A commitment to diversity

When Margaret F. Hardy was elected firm president in January 2017, she became one of the few women to lead a major law firm in Virginia.

When shareholder Terrence L. Graves became president of the Virginia Association of Defense Attorneys in 2007, he was the first African-American to lead one of the commonwealth's major statewide bar groups.

Sands Anderson is committed to working to have "a lot of voices" around the table, said Faith A. Alejandro, counsel at the firm and a member of the Diversity Committee that Graves chairs.

"Diversity is a focus of ours for lateral hires and hiring new associates," said Hardy.

"Our job is to marshal teams of professionals to deliver the best service possible," said shareholder Cullen D. Seltzer. "If anyone thinks that that comes by going down the same narrow avenues and paths of education or background, I think they're delusional."

"We want our firm to reflect the make-up of our clients," said Hardy.

Firm efforts to that end have included participation in minority job fairs and actively supporting bar associations that celebrate diversity. The firm has sponsored student attendees to the Old Dominion Bar Association annual conference, and it follows the work of the Diversity Conference of the Virginia State Bar, Alejandro said.

Sands Anderson is "working to make women and minority lawyers feel like that they can stay" at the firm should they come on board, Alejandro added.

"It's incumbent on us to scout out talent everywhere we can," said Seltzer. Once someone joins the team, "we need to be smart and make sure that the team is happy" he said.

This summer, Doris Causey will be the second African-American to lead a major bar when she becomes president of the VSB. Next month, the Virginia Women Attorneys Association will celebrate her achievement – and that of Sands Anderson's Hardy – with a reception in Richmond in their honor.

## SANDS ANDERSON AT 175:

# An appreciation of the past

Alexander Hamilton Sands moved to Richmond in 1842 after studying at the College of William & Mary; he started working in the law office of his brother William, who was a lawyer and the Richmond clerk of court. He studied law under his brother and a local judge. In 1849 he earned his law license and went on to a distinguished legal career.

He ended up working on many significant cases and had a reputation as a hard-working and eloquent advocate for his clients.

Sands was interested in improving law practice generally: He authored a form book on civil procedure and a number of legal treatises, including one on chancery practice.

He also was an editor for a Richmond newspaper, the Evening Bulletin. He would substitute as the editor at the Southern Literary Messenger, whose writers included Edgar Allan Poe.

Sands married in 1851 and fathered 13 children, one of whom later joined him in law practice. Another son was a lawyer who later served in the Virginia Senate.

After moving to Richmond, Sands had been a Bible teacher at the First Baptist Church. Just before the Civil War, he was ordained a Baptist minister, and he helped to establish churches for African-Americans in Ashland and Glen Allen. He also served as pastor for those churches.

He continued to practice until his death in 1887 at the age of 59.

Since its start in 1842, the firm has had 13 different iterations:

- ◆ Sands & Sands (Brothers – 1842)
- ◆ Sands & Howard (1860)
- ◆ Sands & Sands (Father and son – 1880)
- ◆ Sands & Sands (Brothers – 1887)
- ◆ Sands & Lightfoot (Early 1900s)
- ◆ Sands, Williams & Lightfoot (Early 1900s)
- ◆ Sands & Sands (Father and son – 1930s)
- ◆ Sands & Marks (1941)
- ◆ Sands, Marks & Sands (1945)
- ◆ Sands, Marks, Sands, Henning & Sydnor (1950s)
- ◆ Sands, Anderson, Marks & Clarke (1960)
- ◆ Sands, Anderson, Marks & Miller (1975)
- ◆ Sands Anderson (2010)

So after 175 years, what would Alexander Hamilton Sands think of the firm that still has "Sands" in the front?

He would be "incredulous at the speed of communication," said Margaret F. Hardy, firm president.

"But he would see that we are still relying on the law," she added. "He would recognize the professionalism of the Sands Anderson lawyers of today."

"He might not fathom how we do our jobs," Hardy noted, "but he would see how we handle our clients. That's one of many things he would recognize and be proud of."

Faith A. Alejandro, counsel at the

firm, concurred. "He would be most pleased to see our client focus, offering complete legal services and that the client is the driver."

Shareholder W. Ashley Burgess observed that Sands no doubt worked by candlelight, probably with a quill pen. Obviously, today the lawyers work at computers.

But no matter what the technology, the attorney-client relationship still is the key, he said.

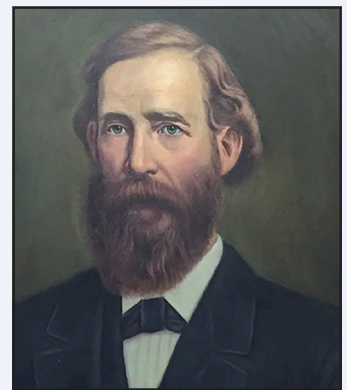
Cullen D. Seltzer noted other changes and developments that might intrigue the founder. Sands would be surprised to see that lawyers have access to years of legal resources in a box, Seltzer said. And no one hikes up to the Supreme Court library any more to do research. It's all available online, he said.

Considering the day and culture in which he lived, Seltzer said Sands might be surprised to look at the faces at the firm – to see women and minority lawyers, because since 1842 "culturally we've changed and come so far."

Still some things haven't changed in 175 years – need for technical competence, the knowledge of the law, knowing right from wrong, treating people with respect, collegiality and professionalism, Seltzer said. "Those won't change – we've internalized those lessons."

Hardy provided a succinct way to characterize 175 years of existence and legal work.

"The valuable thing about being around a long time is that you recog-



Alexander Hamilton Sands

nize, 'It's going to be OK,'" she said. The firm might have its ups and downs, attorneys come and go. But longevity puts things into perspective, she said. The firm always has been resilient. The firm always will be resilient.

Alexander Sands could not have known what the firm started long ago would grow into. But there have been many lawyers in Virginia carrying the firm name and its credo over the years.

"We are the repository of scores and scores and scores of lawyers who have been part of the community," said Seltzer. "We ride the wave they built."

And Sands and the lawyers of today share a common commitment to fundamental values across decades. In Seltzer's words, "Be honest, work really hard and help people make their lives and communities better."

All stories by Paul Fletcher



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