

# FROM THE PRESIDENT

STEVEN D. BENJAMIN

## Mentors Among Us

**M**urray Janus was already a legend when I began practicing law. We were criminal defense lawyers in the same town, but within our profession, we were worlds apart. He was the epitome of a criminal defense lawyer. I was a new lawyer learning how to practice. I knew nothing. He knew everything there was to know.

Mr. Janus became my mentor. He was for me — as he was for countless others — the very model of a dignified professional practicing criminal defense at the highest level. He was the man. He was the lawyer's lawyer. He was the lawyer we wanted to be. So we watched him and tried to learn what it was to be a great lawyer and what it took to ascend to his ranks.

What it took was hard work. We learned from Mr. Janus that being a criminal defense lawyer is not a costume or a role. It is not personality, self-promotion, glibness, or a good spiel. Being a criminal defense lawyer is a lifelong commitment to justice, a belief in the worth of the individual, an allegiance to fairness and equality, and an indomitable work ethic coupled with a willingness to sacrifice in the defense of another. He taught these lessons; he imparted pride in our profession; and he fostered in all he mentored an abiding desire to excel.

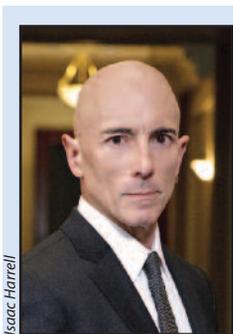
Mr. Janus introduced me to NACDL and encouraged me to attend my first meeting. Many years later, when it

appeared that I might one day follow him as a president of our association, I hoped he could share that honor and fortunately, he did. When he died this year, he left family and friends who miss him very much. He also left the legacy of his mentorship. His influence on generations of lawyers will be remembered and felt forever.

What we achieve in our lives is important. More important is what we inspire others to achieve in theirs. We have lost some of our great mentors, like Murray Janus and Past President Bill Moffitt. Others remain among us. Our past presidents are mentors who return to our meetings and continue to inspire. My friends and contemporaries, the officers and directors of NACDL, lawyers like Lisa Wayne and Billy Murphy — they are now the mentors for others that Murray Janus was for me. Every day they teach new lawyers by their training or by their example the skills, culture, and values of our profession.

We can do more. I call on my brothers and sisters of the defense bar to step up to the responsibility of mentorship. We forget, sometimes, how ill-equipped new lawyers can be to practice law. They need to learn from us what is not taught anywhere else — the lessons of professionalism, strategy, and tactics; the process and business of practicing law; the logistics of client, case, and courthouse management.

This responsibility of mentoring is the reason for our traditional coupling of programs with quarterly board and governance meetings. Mentoring takes place wherever we are accessible to others: courtrooms, hallways, meetings, and conferences. That is why one of the expectations of leadership in NACDL is attendance during our CLE programs. Wherever you are, and however you can do it, take the time and make a difference for a new lawyer. What you inspire in others will be your rich legacy. ■



Isaac Harrell

Steven D. Benjamin is an attorney in private practice with the firm of Benjamin & DesPortes. In addition, he serves as Special Counsel to the Virginia Senate Courts of Justice Committee. He has led criminal justice reform throughout his career, including as counsel in the landmark Virginia Supreme Court decision recognizing a constitutional right to forensic expert assistance at state expense for indigent defendants. He is a recipient of the Virginia State Bar's Lewis F. Powell Pro Bono Award.

### STEVEN D. BENJAMIN

Benjamin & DesPortes, PC

P.O. Box 2464

Richmond, VA 23218

804-788-4444

Fax 804-644-4512

E-MAIL [sbenjamin@benjamindesportes.com](mailto:sbenjamin@benjamindesportes.com)

WEB SITE [www.benjamindesportes.com](http://www.benjamindesportes.com)



Sign up  
for Twitter

to follow President  
Steven D. Benjamin

(@stevebenjaminva).

**IN MEMORY AND HONOR  
OF THE MENTORS  
AMONG US  
PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE.**