

ALUMNI PROFILE

Jones takes lead in Virginia fight for birth-injury program



Ann LaCroix Jones, L'90, first encountered families with profoundly injured children soon after joining a personal injury firm in Fairfax, Va. Her firm, like many firms, rarely took these cases.

"They are incredibly complex. They're enormously time-consuming, and you're not going to get a huge payout at the end," Jones says. Jones had a hard time saying no.

Parents of these children are persistent and one mother kept calling, reaching Jones directly, and striking a deeply sympathetic chord. William "Sandy" Snead III, the lawyer for whom Jones was working, "was willing to invest the money to back [the case]. He gave me a long leash so I could learn about this, which I did, and we were successful. Then you take another and then another. You talk to these people and you have to help them."

Today Jones is regarded as one of the top legal experts on Virginia's Birth-Related Neurological Injury Compensation Program, a no-fault program that provides lifetime support for infants who suffer permanent, disabling damage to the brain or spine during labor, delivery or resuscitation. She has helped 13 children enter the program and has about 10 more under review.

Jones was widely quoted in Virginia media during the 2005 General Assembly's deliberations over a proposed change in the 17-year-old law that would have excluded premature babies from the program's coverage. "The change had been proposed before," Jones says. "It was a bad idea for many reasons. We tried to make that clear. Apparently someone was listening." The proposal failed.

It was a victory for parents who often are forced to represent themselves in these challenging, complicated and extremely emotional cases because so few lawyers will take them.

"I've read too many opinions where they didn't get the award, and I thought I could have won that for them," Jones says.

Jones left Fairfax County for her undergraduate education at James Madison University knowing she wanted to become a lawyer. Her mother ran a court-reporting business, so Jones had seen the inside of many courtrooms. "I loved the atmosphere. I wanted to be a trial lawyer."

Richmond was the perfect place to pursue her legal interests, she says. "Everything is there – the courts, the legislature."

She also found her future husband, Kevin Jones, L'90.

After law school, Jones clerked in Fairfax County Circuit Court, a "spectacular experience." She learned "how not to shoot yourself in the foot in front of the judge."

From there, she worked for Snead for about 12 years. Last year, Jones founded Jones and Rostant PC, where she focuses on medical malpractice and personal injury cases. She will continue to work for "birth-net" clients.

"That's a passion," she says. "I have to work for them."

By Rob Walker