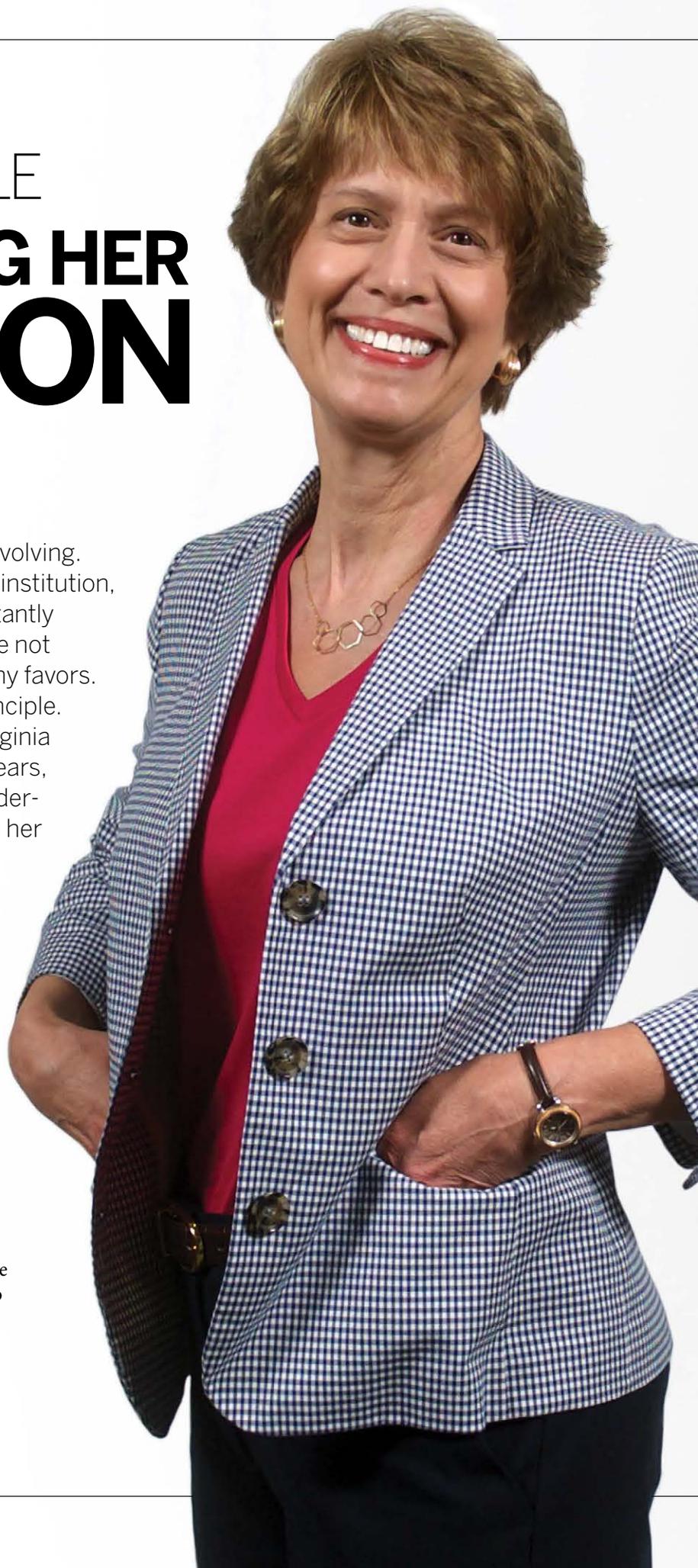


LEADER PROFILE

FOLLOWING HER PASSION

A law librarian's role is constantly evolving. Regardless of your role within your institution, if you are complacent and not constantly looking for ways to improve, you are not doing yourself or your institution any favors. Gail Warren lives her life by this principle. As the state law librarian for the Virginia State Law Library for the past 35 years, she credits her managerial and leadership skills to her past positions and her work serving on numerous American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) committees.

Like many of her colleagues at AALL, Gail Warren's career path to becoming a law librarian was not direct. "My goal early on was to attend law school and to practice law," recalls Warren. "I was 14 or 15 years old when I started expressing a desire to become an attorney. At the time, no one in my immediate or extended family had even graduated from college. My mother was a single parent struggling to make ends meet. My father, however, appeared to be living a carefree lifestyle with few financial worries and, even to the teenaged me, there was something wrong with that. So, I saw going to law school and



becoming an attorney as a way to correct that scenario for lots of mothers and their children.”

Warren attended law school at the University of Richmond in Virginia. While in school, she realized two very pivotal things: “One, I realized my career goal of practicing law probably wouldn’t be a great match for my personality or my temperament. Handling conflict is inherent in the practice of law, and that is something I realized I would prefer to avoid, but I loved the classes and I loved doing the research. Two, I had started working in the law school library—and in doing so, I found I really felt at home in the law library environment.”

“Figure out what your strengths are, and let that guide the ways in which you advocate. I think you also need to be honest in your assessment of your value to your institution and your library’s value to your organization.”

Gail Warren

During her final year of law school, the career services placement office notified her of an open position at the Virginia State Law Library beginning July 1 of that year. The position was for a temporary, full-time law library assistant; nevertheless, Warren was thrilled to find a job in a law library. During that year, the state law librarian announced her retirement and Warren was encouraged to apply for her position, despite not having a library degree. After interviewing with the chief justice and the justices, they appointed Warren to a permanent employee position in July of 1982 with the understanding that she would become the state

law librarian when the current librarian retired. “They hired me with the condition that I get a Master’s Degree in library science. The School of Library and Information Science at Catholic University was willing to expedite my application, so I began my first class in August of 1982. I became the state law librarian on September 1 of that year,” said Warren.

Warren also served as adjunct librarian at the University of Richmond Law School Library. “This was around the time that lawyering skills programs became popular and the library didn’t have enough professional library staff to teach their sections of students, so I taught at the law school as part of that program for a number of years,” notes Warren.

In addition to her role as a government law librarian, Warren has served in several positions at AALL, including a three-year term as Executive Board Treasurer. She has also served on several committees, including the *Law Library Journal* Review Special Committee, Leadership Development Committee, Executive Committee, Education Program Review Special Committee, Member Recognition Special Committee, Annual Meeting Program Committee, and the Council of Special Interest Section Chairs, to name just a few. She is also a member of the Southeastern Chapter of the American Association of Law Libraries and the Virginia Association of Law Libraries.

Warren’s extensive experience in an upper-level role enables her to help others grow and expand their knowledge and skills in court and government law, technology, and other general career management principles.

Describe a typical day?

A typical day includes performing routine administrative duties. Tasks like approving invoices and employee leave requests, as well as scheduling shifts at our reference desk. I also work two to three days a week at the reference desk. On the days I’m at the reference desk, I’m answering questions, usually via email (even law clerks who work in the building will send an email message as opposed to coming into the library). Some of the questions are super basic and can be answered in a matter of minutes, while others may take hours of research.

GAIL WARREN

- STATE LAW LIBRARIAN
- VIRGINIA STATE LAW LIBRARY
- RICHMOND, VA

QUICK HITS WITH GAIL WARREN



ebooks or print?

Print

iPhone or Android?

iPhone

Last book you had the pleasure of reading?

My library sponsors a book club for court staff, the Brown Bag Book Group, and we recently read *The Underground Railroad* by Colson Whitehead. I also look forward to each new book in a mystery series by Deborah Crombie. Her recent *Garden of*

Lamentations is a title I would recommend to anyone who likes mysteries.

Words to live by?

"People are always blaming their circumstances for what they are. I don't believe in circumstances. The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want, and if they can't find them, make them," from Act 2 of George Bernard Shaw's play *Mrs. Warren's Profession*.

Favorite TV show to binge watch?

NCIS! I also binge watch a series on PBS called *A Chef's Life*. It follows Vivian Howard, a chef in a small town in Eastern North Carolina.

Favorite travel destination?

I really enjoy visiting the Outer Banks of North Carolina or the Blue Ridge Mountains in Virginia.

Guilty pleasure?

Every four weeks I get my hair cut, and one of the things I can't wait to do when I arrive is read the gossip magazines. I don't buy these tabloids, but while I'm waiting, I read them from cover to cover. My other guilty pleasure is eating Gearharts dark chocolate caramels.

government officials such as the governor and legislators, and so on. Generally speaking, we are not open to the public. Although the public does not visit the law library, they do call us and send us email questions. Everyone who contacts us, including inmates, receives a response. Our primary mission is to serve the legal community of the commonwealth of Virginia.

The bulk of the services we provide is for Virginia's two appellate courts, and to some extent, for lower court judges. We complete in-depth research for judicial staff; this is far more research than we would complete for an attorney or the public. We also offer orientation sessions for incoming judicial clerks, and I often present educational programs at judicial conferences. The library is located on the second floor of the court building, and, in addition to maintaining that collection, we are also responsible for maintaining chambers collections—collections for each of the appellate justices and judges in Virginia—a total of 28 satellite libraries. Our library houses the Supreme Court of Virginia Archive, so we are responsible for preserving items like photographs, administrative papers, and judges' papers. We also participate in the Legal Information Archive, a digital preservation program of the Legal Information Preservation Alliance (LIPA). The program is focused on long-term preservation and access to born-digital legal publications.

I spend the remainder of my time working on special projects that require a lot of writing. I am a member of the Virginia Access to Justice Commission and serve on two of its working committees. The Commission developed a website for self-represented litigants, and I serve as the site administrator. What I find myself doing most days is juggling tasks—from mundane administrative duties to the reference questions and special projects I handle, my days are pretty busy.

Who are your patrons at your institution, and what sorts of services do you provide?

In Virginia, access to the library is governed by statute. The law library serves groups such as justices of the Supreme Court of Virginia, the judges of the staff of the Court of Appeals in Virginia, judges of all lower courts in Virginia, practicing attorneys in good standing,

Do you work closely with the Supreme Court of Virginia?

My boss is the chief justice, currently the honorable Donald W. Lemons. I meet with him routinely to discuss initiatives or ideas. He has challenged me and my staff in the past two years to do things we've never done before, such as installing exhibits on the first floor of the court building and conducting tours of the courtroom for school children and other groups. One of the co-chairs for the Access to Justice Commission is Justice Bernard Goodwyn, so I work with him in that role. The reference services we provide for court staff require that we have daily contact with judicial law clerks and judicial assistants. We also complete research related to special court events. Our librarian-archivist completes all fact-checking for memorial resolutions presented at judicial conferences twice a year.

How has your past work experience benefited you in your current position?

Every position I've ever filled, including summers in college when I worked at King's Dominion—an amusement park like Six Flags—has provided me with opportunities to learn about managing others. I started working at King's Dominion after my first year in college and continued working there through college and into my first year of law school. During my time with King's Dominion, I had opportunities both to supervise staff and to work with Wilson Learning, a management learning company, as they implemented an employee program. Those early work experiences really inform how I work today and my management style. Each opportunity I've had built on the previous experience. Even as a student working in the law school library, where one started out by filing loose-leaf services, I eventually worked my way up to the circulation desk where I had regular interaction with staff and patrons. The greatest benefit of all past work experience was learning how to work with people. Learning how to motivate them, while respecting their boundaries, and realizing that not everyone is going to do a job the way I would do it. It's important to acknowledge and respect people's strengths and weaknesses.

I like to think that if you talked to the people I work with they would say I support them, kind of like how a coach would. Looking back, one of the most important "educational" opportunities I had was during the first year I worked at my institution, when I was the law library assistant. Although the librarian did not have any degrees, she did have the desire to do right by the library. But she was very insecure, and her management style reflected that and it was not an example anyone would want to emulate. It served as a lesson in how actions a manager might think are those of a powerful manager actually result in people doing the exact opposite of what you need them to do.

What's the biggest challenge you face in your position?

Given that I've been in the same place for so long, my biggest challenge is not allowing myself or my staff to be complacent or too comfortable with the status quo. We can always continue to improve how we provide services

"Volunteering is one of the greatest things you can do to enhance your career."

or how we share information. I think we need to be open to filling new roles, whether or not they are traditional library roles. These non-traditional roles open new doors for remaining relevant to the mission of our parent institutions.

What do you see as the biggest challenges facing the profession?

Can I repeat myself? Allowing ourselves to be complacent about what we do or becoming too comfortable doing what we have always considered to be our role as librarians is a huge challenge. Not remaining relevant puts us in jeopardy. The problem isn't that we don't consider ourselves relevant; it's that we are not remaining relevant to those we serve—not understanding their perspective or where they are coming from gets us in trouble. It's important to be willing to take risks and try something new, such as offering a new service.

Any advice to those looking to advocate for themselves or their libraries?

Be true to yourself and acknowledge your strengths and weaknesses. There was a program at AALL 2017 that discussed introverts and extroverts, and a takeaway from that program was that not everybody needs to be out there advocating loudly and strongly. Figure out what your strengths are, and let that guide the ways in which you advocate. I think you also need to be honest in your assessment of your value to your institution and your library's value to your organization. Envision a successful future for your library; you're not going to get there if you don't know where you want to go or where you want to be in five years or 10 years.

There was a link in AALL's *KnowItAALL* toward the end of August that offered suggestions for making your job sound interesting to people. The article gave some really sound advice that applies equally well to advocacy, such as finding something relatable you can

use to connect with your audience. Skip the nitty-gritty details. As librarians, we sometimes start talking about the day-to-day, technical or reference services we provide as a way to justify our existence. I don't think the people we are trying to convince really care about all that, so focus your argument on the areas they do care about. The last thing the article touched on was to show instead of tell. Show how the library's services are improving workflow, productivity, etc., rather than just explaining that its services are beneficial or just listing the services you provide. (See the full article at bit.ly/ND17Muse.)

What role has AALL played in your career?

When I became a librarian in 1982, one of the first things I did was join AALL. Since 1982, AALL has provided me with a professional home that no other organization has been able to provide. I have had so many opportunities to learn and grow through attendance at the AALL Annual Meetings and through the educational programs I've attended. I have had the benefit of being mentored by many AALL leaders who showed me the way and provided opportunities to experience leadership. I have also made lasting friendships that began when we met at an AALL meeting. Thirty-plus years later, these friendships are strong and priceless. I served a three-year term as treasurer on the Executive Board (2015–2017), and the chief justice thought it was a great leadership opportunity. He and the court realized my filling that leadership role sent a great message about the library and its importance, and what I as an individual might be able to accomplish.

What lessons have you gained through the leadership roles you've held?

Serving on committees and as a committee chair, and being in a role that required me to conduct a meeting or stand up in front of a room and present a program allowed me to try out leadership roles in an environment where I felt supported. To this day, when I do a presentation at a judicial conference and am in a room filled with justices and judges, I'll be nervous, but I'll know I can do it because I've done it at AALL.

Some of the same experience I've gained through leadership has also taught me that it's OK to fail, because no matter what, you learn and grow from each outcome.

What career advice would you give to newer law librarians?

Follow your passion. Don't let money be your priority, which is hard to tell people, especially law students who might be in debt forever. But if you're in law school or your first job and are not sure what you want to do, think about what it is that fulfills you. What is it that makes you happy? Always be open to learning something new. I don't care how old you are, or where you work or what you do, you can always learn something. Take advantage of opportunities when they arise. This goes back to not being complacent, even in your career. If an opportunity arises that is going to take you down a different path, think seriously about following it.

Practice patience. A lot of people get frustrated because they aren't getting to the place or position they want to be quickly enough. Find a role model or mentor and make the most of your relationship with that person. Lastly, volunteer. I wouldn't have had any of the experience or leadership roles I've had in my career if I hadn't first volunteered. Volunteering is one of the greatest things you can do to enhance your career. Start out at your local level and work your way up to a regional or national position.

What is the most memorable question you have ever been asked in your work?

A couple of years ago I received a research request that required me to visit the Special Collections Research Center at the Earl Gregg Swem Library at William and Mary. I was going through former Governor Mills Godwin's papers searching to see if there was something, anything, about the first occurrence of an event that is still held today. I left empty-handed. I was certain there was something about this somewhere—I had searched through boxes and boxes of official files of the governor (and searched online) and found nothing. On a second visit, I decided to expand my search and look through scrapbooks, as this particular Virginia governor must have loved to scrapbook or someone on his staff did. There were newspaper clippings and programs, etc., within the scrapbooks, and lo and behold, as I was turning the pages, I found what I was looking for. I was happy I had uncovered this treasure, and the individual who requested the research was so pleased I was invited to join him and his staff at the next observance of the event. ■