



Volunteer Appreciation

LEGAL EDUCATION SOCIETY OF ALBERTA



Dennis Pelkie QC

Borden Ladner Gervais LLP

FEATURE VOLUNTEER

Dennis Pelkie QC was called to the Bar in 1977 and has practised law in Edmonton and Calgary. Dennis was a sessional instructor of Wills at the University of Calgary for three semesters, taught the Wills bar admission course for many years and is a frequent presenter at LESA seminars. Currently, he is at Borden Ladner Gervais LLP and focuses on Wealth Management – Wills, Estates, and Estate Litigation. In 2004, Dennis was appointed Queen's Counsel.

Tell us about yourself.

I was born and raised in Edmonton and am one of eleven children. Our parents stressed the importance of education. They also encouraged us to become involved in our community whether at school, church, politics, or service groups. Not only did I learn the necessity of team work to get family projects done, I also realized that you could learn from observing and listening to others. That being said, I did learn that at times I needed to stand up for myself. Out of the eleven siblings, I have one brother and nine – yes, nine – sisters.

My first year of University was at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington. I completed my undergrad and law school at the University of Alberta. I played hockey for the Gonzaga team and one of my teammates introduced me to Patti who was from Lethbridge. We Canucks stuck together. Patti and I have been married for thirty-nine years. She has been my constant supporter throughout my legal career.

I articulated and practised in Edmonton for a number of years. In 1983, Patti and I and our two children moved to Calgary. Our grown son and daughter give me great joy as they are thoughtful, caring, great fun and a testament to the values my parents instilled in me.

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When did you decide you wanted to be a lawyer? Tell us a bit about your practice area.

Who knows? Maybe it was Perry Mason, but I wanted to be a lawyer from a very early age. I did not know what it meant to be a lawyer, but I thought I wanted to be one – and I'm very happy with the choice. I do enjoy the practice of law. I was the first one in my family to become a lawyer. However, now I have a niece, her husband, and two nephews who are lawyers.

Wealth Management – Wills, Estates, and Estate Litigation, is a fascinating area. I never know from meeting to meeting, phone call to phone call, the issue or fact scenario what I will be told. At times I am retained by people who have suffered an emotional tragedy, often the loss or incapacity of a loved one. The adage that fact can be stranger than fiction frequently applies to my practice. I can safely say that I rarely have a routine or mundane day. Each client brings a challenge to my law practice. A bonus is that I have clients whom I have advised for many years. They and their families have become friends.

You have been a consistent and loyal supporter of LESA since the early 1980s. What motivates you to volunteer?

Initially my motivation came from various mentors who encouraged me to be involved in all aspects of the legal profession and my community. The firms where I have practiced have been very supportive of my work with LESA, recognizing, as I do, the importance of continuing legal education. Working with the true professionals at LESA has made the whole experience fun and rewarding.

I enjoy working with my colleagues who are motivated and willing to share their knowledge. Over the years I have developed binding friendships. Whenever I have been called on to give a presentation, it has afforded me the opportunity to research a specific area of the law in depth. In turn, that knowledge helps me better advise my clients. I have chaired several panels. I am always amazed that when I approach the leading practitioners of various practice areas, they are ready and willing to give of their time, energy and expertise. It is a positive experience.

What advice would you pass on to a newly called lawyer?

Volunteer. Give some time to our profession. As well as LESA, I have volunteered in the greater community. I found that the more involved I became, the more I enjoyed what I was doing. With every new experience I have had the opportunity to meet more people – all unique – who have made life more interesting. Enjoy what you do.

The generous contributions of time, talent, and energy from all of our volunteers make every Legal Education Society of Alberta program and resource a great success. We appreciate the work of our volunteers and their service to the profession. Contact Dawn Ofner at dawn.ofner@lesa.org to volunteer.

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