

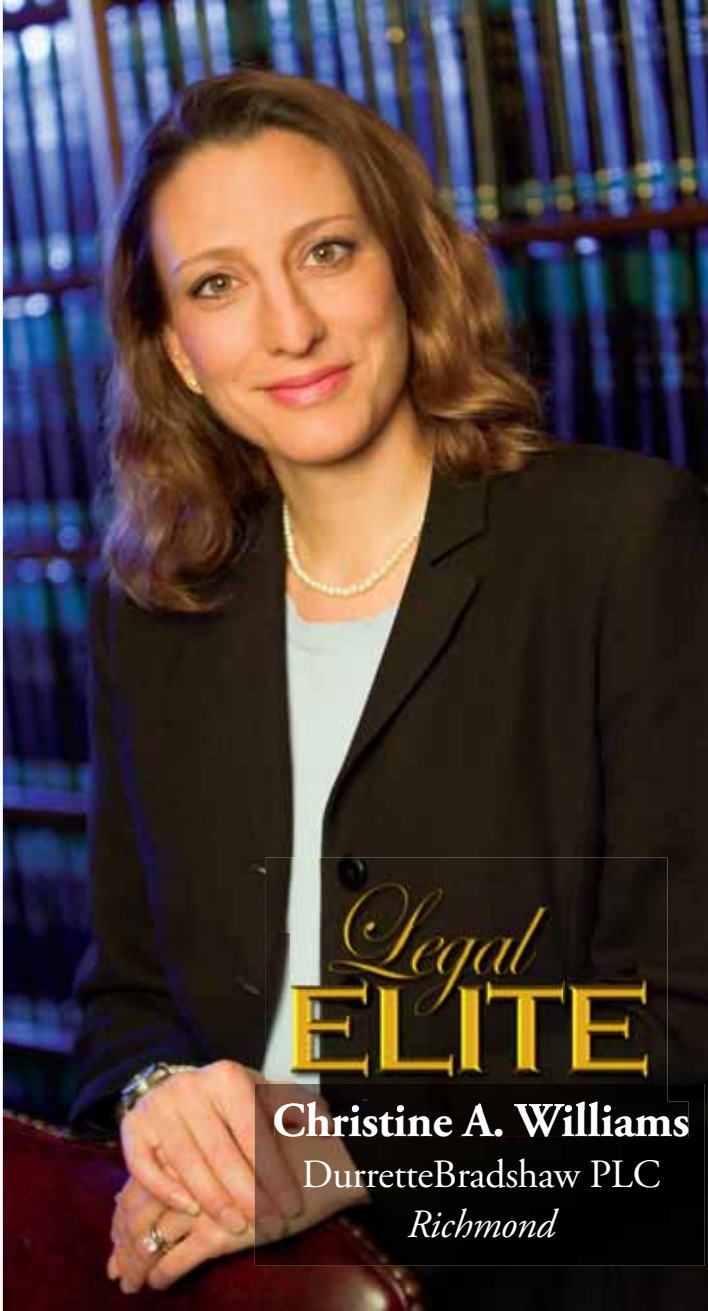
YOUNG LAWYER

as seen in virginia business, december 2006

by Jessica Sabbath

Some senior members of a law firm would have second thoughts letting a 29-year-old associate argue a \$1 million wrongful death case in front of the Supreme Court of Virginia. But for Bruce Marshall, managing director of Richmond-based DuretteBradshaw PLC, the decision was easy.

After all, Christine A. Williams had done most of the work on the case. "She earned the right to do it," says Marshall, who worked



Christine A. Williams

DuretteBradshaw PLC

Richmond

on the case with Williams. "I didn't see any reason not to allow her to do it, and she did an excellent job."

Williams, now 31, represented a charity providing hospice and respite care. A plaintiff sued the organization, alleging negligence because her mother died from complications in a surgery that was needed after she had broken her leg at the facility. When a circuit court ruled the organization was protected by the state's charitable

immunity doctrine, the plaintiff appealed and the case went to the state Supreme Court. "It was a great honor," says Williams of arguing in front of Virginia's top court. "I know there are some directors here who have never had the opportunity to do that, so I was very fortunate."

The full panel of the court, however, decided the charitable immunity doctrine does not protect charities from the more serious forms of negligence, and the case was sent back to the circuit court. "The issue was they had already made up their minds," says Marshall.

At the circuit court, Williams successfully argued that even if the plaintiff could prove all of the allegations, the evidence would be legally insufficient to claim gross or willful and wanton negligence. The judge agreed and dismissed the case.

The case is just one example of Williams' impressive short career and the confidence the firm's directors have in her. She also has argued another case in front of a three-justice writ panel of the state Supreme Court and a patent infringement and breach of contract case before the federal Circuit Court of Appeals in Washington. The law firm directors say they value her opinion, ask for her input on hiring decisions and allow her to handle tough depositions. "I give her more responsibility than I would customarily give to an associate with her level of experience," says Wyatt B. Durette Jr., a director and founder of the firm. "I don't hesitate to ask her to do anything that I would do."

Williams practices primarily in the firm's commercial and complex litigation groups but also works in its growing appellate group. She represents individuals and businesses in state and national cases, including breach of contract, antitrust and premises liability. Williams enjoys the research involved with commercial and complex litigation, and the opportunity to interact with opposing lawyers. "We're constantly learning not only about the law but about our clients. You have to know about your clients' business in order to represent them," says Williams.

Happenstance stemming from a high school program helped Williams discover her career. She worked at a law firm in Long Island part time throughout high school and later worked summers at a law firm in Virginia Beach. "It was just really the only professional environment I'd ever been exposed to," says Williams. "I pretty much never stopped."

Williams majored in psychology at Virginia Wesleyan College in Virginia Beach and studied law at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. There she volunteered to represent children in foster care in a volunteer program and needy juveniles in the school's criminal clinic. "[The programs] taught me, one, a little bit about how the legal system works, and then they taught me the power of volunteering," says Williams. "If someone takes a little out of their lives they can really have an impact on the life of someone else."

After graduating from law school, she searched for jobs in Richmond, her husband's hometown. DuretteBradshaw hired her on a trial basis. "That trial was over quickly," says Marshall.

Williams keeps busy outside the office. She and her husband have a 2½-year-old son and another child on the way. Williams co-chairs the board of TrePades, an organization that raises money through an annual golf tournament for a local children's charity.

She credits her success to a little luck and first-class mentors. "They treat me like a contemporary," says Williams. "If I'm working with them on a case, it's not just, 'Go do the grunt work and come back.' They ask for my opinion, they give me major assignments, and that's treated with the same respect as it would from anyone else."