



**A**s a member of the *Daily Press* staff for more than 32 years and editor-in-chief for nearly a decade during his tenure, Ernie Gates has earned the reputation of being one of the best informed, most respected people on the Peninsula, if not in all of Hampton Roads. His integrity and ability to delve into local news and present it in a non-biased manner helped build a combined print and online audience that matched the heyday of newspaper readership.

Even after Gates' position was phased out last year as Tribune Company (the parent organization that owns the *Daily Press*) reorganized in the economic crunch that hit newspapers around the country, Gates continued to look for ways that he could serve the community of Hampton Roads and Virginia as a whole. And his contributions are as beneficial and meaningful as ever.

**Hampton Roads Magazine:** After being with a local newspaper for so many years, you must have a unique perspective on Hampton Roads.

**Ernie Gates:** The point of a newspaper in general is to try to reflect the community and its wholeness. So one thing you do is soak up a lot about the local culture, the local values and so on. That was one of the things I tried to reinforce as editor—that our overall objective was to reflect the community so readers, over time, would actually see the place where they lived and recognize that on our print and web pages.

**HRM:** What have you been doing lately?

**EG:** I've been doing some volunteer work for the non-partisan districting coalition—basically trying to get legislation to do the right thing but in a non-partisan way.

I worked simultaneously with the college competition in which a dozen colleges competed to redraw the political districts of Virginia in an impartial way, as an alternative to what the General Assembly was going to do. In addition, I was an advisor to the bi-partisan commission that the governor set up to recommend some things about redistricting. For many years I've been fascinated and stayed pretty deep into politics, in a non-partisan way, and this allowed me to stay connected to that.

**HRM:** And we understand that led to some other interesting connections.

**EG:** Yes, I connected with the Lewis B. Puller Jr. Veterans Benefits Clinic at the William & Mary Law School. It helps veterans who are struggling with the benefits process or who need a diagnosis. The current wars are delivering back into the community more and more people with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or traumatic brain injuries that are hard to diagnose. So the law students help service members as they come back from deployment and also veterans back to Vietnam, Korea and even World War II, to be sure they are getting the benefits they were promised.

**HRM:** Is that purely a local program?

**EG:** They're on the verge of a really important expansion. They've created a consortium of universities around Virginia where they take law students and give them real life experience in cases where the outcomes have to do with real people and the real system.

**HRM:** Any advice for people coming out of college, especially journalism students?

**EG:** Be prepared to change because the medium is changing just as fast as the technology. Bring a level of inquisitiveness to the job so that the work you're doing is always revealing something. The heart of good journalism, to me, is telling somebody something they didn't know, and that they want or need to know—especially something somebody didn't want them to know. Use your curiosity to find out things and then use your skill as a communicator, in whatever channel, to relay those things. That's the equation, and these days you have the added advantage of interacting directly with your readers and audience. **HRM**