

The Paraview

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Metrolina Paralegal Association**



2012

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Message from the President:

As we begin the new year, although elections and installation of officers are completed, please keep in mind that there are always opportunities to serve MPA and its members. If you are interested in serving on one of the many committees that MPA has, please contact us at metrolinaparalegal@gmail.com; and we will help you find a committee that is a good fit for you and your talents and/or interests. If you are interested in serving on the paralegal panel that travels to area paralegal schools for a panel discussion with students, please contact MPA's Student/School Liaison Kelly Humiston at kellybh1001@gmail.com. Kelly is working on a panel discussion to be held this fall. A volunteer opportunity with Mecklenburg County Superior Court Judge Lewis and the Girl Scouts will be coming up next spring as well.

Our Fourth Vice President, Linda L. Lyle, NCCP is planning the Fall Fest seminar. Due to the Democratic National Convention in September, things will probably be a bit different than usual. More information will be forthcoming as details become available.

Congratulations to MPA's 2012 Paralegal of the Year nominees: Bambi Michele Lohr, NCCP, April Ritter, CLA, NCCP and Ellen Hamilton, NCCP. If you run into any of these excellent paralegals, please be sure to question them on their secrets to success and excellence!

If there is anything that I or your Executive Committee can do for you to make the most of your membership, please contact us at metrolinaparalegal@gmail.com. Don't forget to check out MPA's Facebook and LinkedIn pages.

Thank you for allowing us to serve you!

Candace L. Russell, ACP, NCCP



SAVE THE DATE FOR MPA's FALL SEMINAR

☆ **FRIDAY, September 21, 2012**

We have the date set, we have the location in Southpark set, we are working on the presenters, breakfast and luncheon menus, and some surprises. So please mark your calendars now!

Registration forms and more detailed information on Fall Seminar will be sent out in late July-early August.

In the meantime, if you have any questions or suggestions, please contact 4TH VP Linda Lyle, NCCP at: linda.lyle@wnhplaw.com – Work Direct Dial # [\(704\) 716-5252](tel:7047165252).

2012 MPA PARALEGAL OF THE YEAR: ELLEN HAMILTON, NCCP

By Satyra Riggins, CLA



The 2012 MPA Paralegal of the Year is Ellen Hamilton, NCCP. Ellen was nominated by Kenneth Schorr, Director of Legal Services of the Southern Piedmont and Katya Riasanovsky, Pro Bono Coordinator of Legal Services of the Southern Piedmont. Ellen has been employed at Legal Services of the Southern Piedmont since November of 2003.

Ellen's job duties include telephone interviews, meeting with potential clients, requesting medical records, representing clients at administrative hearings, contacting agencies to resolve issues, and representing the LSSP at community outreach events. Ellen is a very busy paralegal.

Ellen began her legal career by volunteering with the Children's Law Center, currently Council for Children's Rights. She became a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) and assisted attorneys with child related cases. She obtained her paralegal studies coursework through the paralegal program at Central Piedmont Community College.

Ellen credits a successful paralegal career to someone who has a combination of the coursework, good written and oral communication skills, a willingness to learn, and initiative. There are many other traits that make a paralegal successful but these are some of the key ones in her opinion.

Though Ellen has enjoyed her paralegal career, it has not been without its challenges. Ellen's biggest challenge has been juggling seven attorneys in the same department. As it often is the case, each attorney has his or her own approach to assignments. Learning and remembering the styles and nuances of each attorney continues to be a constant challenge.

Ellen's best advice to fellow paralegals is to be prepared; take advantage of opportunities available to paralegals by joining paralegal associations, by attending CLEs, and by attending paralegal conferences; to document everything since what you think might be an insignificant fact could be a key piece of evidence; and to take initiative. Who knows if you take this advice, you might be a MPA Paralegal of the Year in the future.

MPA Paralegal of the Year 2012 Nominees



(From Left to Right: April Ritter, CLA, NCCP and Bambi Lohr)

April Ritter, CLA, NCCP is a paralegal at Robinson Bradshaw & Hinson, P.A. She has been a member of the MPA since 2000 where she has served a number of positions including Treasurer, Parliamentarian, Second Vice President (Programs/Seminar) and most recently, Audit Chair. Her colleagues agree that she is “devoted” to the paralegal profession as well as the MPA. Gayle Green, Theresa Irvin and Mary Willard all highlighted April’s professionalism and her contributions to the MPA.

Bambi Lohr is a paralegal at Duke Energy. Her nominator, Lauren Bowman Llamas, commended Bambi for being a team player, her dedication, and her organization. Lauren highlighted the fact that Bambi “cares about the outcome of each case” she is a part of. In addition, Lauren shared that Bambi “is always interested in educating herself and self-betterment in order to perform her job to the best of her ability.”

MPA Student Network

Topics and Activities that Connect and Enrich Paralegal Students in the Charlotte Area.

Paralegal Students - Invite a Paralegal Panel to come to your school!

Do you wonder what your day will *really* be like as a paralegal? How does working for an in-house legal department compare to working for a law firm? Which type of law is best suited for your talents or passions? There are many factors to consider when seeking that first paralegal job, so what if there was a way to ask paralegals from various areas of law about what they do each day and what it takes to work in that particular field?

Metrolina Paralegal Association's Paralegal Panel can help answer the questions you have and guide you on your career path with great, practical advice about becoming a paralegal.

A Paralegal Panel is a group of experienced, active paralegals from different areas of law who volunteer to visit Charlotte area paralegal programs and speak with students. Each panel presentation is an informal question-and-answer session that lasts about an hour and can be scheduled for day or evening classes.

If you would like a Paralegal Panel to come to your school, please express your interest to your instructor or program director and have them contact me at the email address below. As a student, you can also contact me directly about this or any other MPA Student Network topic. I look forward to hearing from you!

- Kelly Humiston, MPA Student/School Liaison, kellybh1001@gmail.com.

(This is a volunteer activity by MPA paralegals provided at no cost to Charlotte area paralegal programs and is offered as a service that advances MPA's Objectives and Purposes #3: To promote the profession of the paralegal; educating the public for the advancement and improvement of the profession; and broadening public understanding of the skills and function of the paralegal.)



Are You Sitting on the Bench? 7 Ways to Become a Real Player

By: Vicki Voisin, ACP

Sitting on the bench is not a lot of fun. All the other team members are participating in the excitement of the game while the bench warmers are just watching -- and wishing they could be more of a player. Paralegals may experience the "bench warmer" malady, too, when they would like to play a bigger role on the legal team and assume greater responsibility. Wanting and wishing will not make it so. Instead, you have to take action to get off the bench and out on the field.

Here are 6 ways to make that happen:

Perception is everything. Be sure you are *perceived* as a person who can take on more responsibilities. Is your office neat and organized? Even though you may know where everything is among the piles of papers and files, you may appear overwhelmed and unable to take on any more work. You may also appear disorganized and unable to keep track of a project. Give some thought as to how you can project a better image in the office.

Upgrade your skills. If your employer will send you to continuing legal education classes, always go. If that is not an option, learn on your own time and dime. Your local paralegal association may offer classes. There are excellent learning tools available on the Internet. Read everything you can. Pay attention to how others in the office are doing their work and ask them to teach you.

Become an expert. Has your office implemented a new software program? Learn it inside and out and then offer to train others how to use it. You may also want to draft training manuals and checklists to save everyone time. Whenever you become the "expert" in any area, you will be called upon to play a bigger part in the game.

Volunteer. Want to take a more active role in a case, perhaps one that is going to trial? Anticipate what has to be done and take a stab at completing the work. For example, ask if you can prepare the witness and exhibit list or organize the trial notebook. Many attorneys prefer to do this themselves but there is no harm in asking if you can prepare a draft. When the final product is completed, compare it to your draft to learn how you can improve for the next "stab". You may find that the attorney will gladly turn more responsibilities over to you IF he thinks you more things well.

Do good work and meet deadlines. When you are given work, be sure to ask when it must be finished. Then do your best work and finish as soon as possible, perhaps beating the deadline. A word of caution: Never hesitate to ask questions if you aren't sure how to do the work and never promise you will meet a deadline if you know you are not able to.

Cooperate and pitch in to help. Cooperation is the act of working with others to complete a project. When you respond positively to requests for assistance, as well as

take the initiative to solve problems and get the work done, you demonstrate a cooperative spirit and willingness to help everyone for the good of the team.

Team players do not come in any particular style or personality, nor are they always the “Yay, Team!” cheerleader types. While they may be soft-spoken, they are not passive. They care about what the team is doing and they contribute to its success without being asked or pressed into action.

Follow these 6 steps, to become an active and committed team player. You will find that warming the bench is a thing of the past.

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© Vicki Voisin, "The Paralegal Mentor", delivers simple strategies for paralegals and other professionals to create success and satisfaction by setting goals and determining the direction they will take their careers. Vicki spotlights resources, organizational tips, ethics issues, and other areas of continuing education to help paralegals and others reach their full potential. She is the co-author of *The Professional Paralegal: A Guide to Finding a Job and Career Success*. Vicki publishes *Paralegal Strategies*, a weekly e-newsletter for paralegals, and co-hosts *The Paralegal Voice*, a monthly podcast produced by [Legal Talk Network](#).

The NALA Report

Renae Elam, CP, NCCP, MPA's NALA Liaison, will attend NALA's 37th Annual Meeting and Educational Institutes Convention July 25-28, 2012 in Omaha, Nebraska. This is NALA's "All Institute" convention, which will feature six institutes: Bankruptcy; e-Discovery; Essential Skills; Family Law; Personal Injury; and Real Estate. In addition to representing MPA as a NALA affiliate, Renae will participate in the Personal Injury institute during the convention.

Upcoming NALA Fall programs offered through Real-Time CLE Online presentations include:

August

- 28: American Legal System: Part 1
- 30: American Legal System: Part 2
- 29: Real Estate - Legal Descriptions

September

- 5: Real Estate - Title Searches
- 6: Ethics - Techno-Ethics: Ethics in the Age of Technology
- 10: Litigation - Electronic Discovery
- 11: Litigation - Evidence Part 1
- 11: Basic Business Organizations
- 12: Real Estate - Evictions
- 13: Immigration: Business Immigration in a Declining Economy
- 14: Art and Science of Witness Interviews
- 17: Litigation - Advanced Courtroom Technology
- 18: Litigation - Evidence Part 2
- 19: Intellectual Property - IP: What Every Paralegal Should Know
- 20: Using the CM/ECF System
- 21: PowerPoint 2010 for Paralegals
- 24: Elder Law
- 25: Litigation - Evidence Part 3
- 27: Ethics & Technology
- 28: Bankruptcy Basics

Registration is \$80 per session for NALA members and \$105 for non-members. Special fees are offered for multiple participants at single sites. For details visit www.nala.org.

Maintaining Your Marketability, While Keeping an Eye Open for New Opportunity.

By Latavea Cross

In this economy and slow-climbing job market, many professionals are faced with the tortuous dilemma of desiring a transition into alternative employment while impatiently waiting in their current positions. Conversations can be overwhelming when you constantly hear, “The job market is still unstable, so it’s best to stay where you are for now.” It’s even more disheartening to read statistics that rank North Carolina as the 5th highest in unemployment in the nation. At the same token, many news stories and documentaries regarding families that contained one or more post-secondary degree holders who earned a six-figure income are now forced to utilize local food pantries to feed their families. Years later, these same individuals, still in pursuit of employment, are in danger of losing their unemployment benefits.

The legal profession, unfortunately, is faced with the same economic issues which can be overwhelming and cause anxiety, but I’m very grateful every time I have a conversation regarding the economy, read statistical data, or even watch economy-related programs because I realize that I could be in their shoes at any moment. Long gone are the days where options were available to those who may dislike their current position. Most stay because the prospect of finding something better is slim to none. This situation is akin to a bad relationship between you and your employer. You’d love to end the “relationship” but fear that when you do, being single or in this case, “unemployed” in 2012 isn’t very tempting either. I guess a bad relationship is a small price to pay for steady income!

So, what does this mean for those of us who are holding on to our current positions by the skin of our teeth? Does this mean that those of us who’ve made it through the downsizing, benefits cuts, and frozen bonuses are sentenced to “life” in employment purgatory? For a year or so, this was my point-of view which made me extremely miserable. That year, I worked extra hard, met my hours, took on extra responsibilities, and even worked overtime when needed. I knew, for certain, that I was going to receive a great raise or perhaps promotion, but low and behold, due to the “economy”, neither one of those assumptions came true. I decided to put out my feelers to determine what opportunities were available. Well, the short and long of it was a big fat NOTHING! At least 100 other qualified applicants were applying to the same positions I was, and most were probably even more qualified, which delayed my “parole date” even further.

About three months later, I decided that I needed to keep my competitive edge. Prisoners usually learn a trade while serving their sentence, so I figured, why go against the grain? I decided my time was best served making myself more marketable. Below is a short list of self-made promises I have followed while the economy continues to rebound itself:

1. **Go Back to School.** I know, I know, easier said than done. I dreaded it! It took about a year or so for me to commit to it. I have already obtained an undergraduate degree, so there was no thrill in going back to school. However, I am single, with no children, and my employer agreed to reimburse me, so I bit the bullet and committed to becoming a part-time student. The biggest influence for me to go back to school was

realizing that although I had so many years of experience as a paralegal, it was due to on-the-job training, making me a jack of all trades, but a master of none. My job searches revealed that a great majority of positions I desired required a paralegal degree in addition to experience. Going back to school would infinitely sharpen my skills, and a paralegal certification would afford me the positions I desired.

2. Join Professional Organizations and Social Organizations and Get Involved.

We all know that professional organizations are a great way to have an impact on your profession as a whole. It's a great way to interact with others in your profession and find solutions to the problems you may face on a day-to-day basis. It's also a way to roll up your sleeves and get involved. Taking it a step further and getting involved by becoming a part of a committee and, dare I say Board, will afford you some ownership in which direction the organization takes, which may be a great thing!

3. Look for Opportunities to Market Yourself. Now, Item #2 listed above is a great way to market your company, but it can also be a great way to market yourself. I have found that in joining professional organizations, not only do you network with individuals in your same profession, but you also come encounter those who provide services to your industry (i.e. legal staffing agencies), killing the proverbial two birds with one stone, if you will.

4. In all that you do, always keep your resume in mind. This is my mantra. In an effort to breathe some life into your career, your routine, your hamster wheel, always try to keep your focus on your resume. Look for opportunities to gain more knowledge and step outside your norm to keep up with the ever-changing times. I'm not a litigation paralegal, but I have often volunteered to assist with litigation and merger and acquisition efforts because organization and analysis are skills that apply to many areas of the law. Not to mention, it looks outstanding on my resume, in addition to going back to school, and joining several professional and social organizations. I have been in on several rounds of resume reviews for prospective paralegals with impressive resumes and have often found myself short on experience and wondered if I was interviewing my replacement. I pondered how they managed to accomplish so much in such little time and to my astonishment realized they were making the best use of their time.

5. Maintain the integrity of your current position. Finally, I recognize that holding on in your current position can be weary, tiring, frustrating and sometimes even hopeless, but always maintain the integrity of your current position. There is nothing worse than someone who hates their job and it's evident in their work product, conversation, attitude, and just everything they contact. Eventually they become careless with their filings, fail to return phone calls and just become dead-weight for the team. Do not become like them because remember, someone always has to come in behind and clean up your mess. Everyone is in the same boat in this economy. Besides, your current job will end up being your next recommendation!

I hope this article provides someone with some encouragement and comfort in knowing that they aren't alone in this economic catastrophe. Sprucing up the old resume and taking that scary leap out into a tempestuous job market can be quite a rewarding experience if you adhere to my rules!

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