## THE PARAVIEW

**Quarterly Publication of the Metrolina Paralegal Association** 



2011

P.O. Box 36260 Charlotte, NC 28236 www.charlotteareaparalegals.com

FIRST QUARTER EDITION



#### THE PARAVIEW

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#### ADVERTISING RATES

The Metrolina Paralegal Association publishes *The Paraview,* which includes substantive legal articles of interest and general news for the career paralegal. This publication is distributed to approximately 250 members of the MPA in the Charlotte area. The membership of the MPA includes paralegals from private law firms, corporations, title companies, government agencies, local community colleges, educators, and paralegal students. Advertising is available in *The Paraview,* which is the only local professional publication of this type in the Metrolina area. Our magazine will keep your display advertisement circulating in the legal community for a three-month period.

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#### IN THIS ISSUE

Mark Your Calendars	Pg. 3
Holiday Luncheon Recap	Pg. 4
Stay on Track with Helpful Tools	Pg. 5
7 Ways for Paralegals to Become Indispensable to Employers	Dn 60
by Seth Davis	Pp. 6-8
A Day in the Life of a Custody Advocacy Paralegal	Pg. 9
North Carolina News	Pg. 10
MPA Spotlight	Pg. 11
MPA Board Members and Chairperson	Pg. 13
MPA Patrons	Pp. 14-15



# MARK YOUR CALENDARS 2nd Quarter 2010





#### January 2011

Jan. 1-Welcome 2011!

Jan. 5-MPA Executive Committee meeting

Jan. 13-MPA Monthly Mtg

Jan. 17-MLK Day



#### February 2011

Feb. 2-MPA Executive Committee Mtg

Feb. 11-MPA Annual Seminar

Feb. 14-Valentine's Day

Feb. 21-President's Day



#### <u>March 2011</u>

Mar. 2-MPA Executive Committee Mtg

Mar. 10-MPA Monthly Meeting

Mar. 13-Daylight Savings begins

Mar. 20-Welcome Spring!



## Holiday Luncheon Recap

The MPA Holiday luncheon occurred on Thursday, December 9, 2010 during the regular scheduled meeting time. The holiday luncheon was a Gift-A-Palooza with a Yankee ornament exchange, the 50/50 raffle with proceeds going to Crisis Assistance Ministry, and the centerpiece giveaways utilizing the "right" and "left" story. We also enjoyed seeing all the festive holiday sweaters from those participating in the festive sweater contest. Thanks to everyone who attended and thanks to the MPA patrons who provided gifts for this event. See you next December at the evening social.



# STAY ON TRACK WITH THESE HELPFUL TOOLS





#### **OFFENDER SEARCHES**

If you practice in the area of criminal law, you may be very familiar with the NC Department of Correction Offender Public Information search. However, for those who are not aware of this search capability, the NC Department of Correction has a web based search engine which allows you to search for offenders. The website location is

http://webapps6.doc.state.nc.us/opi/offendersearch.do?method=view.

In addition to offender searches, you may search for escapes/capture inmates, absconders, and inmate releases.







#### PDF SPLITTING ASSISTANCE

www.splitcourt.com

This free website permits you to upload a large PDF file and have SplitCourt split the file into individual PDF files just under 2 MB in size. You can then download a .zip file containing the split PDF files. This could come in handy when you're dealing with very large odfs.

#### 7 Ways for Paralegals to Become Indispensable to Employers

By Seth Davis, ServeNow.com

The paralegal profession is bucking the roller-coaster trend of the rest of the labor market and heading sharply upward. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) projects that employment of paralegals and legal assistants will grow 28 percent between 2008 and 2018. The good news for paralegals is that the profession is booming. The less-obvious downside is that more people joining the paralegal ranks means more competition for open jobs.

If you're a paralegal, now is the time to bring out your competitive side; you need to separate yourself from the pack and make yourself indispensable to employers. We have gathered a list of ways that you can increase your value as a paralegal, with some great advice from former National Federation of Paralegal Associations President Georgette Lovelace, RP.

#### 1. Take Your Education Higher

College degrees have become more important than ever before in employers' eyes. Paralegals once were able to jump right into jobs without having associate's degrees or bachelor's degrees, but modern employers have begun to ask that paralegals furnish a degree as a prerequisite of employment.

"When I became a paralegal, I went to school to earn a bachelor's degree and that was 30 years ago," Lovelace said. "At the time the paralegal profession was new and not many people went to school for legal studies. Nowadays it's almost required."

Lovelace explained that there aren't many places in the country where paralegals can get by without higher education, and that some states are creating regulations that require it.

"We're approaching the time when employers won't hire a paralegal without formal education," she said.

#### 2. Don't Rest on Your Laurels After Earning Your Degree

Employers like to see that paralegals are on a constant quest for self-improvement through learning. Paralegals have access to many continuing education courses and can work toward various voluntary certifications, and pursuing these options can be the extra step that boosts your resume above another.

When discussing voluntary certifications, Lovelace said, "I think it's important because individually it gives you a sense of accomplishment. And employers in some areas are starting to require it and list it as a preferred component. It demonstrates the importance of paralegals in the industry, demonstrates professional and personal growth, and demonstrates commitment to your chosen profession."

Voluntary certifications can take the form of NFPA's PACE program that leads to the status of Registered Paralegal, National Association of Legal Assistants' certification program that leads to Certified Legal Assistant/Certified Paralegal status, and National Association of Legal Secretaries' three levels of certification. Many or all of these programs require paralegals and legal assistants to maintain certification by taking continuing education courses.

If you're new to the paralegal industry, Lovelace shared that NFPA is developing an entry-level exam for paralegals called the Paralegal CORE Competency (PCC) Exam. CORE stands for Competent, Organized, Responsible and Ethical, four elements that NFPA has identified as essential qualities of a good paralegal.

6

#### 7 Ways for Paralegals to Become Indispensable to Employers-CONT.

#### 3. Become a Well-Rounded Paralegal

The Bureau of Labor Statistics asserts in its 2010-11 Occupational Outlook Handbook that, "Employers are trying to reduce costs and increase the availability and efficiency of legal services by hiring paralegals to perform tasks once done by lawyers. Paralegals are performing a wider variety of duties, making them more useful to businesses."

Because today's paralegals are expected to possess comprehensive skill sets, the catch phrase of any paralegal when assigned a new task should be, "Yes, I can." Through a mixture of volunteering for new responsibilities at work and participating in continuing education, you can fill in any gaps in your array of skills and become any employer's dream staff member. According to Lovelace, paralegals should be able to handle any task that lawyers perform, with the exception of representing a client in court and giving legal advice.

"I think the role of most paralegals is to perform 'substantive' legal work, which includes duties that are typically performed by attorneys," she said. "Substantive legal work consists of responsibilities such as legal research, drafting legal documents, interviewing clients and witnesses, analyzing and summarizing documents in a legal matter, etc. Paralegals can't go to court or give legal advice, but they should be able to do anything else if adequately trained."

#### 4. Save Time and Improve Processes

Whether it's finding ways to reduce paperwork or streamlining the phone system in the office, you can impress employers by implementing changes that produce noticeable improvements. Lovelace used ServeNow.com - an online trusted network of local, pre-screened process servers - as an example of something that frees up time for other important duties.

"Learning how to do anything including services available on the Internet such as ServeNow.com helps to get things done much more quickly. If you're looking for a process server in another state, you can get on the Internet and plug in information and find a process server in minutes instead of making six phone calls. Employers are always looking at the bottom line, and with this you're saving them time and money," Lovelace said.

#### 5. Decide Whether to Specialize or Generalize

The Bureau of Labor Statistics also mentions that many paralegals are beginning to specialize in niche practice areas such as real estate, bankruptcy, medical malpractice and product liability because they are growing quickly. This strategy can lead to increased employment opportunities, so you may want to research the benefits of becoming specialized, but Lovelace cautions that specializing in one area can limit you professionally.

"I think specializing in certain areas is fairly common now. It gives an applicant an advantage over a paralegal who only has minimal experience in the same area," she said. "On the other hand, I think it's important to have diverse experience. It can limit you if you're too specialized."

Lovelace said she made it a point to gain experience in several different practice areas so if she was applying for a real estate position, she could emphasize to the prospective employer her relevant experience in that sector.

#### 7 Ways for Paralegals to Become Indispensable to Employers-CONT.

"I would encourage paralegals to become more generally experienced because it can help you find the practice you'd like to spend the next five to 10 years in," she said.

#### 6. Become the Office's Technology Guru

Staying on top of new software programs and learning to use them will elevate you quickly in employers' eyes. Lovelace shared that she took the initiative to learn Adobe Pro and soon became the go-to person in her litigation department whenever someone needed to manipulate PDF files. Many software companies also allow you to download free trial versions of their products and participate in their educational tutorials or free webinars.

If you're looking to bring your firm up to speed with the latest programs and technology, consider technology such as:

- ServeManager Web-based application that enables you to assign, track and manage your service of process all in one place.
- Google Docs A free web-based word processing tool that enables people to collaborate on documents, spreadsheets, presentations and more.
- Online hourly billing software You can use these secure, web-based programs for invoicing, time tracking and billing.
- Imaging software Paralegals can use this software to scan images into databases.

Becoming proficient in the latest technology is wise because as Lovelace points out, "Attorneys are far more interested in law than learning mechanics and making something work on the computer."

#### 7. Maintain a Smoothly Running Schedule

"Setting deadlines for yourself and tracking deadlines for your boss is essential, not only because missing a deadline could result in a malpractice suit, but also because it helps everybody stay on task. You become very valuable to your employer when you can keep track of all those deadlines," Lovelace said.

Some of your free and paid options for tracking deadlines include Google Calendar, ScheduFlow Online and VueMinder Calendar Lite. Lovelace uses her Outlook calendar as her scheduling system, but you can explore other programs and methods to figure out which is most effective for you and your employer.

#### Conclusion

You can position yourself to ride the wave of increased employment opportunities in the paralegal profession all the way to the top. Use the above tips to get you started and always be looking for new ways to increase and showcase your value to current and potential employers. And remember: The end goal is to be able to say, "Yes, I can!"

Seth Davis is the content manager for ServeNow.com, which is a trusted network of local, prescreened process servers. Visit www.ServeNow.com for more information.



### A DAY IN THE LIFE. . . OF A CUSTODY ADVOCACY PARALEGAL



Tanya L. Willis who is a Custody Advocacy Paralegal at the Council for Children's Rights provides insight into her work in this quarter's column.

My workday begins at 8:30am and ends at 5:00pm. My typical day begins with checking and responding to numerous emails and voice mail messages. Most of the messages are from my lead attorney and are either requests for information or his messages to parties or volunteers on which I have been carbon copied. The remainder of the day consists of assigning case volunteers, disseminating case files, drafting orders, ordering records, issuing subpoenas or other trial prep tasks, calendaring court cases, and scheduling internal appointments. Twice a month I attend calendar call to have cases set in family court. Occasionally, I attend court or participate in parent conferences with one of my attorneys.

My official title is Custody Advocacy Paralegal, which is somewhat unique in that the agency I work for represents the best interests of children in high-conflict custody cases. My responsibilities are most similar to those of a family law paralegal.

Typical tasks include managing case volunteers, interviewing parents and children, preparation of legal documents, legal research, managing court calendars for three attorneys, attending calendar calls, communicating with private attorneys involved in our cases, and records management.

My favorite part of being a paralegal is being able to fully utilize my analytical, organizational, and writing skills. My least favorite part is performing administrative support/secretarial duties.

My team accepts court appointments to represent the best interest of children whose parents or other custodial parties are engaged in hotly-contested custody or visitation cases. Our clients are from all social, economic, and racial backgrounds. My most rewarding experiences are those in which I am directly involved in the resolution of conflicts between the parties, ensuring optimal placement and promoting effective coparenting of our clients.

I would most like to try the responsibilities of a criminal law paralegal. The intensive trial prep and time assisting in the courtroom are appealing.



## **NORTH CAROLINA NEWS**



## FACEBOOK FRIENDS NORTH CAROLINA

Facebook plans to open a \$450 million data center near Forest City, North Carolina. The new data warehouse will create 250 construction related jobs. Once the center is open, it will employ 35-45 full-time and contract workers.



## NC SECRETARY OF STATE OFFERS FREE CLE CLASSES

Did you know that the North Carolina Secretary of State offers free CLE classes? The classes are in Raleigh so this might be more beneficial to your colleagues in the Raleigh area. For more information go to: http://www.secretary.state.nc.us/notary/pdf/cle2011/NOTICE%20OF%20UPCOMING%2OCLE%20COURSES%20-%20January%202011.pdf. Check back

monthly for updated class schedules.



## DNA DATABASE TO GROW IN FEBRUARY 2011

The NC State Bureau of Investigation's crime laboratory had 420 hits in its DNA database in 2010. That number was a record number of matches resulting in the solving of murders, rapes, and other crimes around the state. That database will be even more helpful in February 2011 when it is expanded to include arrestee samples. For more information, go to http://www.ncdoj.com/getdoc/b84d6e37-9ff5-463e-bf37-799678eabd76/more.aspx





## MPA SPOTLIGHT



#### The MPA Spotlight for this quarter is Anne H. Patterson, NCCP.

Anne is a paralegal at Johnston, Allison & Hord. She has been a paralegal for over 20 years. Her areas of practice are corporate law and wills/estates/probate law.

Anne initially wanted to be a detective. However, due to the height and weight requirements of the time, she was too small to become a detective. She decided that she still wanted to work in law in some way and decided to become a paralegal.

Anne's favorite part of being a paralegal is developing client relationships and being able to assist clients to gain their trust and confidence.

Anne's most memorable experience in her paralegal career was her first jury trial. She was very nervous and wanted to make sure that everything was done properly. The jury found in the client's favor.

Anne has been a MPA member for twelve years. She served as the MPA historian from 2005-2007. She served as MPA President from 2007-2009. She served as MPA Treasurer from 2009-2010.

Anne is married. She and her husband, Pat, have three children Nolan (25), Matt (23), and Gabriel (19). She also has two dogs. . . A Chihuahua named Teacup and a German shepherd, Labrador mix.

Anne enjoys reading, jigsaw puzzles, the beach, Alabama football, and shopping.



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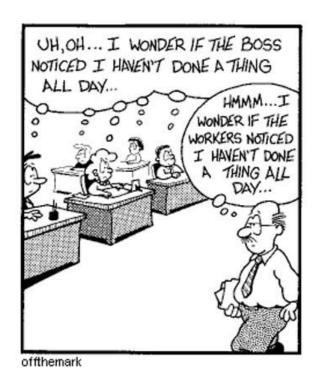
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12

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