

## Message from the Chair

### Behind the Scenes



Cheryl Nodarse

I recently had the opportunity to see the musical “Wicked.” For those of you who have seen the production, it goes without saying that I loved it. The show transported the audience to a different world for three hours. While it is easy to point to the actors as the stars of the show, we all know that it takes more than actors to make a musical a success. Certainly, there are the musicians in the orchestra, the stage crew, the costume designers...numerous people working together toward a common goal of a successful show.

Like the actors, we section council members are formally recognized for section happenings. But additionally, there are a number of folks out there working day in and day out to make this section work for you who don't get their names in the limelight, so to speak. I wanted to take this opportunity to recognize some of the key, behind-the-scenes people who do so much for the section:

**Margaret Agius** – Margaret is the person who keeps the section's job bank current and fresh with a steady stream of job postings. Margaret has been serving in this role since 2002.

**KathyAnn Blunck** – KathyAnn has long been the coordinator of our section's annual meetings, held each year in conjunction with the State Bar Annual Meeting. It has been no small feat to organize this event, which includes elections, key announcements, and, in years past, meal planning.

**Kevin Gasiewski** – Kevin has been in charge of new memberships since 2001. As we know, the State Bar has a list of criteria for membership, and Kevin must individually process each application to ensure compliance with the Bar's requirements.

**Linda Jevahirian** – Linda has been the sole public relations person for the section for numerous years. Whenever you see an announcement about one of our events in a legal news publication, Linda is generally the one to thank for that.

**Kathy Kasiorek** – Kathy has graciously handled all of the website and listserv issues that have come our way over the past several years. Kathy also ensures that our section is included in the “Section Briefs” page of every *Michigan Bar Journal* issue.

To all of you – Margaret, KathyAnn, Kevin, Linda, and Kathy—and to everyone else who has worked so hard over the years to make this section the overwhelming success that it is, please accept my many thanks for all that you do!

This will be my last message to all of you. I will hand over the reins to Nicole Cook at the annual meeting in September. It has been a sincere pleasure and privilege to serve as chair of the section.

And speaking of the annual meeting...please plan to attend, if you are able, so that you can meet some of our scholarship recipients and participate in the nomination/election process.

Issue 3, 2008

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#### Disclaimer

Articles and columns that appear in the *Michigan Paralegal* do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Legal Assistants Section of the State Bar of Michigan, and their publication does not constitute an endorsement of views that may be expressed. Publication and editing are at the discretion of the editor. The *Michigan Paralegal* encourages republication and dissemination of articles it publishes. For information regarding permission to reprint articles, please address inquiries to the editor.

#### Editor's Note

The newsletter is published quarterly.

Newsletter submissions (Calendar Events/Items, Letters to the Editor, Section News and Business, Section Committee News/Reports, National and International News, State and Local News, and Advertising should be sent to the attention of Denise Gau at [gau@butzel.com](mailto:gau@butzel.com).

#### Section Mission

The Paralegal/Legal Assistant Section of the State Bar of Michigan provides education, information and analysis about issues of concern through meetings, seminars, the website, public service programs, and publication of a newsletter. Membership in the Section is open to qualified legal assistants and to all members of the State Bar of Michigan. Statements made on behalf of the Section do not necessarily reflect the views of the State Bar of Michigan.

## 2007-2008 Council and Committee Directory

**Chairperson**—Cheryl Nodarse  
(517) 886-7176, [cnodarse@hubbardlaw.com](mailto:cnodarse@hubbardlaw.com)

**Chair elect**—Nicole Cook

**Secretary**—Jeanne Nyhuis

**Treasurer**—Marianne B. Delaney, CP

**Ex Officio Chairperson**—Denise E. Gau

### Council

Marianne B. Delaney, CP • Brian Philip English  
Ida R. Farhat, ACP • Vanessa Lozzi  
Elsie Morren • Rebecca C. Opipari  
Jaxine Wintjen, CLA

**Commissioner Liaison**—Eric J. Pelton, Esq.

### STANDING COMMITTEES

**Annual Meeting**—Kathy Ann Blunck, Chair

**Education**—Nicole Cook, Chair

**Job Bank**—Margaret Lucas Agius, CP, Chair

**Membership**—Kevin D. Gasiewski, CLAS, Chair

**Newsletter**—Denise E. Gau, Chair

**Policies**—Jaxine L. Wintjen, CLA, Chair

**Pro Bono**—Ida Farhat, ACP, Chair

**Public Relations**—Linda S. Jevahirian, Chair


**Scholarship**—Becky Opipari, Chair

**Website**—Kathleen D. Kasiorek, CP, Chair

## Free Clutter vs Clutter Free

By Vicki Voisin, ACP

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Is your office ruled by clutter? Is your desk so covered with papers and files that you have no room to work? Is too much “stuff” affecting your productivity? Do you long to simplify and pare down?

You probably answered “yes” to at least one of those questions, so you must hear the tale of my friend, whom I will call “Gloria,” who finally learned the important lesson that even though something may be “free,” it may still be very expensive.

Here is the story:

The conference was excellent, and exhibitors were abundant. Gloria was there, business cards in hand. She was moving from booth to booth, chatting with the exhibitors, letting them know she appreciated their support of her career field, and learning about their products and services.

And, yes, she was picking up every sample, product, or gift in sight. If she could manage, she picked up two or three of everything. Some exhibitors had candy. Others had brochures and magazines. She helped herself to those, too. It was all free, so why not?

When the conference was over, Gloria returned to her room to pack for the trip home. She swept the oh-so-cute, itty bitty bars of soap and bottles of shampoo, conditioner, lotion, and mouthwash into her luggage, along with the shower cap, shoeshine cloth, and sewing kit. Then she tossed in the unused packages of coffee, several pens, and the pads of paper that were by the telephone. It, too, was all free, so why not?

Gloria crammed all the freebies into her luggage, remembering that it had been too heavy when she left home and was even heavier now. While struggling with the zipper, she said a brief prayer that it would hold when the not-always-gentle baggage handlers hefted the luggage onto the airplane.

When Gloria unpacked at home, she put all the hotel goodies in the bathroom closet with her mounting collection from previous trips. She realized they were not being used, but it was all free, and that pleased her.

She took everything else to her office and dumped it on her already overflowing desk. There was a virtual sea of freebies, including mugs, mouse pads, a yoyo, a Frisbee, letter openers, staple removers, calendars, pads of paper, cubes of sticky notes, squishy stress relief balls, highlighters, pens, luggage handle wraps, software samples, bags...and more bags. She had even picked up things she could not identify.

Then Gloria surveyed her desk. Her pen collection documented trips to New Orleans, Jacksonville, Tulsa, Phoenix, Dallas, and Minneapolis. She spied a clock from a well-known employment agency, a calculator courtesy of a title company, and a tape dispenser from a prominent office supplier. Gloria literally could not see the top of her desk. There was “free” stuff everywhere.

Knowing of my interest in the virtues of good organization, time management, and efficient work habits, Gloria called me. “Vicki,”

she pleaded, “You have to help me! My desk is covered with so many free things that I cannot work!”

“Gloria,” I replied sympathetically, “you have picked up some nice things that you only thought were ‘free.’ They are taking up valuable space in your office and keeping you from being productive. This makes them ‘Expensive’ with a capital ‘E.’”

“But I can’t just throw everything away!” she whimpered, “They are all useful things that I might need some day. . .” When I later visited Gloria’s office and saw all her freebies, My first thought was, “Wow! Is this the office of a successful and productive paralegal, or is it a commercial for office suppliers and legal vendors?”

I explained to Gloria that she is not alone, despite the fact there is no “Freebies Anonymous.” Many people have issues dealing with clutter, particularly when the clutter is free to begin with. Excessive clutter is a significant problem. It distracts you from focusing on goals and projects and may lead to a number of other problems such as procrastination, resentment, stress, and even depression. It may contribute to low self-esteem if you feel as though you are not capable or are missing a basic organizing skill that others seem to have.

“It is a common misconception,” I told Gloria, “that letting go of things means having less. In reality, letting go actually gives you more freedom and peace of mind. You will be able to easily access the things you use most often, which is important to a stress-free work environment.”

I also helped her understand that clutter is both time consuming and costly because things inevi-

tably get lost. Searching for misplaced documents and client files is not just a waste of time and energy; it is also a waste of money. For instance, assuming Gloria works 48 weeks in a year and spends just five minutes of each hour of an eight-hour workday looking for things, she will waste 160 hours per year. Multiplied by her billing rate of \$95 per hour, the annual loss totals \$15,200!

Gloria was tired of the clutter-induced stress in her life, so we got busy. I assured her that she did not have to get rid of all of her treasures. Instead, we found three copy paper boxes (easy, because Gloria saved those, too) and marked them “Throw Away,” “Give Away,” and “Keep.”

One by one, we sorted through all of Gloria’s freebies. If there was something she could and would use, it went into the “Keep” box. The things that she thought someone else could use went into the “Give Away” box. The items that did not work or were absolutely no use to anyone went into the “Throw Away” box.

As it turned out, most of the pens Gloria had picked up in her travels either did not work or she did not like to write with them. Besides, how many pens can one person use? If they did not work, then they were tossed. If she did not like them but they were still good, they went to the firm’s supply room, where pens must be the larval stage of wire coat hangers—they are never there when you need them, but more seem to show up in the closets.

Some of the items Gloria kept could be re-purposed. For instance, coffee mugs became holders for her pens, markers, and highlighters. After an hour or so, Gloria could see the top of her desk, and she once again had an orga-

nized, uncluttered space where she could work and be productive. Gloria was amazed at how much weight and stress lifted from her shoulders when the clutter was cleared away. She could breathe! She could work! She felt peace.

We talked about maintaining this peace in her life by keeping her office neat. Because her desk is prime real estate, only the things she uses on a daily basis, such as the stapler, hole punch, and pens, should be on top and within reach. The things she uses weekly should be kept nearby in easily accessible file cabinets, bins, and boxes. If she is using something only once a month, it should be stored elsewhere.

Instead of stacking files on top of her desk, she should place them in an inclined desktop sorter so they stand upright and are easy to see. She should deal with mail the minute it arrives, and junk should be discarded (possibly shredded) immediately.

Then, once a month, she should sort through her papers and magazines and discard anything she does not need. At the end of the day, Gloria should clear her desk and empty her voice mail and e-mail boxes so that when she arrives in the morning she is greeted by a serene space. She will feel much less overwhelmed when she sits down to a clear desk. This will save valuable time and energy and will help her prioritize her work.

Gloria’s office looked wonderful, so I gave her some homework—to deal with the freebies at home. That evening, Gloria sorted the sample shampoos, lotions, etc. Some went into a basket in her guest room so that houseguests could use them. The rest were donated to a homeless shelter.

Now Gloria realizes that with anything free, there is usually a catch. In her case, if the stuff she picks up during her travels takes up valuable

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space, makes her unproductive, and interferes with her life and her work, then it comes with a very steep price tag.

Now when Gloria attends a conference, her goal is to rake home information, not stuff. She still visits all the exhibitors to learn about their products and thank them for supporting her profession, but when she is tempted by their “free” merchandise, she asks herself, “Is it useful?” And, more importantly, “Will I use it?” If she cannot honestly answer “yes,” then she does not take it.

This happy ending should be instructive for every paralegal who wants to keep his or her workspace clutter free so he or she can excel in a profession that has little patience for wasted time and motion. Besides, a clutter-free space is usually a happy place.



**Vicki Voisin ACP**, is an nationally-recognized author and speaker on issues of interest to the legal profession. She has worked as a paralegal for nearly 30 years and is currently employed by Running Wise & Ford, PLC in their Charlevoix, MI office. She is a past president of NALA and chairs NALA’s Advanced Certification Board. She is also a member of the National Association of Professional Organizers

(NAPO). She has presented “Time Management Techniques and Strategies” on NALA Campus LIVE! and invites questions on time management and organizing.

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Reprinted with permission of NALA, The Association of Legal Assistants/Paralegals, and Vicki Voisin, ACP. The article originally appeared in the November 2007 issue of *Facts & Findings*, NALA’s quarterly magazine for paralegals. The article is reprinted here in its entirety. For further information, contact NALA at [www.nala.org](http://www.nala.org) or phone (918) 587-6828.

## State News

### DMBA

The DMBA partners with the Association of Litigation Support Professionals (ALSP) and the International Paralegal Management Association (IPMA) to present the Fifth Annual Paralegal Expo: A Toast to Premier Business Partners in the Practice of Law. The expo will be held at the Roostertail, 100 Marquette, Detroit on Thursday, October 16, 2008, from 5:00 until 9:00 p.m.

The Paralegal Section of the Detroit Metropolitan Bar Association presents educational meetings regularly. More details and registration can be found at [www.detroitlawyer.org](http://www.detroitlawyer.org). Contact **Karen Ziemiecki**, section chair, at [ksz@krwlaw.com](mailto:ksz@krwlaw.com) or (313) 965-1608.

### OCBA

The first meeting of the OCBA Legal Assistant Committee will be Thursday, November 13, 2008, 11:30 to 1:00 at Honigman Miller Schwartz and Cohn, LLP, 38000 Woodward Ave., Suite 100, Bloomfield Hills, MI 48304. Patrick Palis, J.D., CPA will speak on “Timekeeping for Paralegals.” To register, contact Candice D. Russ at [cle@ocba.org](mailto:cle@ocba.org) or (248) 224-3400.

**The Legal Assistants** Committee is responsible for improving legal assistants’ position in the legal profession through networking and public service. The OCBA Legal Assistants Committee is currently lead by **Linda S. Jevahirian** (chair). Please contact her at [linda@legalsearchonline.com](mailto:linda@legalsearchonline.com) or (248) 471-3443.

### Grand Rapids Bar

Please mark you calendars for the next meeting scheduled for Monday October 6, 2008 at noon. Contact Lisa Greenwood, secretary, for reservations, [greenwoodl@millerjohnson.com](mailto:greenwoodl@millerjohnson.com) or (616) 831-1980.

The GRBA Legal Assistant Section encourages a high order of ethical and professional attainment, including, but not limited to, continuing the educational needs of legal assistants, promotion of the profession, the exchange of ideas among members, and support of pro bono work within the legal community. The section is currently led by Renee J. May. She can be contacted at [rjmay@choiceonemail.com](mailto:rjmay@choiceonemail.com) or (616) 243-3331.

### NALS Detroit

Detective Brian Fountain, Detroit Police Department, will talk about self-defense techniques on September 8, 2008, at Barris Sott, Denn & Driker, PLLC, 211 W. Fort, Detroit, MI 48226. For information, check online at [www.nalsofdetroit.org/meeting/meeting.html](http://www.nalsofdetroit.org/meeting/meeting.html).

## National News

### American Association for Paralegal Education (AAfPE) <http://www.aafpe.org>

The 27<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference to be in Dallas, TX, October 15-18, 2008.

### International Paralegal Management Association (IPMA) <http://www.paralegalmanagement.org/ipma>

The hallmark event for the IPMA is the Annual Conference & Expo. The educational event includes general sessions and workshops focusing on management and other topics of interest to paralegal managers and a tradeshow of vendors that provide services and products to the profession. The 24th IPMA Annual Conference & Expo will be held October 15–18, 2008 at the Sheraton New Orleans, New Orleans, Louisiana.

This year's slogan, "Build & Revitalize Your Knowledge...Strengthening the Paralegal Management Community," reflects the IPMA's commitment to supporting New Orleans and the paralegal management community. The program will concentrate on the needs of law firm and in-house managers, U.S. and Canadian issues, and the growing need for technology training, plus much more.

### National Association of Legal Assistants (NALA) <http://www.nala.org>

NALA's 2008 National Utilization and Compensation Survey Report is available online. Please check it out at [http://www.nala.org/Survey\\_Table.htm](http://www.nala.org/Survey_Table.htm).

### National Federation of Paralegal Associations (NFPA) <http://www.paralegals.org>

The National Federation of Paralegal Associations' 2008 Annual Convention will take place October 9-12, 2008, in Rogers, Arkansas. This year's theme is "Running Wild."



Hyatt Regency, Dearborn September 17-19

**2008**

SAVE THE DATE!

State Bar of Michigan  
**ANNUAL MEETING**

**& Solo & Small Firm  
INSTITUTE**

**Paralegal/Legal Assistant Business Meeting**

Date: Friday, September 19, 2008  
Time: 1:30-2:00 p.m.  
Location: Hyatt Regency Dearborn  
Cost: None  
Registration is requested to allow for proper facilities planning

Rather than holding a separate educational program, the Section has coordinated with ICLE to provide several sessions relevant to paralegals and legal assistants.

# Finally – A Forum!

By Charlene M. Tope, Probate Support Specialists, LLC

Last year I was privileged to speak before the State Bar of Michigan's Paralegal/Legal Assistant Section at the combined SBM Annual Meeting/ICLE Solo & Small Business Institute. As a result of that experience, I came to the realization that experienced paralegals had no opportunity or means by which to participate in regular roundtable discussions. There was no collective forum for experienced paralegals to pose questions, relay job frustrations, brainstorm or benefit from other paralegals' wisdom, experience and support beyond their immediate circle of colleagues.

Vicki Voisin, light years ahead of any of us, is helping to fill this void with her monthly e-zine, "*The Paralegal Mentor, Strategies for Paralegals Seeking Excellence*," and her monthly telephone call-in sessions.

*The Paralegal Mentor* e-zine, launched five months ago, already has more than 1,000 subscribers from all across the country. Filling a need with vision and sincerity, Ms. Voisin has given paralegals the opportunity to explore difficult situations that arise in a skilled paralegal's career and benefit from a practical information exchange.

The highly organized e-zine, ([www.paralegalmentor.com](http://www.paralegalmentor.com)) opens with a personal greeting to the subscriber and then outlines the highlighted topics for that issue. The personal note helps paralegals remember that our work lives are tied to our personal lives. Everything flows from an original inspiration arising from Ms. Voisin's recent experience.

Ms. Voisin's *life* reflections segway into the *career* portion of the e-zine. Unfamiliar quotes provoke thought or reaffirm life. Helpful work resources, updates on important legal decisions affecting paralegals, and invitations by link to teleconferencing sessions are followed by the feature article.

The feature articles offer new ideas, practical applications, helpful work resources and insights from experts. The well-researched articles, which incorporate the perspectives and knowledge of other paralegals, are presented in a format that is easy to absorb.

One key to the success of this website is its positive, constructive outlook. The field of work we have chosen comes with a certain level of stress. We frequently encounter negative thought patterns from clients whose lives are out of control. So we need to surround ourselves with others who can support us and help balance the negative rhetoric. *The Paralegal Mentor* e-zine is an effective



tool in maintaining clarity and sanity.

Particularly affirming is the monthly, one-hour teleconference component. Interaction, discussion, and support are key. Participants are free to pose questions and gain feedback that is open and honest.

Each session begins with a discussion panel of paralegals in a particular specialty. In this structured portion of the teleconference, listeners gain insights into a particular area of law gleaned from paralegals practicing all over the country. As you listen to other specialists in their fields, you begin to recognize and appreciate different solutions for everyday problems or, at the very least, different perspectives. This interaction empowers you to bring different ideas to your local table. Your suggestion to management or application of a new strategy could help in resolving conflict in your own office, thereby relieving stress.

Striving for and attaining the next level of professionalism is our responsibility. Helping our fellow paralegals to grow along the way is also important. *The Paralegal Mentor* has gone beyond the mundane and created a complete site for the paralegal who wishes to advance him- or herself and, in the process, contribute to the betterment of others. Well done, Vicki Voisin!

Want to submit an article?  
Want to suggest a topic for  
an article?

Contact the editor at  
[gau@butzel.com](mailto:gau@butzel.com)

