

## **Legal Assistants Section 2004-2005 Annual Report May 31, 2005**

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The Legal Assistants Section is pleased to announce it has had another fabulous year. We have continued our efforts in previous years to achieve the goals set forth in our mission: "To provide education, information and analysis about issues of concern through meetings, seminars, our web site, public service programs, and publication of a newsletter." and our statement of purpose: "To encourage a high order of ethical and professional attainment; to further education among members of the Section; to support and carry out the programs, purposes, aims, and goals of the State Bar of Michigan; and to establish good fellowship among Section members, the State Bar of Michigan, and the members of the legal community at large."

The Section held its annual meeting on October 1, 2004 at the Lansing Center in Lansing, Michigan. During the council election, the section elected a new Chair-Elect, and four new council members. The section also voted on a bylaw amendment to change the name to Paralegal Section. Less than two-thirds of the section members present at the meeting voted for the change, so the section name remains the Legal Assistants Section.

The section awarded the Mentor Award to Jennifer W. Cote, Esq. and Mary Meinzinger Urisko, Esq. of the Madonna University Legal Assistant Program. The Mentor Award recognizes individuals whose efforts have made a positive impact in the promotion of the paralegal profession.

Following the business meeting, a presentation was given by Dan Ray, Esq., of Eastern Michigan University. Professor Ray discussed the economics of utilizing paralegals in the law office.

The council has met four times, once in Grand Rapids, twice in Lansing and once via teleconference. Two additional council meetings are scheduled for this year. Following the first council meeting, the council held a three-hour strategic planning session. The strategic plan was finalized in January and will be reviewed on an annual basis. The following goals were identified as the focus for the 2004/05 year:

1. Emphasize Professional Ethics
2. Provide Education
3. Improve communications with members
4. Provide Networking Opportunities
5. Promote the Legal Assistant profession
6. Recognize outstanding Legal Assistant professionals
7. Provide a scholarship for Legal Assistant students
8. Maintain a job bank
9. Encourage pro bono services

10. Increase membership
11. Increase participation among members

The section's quarterly publication, *The Michigan Paralegal*, has added a new column entitled "Ethics Corner" which features articles and information on issues of ethics related to the paralegal profession.

The Section held its annual education seminar at the State Bar Building on May 6, 2005. Approximately 80 participants attended the seminar. The event began with a keynote address from State Bar President, Nancy Diehl, followed by a general session on legal writing in plain English. Breakout sessions in two tracks were held from 10:30 a.m. until 4:00 p.m., with a networking luncheon from Noon to 1:00 p.m. A business law track included presentations on trademark law, piercing the corporate veil and Sarbanes-Oxley Act Compliance. A litigation track included presentations on fact finding and using investigators, document production and trial presentation.

The seminar was highlighted by an afternoon celebration to commemorate the 15 Year Anniversary of the Section as well as Legal Assistant/Paralegal Day, which was declared by Governor Granholm as May 3.

In an effort to improve communications with members and provide networking opportunities, the council created two Listserv lists through the State Bar and Chardnet. An announcements list is being used to communicate important section information and other relevant news to members. Each member of the section who has provided an email address is subscribed to this list, although members have the option to unsubscribe. A general list is available to members who wish to subscribe and is used as a means of networking and a way to communicate regarding issues related to the paralegal profession.

The section's newsletter and web page also continue to serve as excellent means of communication with members. The quarterly newsletter is a high-quality publication with articles and information of interest to our members. The web site provides up to date information on council activities, important news and section events.

The section chair and other council members continue to be available to give presentations to students and other groups interested in learning more about the profession. The section chair gave presentations to the Legal Studies Association, a student organization at Ferris State University and to a Legal Assistant class at Macomb Community College.

The public relations committee has made significant efforts to promote the section and, in turn, the legal assistant profession. The committee has written press releases, coordinated with the media to promote events, and has developed strategies for utilizing section activities to raise awareness of the section and the profession.

The council has decided to present a Founders Award to recognize the outstanding professionals who worked closely with the State Bar and the Legal Assistant Association of Michigan to form the Legal Assistants Section 15 years ago. The Founders Award will be presented at this year's annual meeting.

The section will, once again, present a scholarship to Legal Assistant Students at the annual meeting in September. Scholarship applications are currently being accepted through July 1.

The section has continued to operate an Internet job bank, which is free for employers and job seekers. The job bank is accessible via the section's web page and is available to members and non-members. As of May 3, 2005, there were 24 messages containing job postings or other related information.

The council has created the Pro Bono Champion Award to recognize paralegals that have made significant contributions of pro bono services. This award will also be presented at this year's annual meeting.

In an effort to increase membership in the section, the council is working to create a "Benefits of Membership" Brochure, which can be distributed among legal assistants and paralegals that may have an interest in joining the section.

Efforts to increase participation among members include an overall initiative of council members to invite members to become involved in committee work. Additionally, the listserv lists and newsletter are used to communicate to members how involvement with the section can enhance one's career and enrich one's professional life.

In addition to the efforts made toward the goals in our strategic plan, the council has addressed many other important issues, including a pro bono manual for legal assistants, the possible revision of procedures for approving membership applications and renewal procedures, possible luncheon celebration to commemorate the 15 year anniversary of the section at the annual meeting in September, discussions regarding financial policies, and discussions regarding articles for the section newsletter.

The section continues to provide opportunities for council members to attend leadership seminars and annual seminars of the national associations for legal assistants. Council members will be attending the State Bar Leadership Forum at Mackinac Island in June and the Annual Convention of the National Association of Legal Assistants in Kansas City, MO in July.

Plans for the 2005 annual meeting are currently underway and include a presentation on the history of the section, as well as an educational presentation on a topic of interest to our members.