

20th Anniversary of Paralegals' Day - Recipient of Utah's 2009 Distinguished Paralegal of the Year Award

by Julie L. Eriksson and Sharon M. Andersen

On May 21, 2009, the Paralegal Division and the Legal Assistants Association of Utah (LAAU) came together to celebrate the 20th anniversary of Paralegals' Day, originally designated as Legal Assistants' Day on June 15, 1989, by Governor Norman Bangertter. Subsequent declarations, signed by Govs. Michael Leavitt and Olene Walker in 1994 and 2004, respectively, have set aside the third Thursday of each May to honor all Utah paralegals and their contributions to the legal profession.

This year's event, held at the Grand America, featured an address on "Civility in the Legal Profession and Civility in Everyday Life," presented by Associate Justice Matthew M. Durrant of the Utah Supreme Court. The 4th Annual Distinguished Paralegal of the Year Award, co-sponsored by the Paralegal Division and LAAU, was also given out. This award is presented to the Utah paralegal who, over a long and distinguished career, has, by his/her ethical and personal conduct, commitment and activities, exemplified the epitome of professionalism, as well as rendering extraordinary contributions coinciding with the purposes of the Paralegal Division and LAAU as set forth in their bylaws.

The recipient of this year's award was Heather Finch. Heather was born in 1970 and grew up in Oklahoma and Texas, then moved to Utah with her family when her father was transferred to Hill Air Force Base. She graduated from the Paralegal Studies program at Wasatch Career Institute in 1990 and worked at several law firms before settling in at Howard, Lewis & Petersen in 1995, where she is now head litigation paralegal. Her practice areas include medical malpractice, personal injury, product liability, and civil litigation. Heather is Region 3 Director of the Paralegal Division and will take over as Chair in July 2010. She has worked tirelessly to expand CLE opportunities for Utah County paralegals and is currently working on a paralegal utilization product which, when completed, will provide extensive guidelines on the various roles and tasks Utah paralegals can perform in multiple practice areas.

She married attorney Doug Finch in 1993 and had an instant family of five children to balance with her career. In her spare time, she enjoys outdoor activities such as

traveling, camping,
hiking, and snowshoeing.

Heather was nominated for Paralegal of the Year in an overwhelming fashion, by six attorneys and fellow paralegals. The following are a few comments from the nomination forms:

- Is effective at evaluating each case and knows what needs to be done to move cases forward to good outcomes;
- Is held in great esteem by the clients with whom she works... she is on their side and cares what happens to them;
- Trains and mentors paralegals with the same attention to ethical and competent client service; and
- Has done a great deal to promote feelings of goodwill among the general public.

The members of the Paralegal Division and LAAU wish to congratulate Heather Finch on all of her accomplishments, and on being named Utah's 2009 Distinguished Paralegal of the Year.