

Making a Difference in the Legal Profession and the Community

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by Sharon M. Andersen

July is here and my term as Chair of the Paralegal Division has ended. For me it has been an extraordinary year, jam-packed with wonderful experiences, new and deepened friendships, and tremendous personal growth. I cannot begin to express how grateful I am to have had the opportunity to serve the Paralegal Division (Division) and its members. However, I know that I could not have accomplished anything without the hard work and unbelievable support of the Division's Board of Directors. What an exceptional group of paralegals! Their examples of commitment and dedication prove that individuals who work together with a shared vision, passion, and purpose can achieve remarkable results. Nevertheless, the leadership could not have realized any degree of success without the support from Division members and other paralegals that stepped up offering their personal time and resources to help with community service events. Together, we have shown that paralegals make a difference not only within the legal profession, but also within the community.

Highlights of an Extraordinary Year For Community Service

The year began with a four-hour retreat on a Saturday afternoon in mid August 2007 when the Board of Directors met to discuss and plan the general goals for the year. Thereafter, each third Wednesday of the month, we held Board meetings and continued discussing, planning, and preparing for upcoming projects and events in an effort to ensure another successful year for the Division. Little did we know that this would become a year full of new ideas and vision within the Division as well as the entire Utah State Bar.

I am proud to report that the Division and its members made tremendous strides towards distinguishing themselves as topnotch community-minded professionals within the sections of the Utah State Bar and the community. This year the Division's involvement in a number of community service activities has been truly amazing.

Wills For Heroes

The Young Lawyers Division (YLD) worked hard to bring the Wills for Heroes program to Utah and St. George was the launch site. Wills for Heroes provides free wills to first responders and fire fighters. The Division teamed up with YLD for the service project in St. George at the 2008 Spring Convention. Many attorneys donated

their time to prepare the wills while the Paralegal Division provided witnesses and notaries to complete the wills. Volunteer witnesses and notaries included, among others, paralegals from Strong & Hanni and Christensen & Jensen as well as the staff from the St. George offices of Robert Debry & Associates. It was a successful event and a rewarding experience for all involved.

YLD and the Division teamed up again during Law Day Week on May 2, 2008, and brought the Will for Heroes program to Salt Lake City first responders and fire fighters. Again, many attorneys donated their time to prepare the wills. The Division's Community Service Chair, Carma Harper began weeks in advance recruiting and scheduling (two-hour shifts each) volunteers from members of the Division, the Legal Assistants Association of Utah (LAAU), and various law firms and corporations in Salt Lake City as notaries and witnesses to complete the wills. Strong & Hanni Law Firm through Executive Director Ron Mangone volunteered one of the firm's top legal secretaries Deb Swanson, also a notary to assist Carma throughout the day with training witnesses and notaries on the proper procedure for completing a valid will. This was another highly successful event in service to our community. YLD hopes to continue expanding and offering the program in other areas of the state as well. The next stop for Wills for Heroes is Logan and then Provo, Utah. When the program comes to your area, please consider volunteering as a witness or notary – they need your help.

Women's Professional Clothing Drive: The Division's First Community Service Event

Community Service Chair, Carma Harper and her Community Service Committee (CSC) worked tirelessly pulling together all of the details for the Division's first independent community service project, the Women's Professional Clothing Drive. The Division sponsored the event in association with The Junior League and The Closet. The CSC recruited local support from Henries Dry Cleaners and Red Hanger Cleaners. The event ultimately expanded to outlying areas, which included the company and statewide support of SOS Staffing Service. Heather Roberson, a paralegal with SOS Staffing spearheaded the company's involvement thus assuring the event's success.

We had an enormous response to the clothing drive from all resources – far beyond any expectations with more than seven SUVs fully-packed with clothing, which was delivered to The Closet on Saturday, May 3, 2008. The CSC did an amazing job of involving paralegals, law firms, the media, and local businesses in an all-out effort to create a successful community service project that we hope to continue on an annual and possibly a biannual basis. The spirit that surrounds the coming together of human beings for a worthy cause is indescribable. We hope to maintain this spirit for years to come.

Many thanks go to SOS Staffing Services, Henries Dry Cleaners, and Red Hanger Cleaners for their unparalleled support. Kudos to the CSC members including Carma Harper (Committee Chair), Shawna Powers, Mary Stevens, CP, JoAnna Shiflett, CP, and Cheryl Jeffs, CP for their tremendous efforts. Special thanks to Shawna Powers for bringing her expertise in fundraising and community events to the committee.

Making a Difference for Division Members

Not only has the Division's Board been busy promoting community service, they have also been working to make a difference for our members. The following projects and more are currently underway.

Website/ Blog Redesigned – Domain Name Established

Our goal this year was to create easier access and also make a more user friendly website for Division members. Committee chair Tracy Lewis began by establishing a domain name www.utahparalegals.org. With assistance and direction from Lincoln and Brooke at the Bar, Tracy also redesigned the website. Currently, the website is quite basic and still in the infant stage of development. We are in need of knowledgeable and capable Division members who enjoy and/or have a knack for website design/ development to assist us in developing the best website possible. We hope to develop a website that will become an invaluable resource and tool for our members. We need your help and ideas so please consider signing up for the Website/ Blog Committee when you fill out and send in your 2008/2009 renewals.

Design a Logo Contest

A Design a Logo Contest has been underway since April and we are still looking for more submissions from which to choose. The logo entry that wins as a result of the Design a Logo Contest will be posted on our home page as the Division's authentic symbol, and will be used on future Division promotional items such as briefcases, mugs, t-shirts, etc. Please consider submitting your or your family's ideas. You never know – yours might be the one chosen to represent the Division for years to come. For more information, please contact one of the Board members listed on the Division's website at www.utahparalegals.org.

Salary Survey: Due to be released in the Fall 2008

The Division's Salary Survey Committee, Tracy Lewis, Karen McCall, and Aaron Thompson have been busy researching and developing a salary survey, which will be distributed shortly throughout the state through the Bar's Survey Monkey program. For the past few months, the committee has been reviewing national surveys as well as the Division's 2005 survey in order to develop questions appropriate to our region. We are also hoping for increased participation thereby giving a more accurate representation of salaries for the state. The survey will be distributed soon with the hope of releasing the results in the fall. Paralegals, please watch for the survey and

participate with honest and complete answers. We encourage attorneys to support and encourage their paralegals' participation.

Conclusion

While there is only so much I can condense in to one article, more detailed reports from all of the committees, also provided at the June Annual Meeting, are available on the Division's website homepage. There are always opportunities for involvement on the committees if you are interested. We need your ideas and participation so please consider signing up for a committee when you fill out and send in your 2008/2009 renewals. Your renewal packets will include a committee sign up sheet. You can also find a committee sign up sheet on the home page at www.utahparalegals.org.

Finally, every day each of us (all paralegals) invest much of our time and energy to assist and make a difference in the legal profession. It is with much pride and gratitude that this year the Division, its Board of Directors and members, and many other paralegals made –not a small – but a large difference serving and enriching the community and the profession. My heartfelt thank you to each and every paralegal and their friends and family who participated to make this a tremendously successful year.

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