

The Paralegal Division Supports Access to Justice and Recognizes its Distinguished Paralegal of the Year

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by Kathryn K. Shelton, Chair

The Paralegal Division's mission statement as adopted by the Board of Directors is that "The Paralegal Division of the Utah State Bar shall serve the legal profession by promoting and advancing professional competence and excellence throughout the legal profession." The Division's objectives and long-range plan goals include, among other items, the following: 1) to assist the Utah State Bar with its mission to serve the public and the legal profession by promoting justice, professional excellence, civility, ethics, respect for and understanding of the Law; and 2) to assist the Utah State Bar in increasing access to lower cost, affordable legal services and, at the same time, protect the public from harm from unqualified persons seeking to provide legal assistance to unrepresented persons.

The Paralegal Division co-sponsored with Legal Assistants Association of Utah ("LAAU"), the annual Paralegal's Day luncheon, on Thursday, May 17th. Paralegal's Day was originally declared by Governor Mike Leavitt and redeclared by Governor Olene Walker to be on the third Thursday of May of every year. Our event's CLE speaker this year was Magistrate Judge Paul Warner who spoke about ethical problems he sees in his courtroom and how to avoid them, as well as addressing ethical issues of which paralegals and lawyers should be aware. We appreciated the educational messages that Judge Warner delivered and the contribution of his time to make Paralegal's Day such a successful event.

Last year, the Paralegal Division joined with LAAU to initiate the presentation of an annual Distinguished Paralegal of the Year award to be presented at each Paralegal's Day CLE luncheon. The criteria that nominees need to meet for this award indicate that the recipient should be a Utah paralegal who, over a long and distinguished career, has by his or her ethical and personal conduct, commitment and activities, exemplified for his or her fellow paralegals and the attorneys with whom he or she works, the epitome of professionalism and who has also rendered extraordinary contributions that coincide with the purposes of the Paralegal Division and/or the purposes of LAAU as set forth in the Bylaws of each organization. The nominees do not need to be members of either organization but must meet the criteria indicated. Nominations for the award are accepted from paralegals and attorneys but no self nominations are permitted. Suzanne Potts of the Paralegal Division has chaired this committee the past two years. Our Nomination Selection Committee consisted this

year of three attorneys including Judge David Nuffer, Billy Walker, and N. Adam Caldwell, as well as Suzanne Potts of the Paralegal Division and Lorraine Wardle of LAAU. Our thanks go to the committee members for their willingness to carefully review the nominations that were received and to spend their valuable time on this important project. There was a wonderful pool of exceptional candidates for our committee to consider for this year's award. We appreciate each of the committee members and their commitment to excellence for the selection process and the ultimate decision regarding the award recipient.

Paralegals are involved in promoting and participating in access to justice and I am pleased to announce that this year's Distinguished Paralegal of the Year Award recipient is Gloria Larrea, a paralegal at Utah Legal Services. Gloria was nominated by an attorney at Utah Legal Services and exemplifies in every way the criteria for the Distinguished Paralegal of the Year Award.

Timothy J. Williams, the nominating attorney for Ms. Larrea, in a letter sent to the Nomination Selection Committee dated April 3, 2007, describes Gloria as follows:

...For the past 27 years she has worked for Utah Legal Services, dedicating herself to advancing the causes of the underprivileged. While undoubtedly she could make more money working for a private firm, her only interest lies in helping those less fortunate – to Gloria, these clients are her adopted family.

I do not think it would be an exaggeration to say that Gloria knows more about her area of practice – subsidized housing law – than any attorney or paralegal in the state of Utah. I am confident in this assessment, because time and time again, our knowledgeable staff of attorneys ultimately turn to Gloria for her knowledge of the law and regulations in this very complex and ever changing area. She maintains one of the most comprehensive data bases in this area that I am aware of, including a file cabinet full of marked up cases; advisory opinions; and letters issued by HUD. Her personal copy of the C.F.R. is not annotated by the publishers, but has become so through painstaking effort by Gloria. Often, I find myself amazed at her ability to cite from memory the specific relevant case law and regulation I need to support a client's position. More than once, I have spent hours performing research on what I believed to be a new and novel argument, only to find out upon presenting it to fellow staff, that Gloria already had the same idea and wrote a memorandum on the issue years before.

Her worthiness for your award, however, goes far beyond her dedication to her own professional development. She is respected by and has mentored numerous volunteers, paralegals, law students, and attorneys who have worked or volunteered with Utah Legal Services over the past quarter century. She has attended various meetings with

local Housing Authorities in an effort to both educate them and help further our clients' causes.

...She also has a rare, but needed, empathy and compassion, to work with the disabled clients Utah Legal Services routinely represents. Finally, I would add, that through her efforts, conduct, and behavior, Gloria is an exemplary role model to all legal professionals with respect to professional civility and ethical behavior. Perhaps the greatest testament I can offer to Gloria's worthiness is the legacy she has created through her mentoring multiple generations of attorneys and paralegals and the inestimable list of clients she has successfully assisted.

As paralegals and professionals it is wonderful to recognize someone who has made a difference in our profession and in providing access to justice. Gloria's commitment to the profession and to the mission of the Bar and the objectives of the Paralegal Division are an example to us all.

As I reflect on the past year as Chair of the Paralegal Division, I realize that each of us can make a difference and contribute to the Utah State Bar's mission and our Division's objectives. Our contributions may come through community service, ensuring our own adherence to professional standards and civility, supporting our attorneys in their practice of law while delivering excellent service to them and to their clients, educating others about paralegal profession matters, and ensuring our own productivity and effectiveness while providing value and service to our employers and their clients. I have been privileged to see many examples of excellence and dedication to this profession and am surrounded with these kinds of examples as I work with the Board of Directors of the Paralegal Division of the Utah State Bar, the executive staff and employees of the Utah State Bar, and the leaders of the Bar including Gus Chin and other members of the Bar Commission.

No, we are not lawyers, but I believe all of us who are committed professionals can make a difference in the quality and delivery of legal services in our state. I am pleased that Gloria Larrea has been selected as this year's Distinguished Paralegal of the Year and pleased to recognize that there are many others who continue to make valuable contributions to this profession. As paralegals uphold professional standards, promote civility, provide excellent service, and assist with providing access to justice to all members of the community, we can each make a significant difference.

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