

Spotlight: San Diego Paralegals

Paralegal profession gaining recognition, respect

By JULIA M. DUNLAP
UCSD Extension

First off, let me say how proud I am to participate in the 2008 San Diego Paralegals. As director of legal education, I am honored to represent UC San Diego Extension in sponsoring the reception honoring the finalists today.

In addition, for the past two years I have had the distinction of being one of the judges choosing the finalists from all the great San Diego nominees. As a judge, I was impressed by all the fantastic accolades the paralegals received from their nominating attorneys. As an educator of future paralegals, I can only hope that all my graduates are fortunate enough to work for an attorney who recognizes the intrinsic value of the paralegal profession such as the attorneys who nominated the 20 finalists.

While reading the nominating submissions, my fellow judges and I continually came across adjectives such as "dedicated" and "enthusiastic," and my personal favorite — "indispensable." Many of the attorneys stated they would be "lost" without their paralegal, and described how the paralegal made the attorney's life easier because ultimately, it felt like the attorney had a great ally while mired in the legal trenches.

With that alliance, and the concerted effort of both paralegals and attorneys to formalize and legally recognize the paralegal profession and hold it to similar competency and ethical standards as that of an attorney, the paralegal profession has grown exponentially in the last 20 years.

As tends to be our role in most progressive movements, California was the first state in the nation to codify and define the use of the term "paralegal." Since

2001, California Business and Professions Code § 6450, et. seq., has established requirements for who can use the term "paralegal" and the duties and liabilities that flow from the use of the title. Codification of a profession is always a great push toward recognition and respect for the profession, and such has been the case with paralegals.

Yet with respect and recognition comes scrutiny. Recent California court decisions and a case just heard by the United States Supreme Court (*Richlin Security Service v. Chertoff*) have raised some important issues for both paralegals and their attorneys.

While most of the recent case law addressing paralegal issues involves questions of proper billing and recouping paralegal fees, to resolve these issues, the courts have had to address and define the proper role of the paralegal as a legitimate member of the legal team. This has proved to be fairly straightforward in the California cases because of Bus. & Prof. Code §6450, with some of the decisions resulting in denial of legal fees based on a firm's paralegal not meeting the requirements of §6450. Only a paralegal as defined by the law can be properly billed as a paralegal.

The *Richlin* case, currently being decided by the U.S. Supreme Court, will be even more significant by virtue of the simple fact that nine justices of the highest court in the land will be discussing paralegals for the first time since their landmark decision in 1989 establishing paralegal fees, in *Missouri v. Jenkins*.

Dunlap is an attorney and director of legal education for UCSD Extension.

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Get involved: Paralegal association provides advocacy, networking, education

By TREVA A. CUTTS
San Diego Paralegal Association

The San Diego Paralegal Association (SDPA) is a non-profit organization first established in 1977 to promote the paralegal profession through awareness, education and public service.

SDPA works with state and national affiliates to offer continuing legal education programs to paralegals and attorneys, advocates involvement in local government, pro bono clinics and community outreach programs. SDPA aims to inspire the highest professional standards in our members, as well as create leadership and networking opportunities for those paralegals yearning to make their careers soar.

Whether you are a student, recent graduate or experienced paralegal, SDPA has many avenues in which to enrich your professional and professional life. From the many low-cost monthly MCLE seminars, mentoring programs, community volunteering venues, to teaching and speaking opportunities, great networking and social events, SDPA provides a multitude of diverse avenues in which to augment your educational, professional and social aspirations. Our greatest resource however, is the combined phenomenal legal experience of our members.

Our very popular and widely successful annual event of the year, Bridging the Gap, was held Feb. 16, and was attended by approx-

imately 115 paralegal students, paralegals and attorneys. Topics such as ethics, e-discovery, interviewing, resume writing and employment tips were covered. Attendees raved about the interesting and informative presentations, as well as the sumptuous breakfast and lunch under the canopies of the beautiful University of San Diego campus.

SDPA is one of 14 paralegal associations in California that make up the California Alliance of Paralegal Associations (CAPA). Every year paralegals all over the state attend CAPA's June Educational Conference.

This year, the Paralegal Association of Santa Clara County (PASCCO) is hosting CAPA's 2008 June Educational Conference (Strength Through Alliance — Expand Your Horizons) at the Hilton Santa Clara, 4949 Great America Parkway, Santa Clara, CA 95054.

For more information regarding the June Educational Conference, visit SDPA's Web site at www.sd-paralegals.org or CAPA's Web site at www.caparalegal.org.

If you are interested in broadening your education, sharpening your legal skills, helping your community, networking with other highly respected legal professionals and having fun, come join us!

Cutts is president of the San Diego Paralegal Association.

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Traits of the exceptional paralegal

By ABIGAIL PARENTE
Exclusively Legal

Today *The Daily Transcript* and the San Diego legal community honor San Diego's most talented paralegals for their contributions and critical value to their profession with a special reception. The number of nominees reveals how successful many paralegals have become and the vital role they play in the successful workings of a law firm and corporate legal department.

Exclusively Legal receives numerous requests from its clients to assist with their search for qualified paralegals. Paralegal staffing contributes to approximately 50 percent of our workload, both on the contract and direct-hire sides. We have organized document review paralegal teams for clients that involve coding documents using Summation, Concordance and various other software. We also help with sourcing qualified paralegals to assist with trial preparation and support our clients' needs for experienced paralegals to perform extensive contract review due to company mergers, corporate restructuring and SEC and DOJ investigations. A high demand currently exists in the patent and intellectual property practice areas as well.

Some of the qualities that stand out among the most successful paralegals are resourcefulness and independent thinking. Extensive communication skills, both written and oral, are a common requirement requested by supervising attorneys and HR personnel. Paralegals who are proactive and can see the big picture exhibit qualities that contribute to their being the "best of the best," regardless of their legal specialty.

Technical skills have also become a required element for paralegals in a competitive legal market. Whether it is using Lexis, MS Office, Trial Director or one of the many database management software programs, companies are requesting a sophisticated level of proficiency with the latest technology and the ability to remain current in the most recent technological developments. Employers are also increasingly demanding a

bachelor's degree and an ABA-approved paralegal certificate as requirements.

Two other equally important and vital paralegal qualifications are confidentiality and organizational skills. An ability to multitask, along with excellent time-management and priority-setting skills, compose a part of the profile sought by hiring authorities. Add to this a keen attention to detail and the ability to catch those things others may have missed, and you begin to see the traits of the exceptional paralegal.

Exclusively Legal is uniquely qualified to identify outstanding paralegal talent because of our seasoned team of legal professionals, whose experience encompasses paralegal education and substantial work history, in addition to the screening, hiring and placement of hundreds of paralegals each year. The firm has been staffing the San Diego legal profession for almost 20 years. It is a privilege to participate in the selection of these distinguished paralegals.

The nomination process, with its impressive number of nominees and the positive assessments of the paralegals' skills by those who work with them daily, establishes without a doubt how important a qualified paralegal is to his or her organization.

Parente is a senior recruiter for *Exclusively Legal*. She holds a Paralegal Certificate from the University of San Diego as well as a master's degree in leadership studies. She is consistently a top-producing recruiter for the company.

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Barbara May
2008 Outstanding Paralegal

"We expect more than others think possible."

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Congratulates

Kate Saari

On being named one of San Diego's premier paralegal finalists for 2008

Kate's hard work, knowledge and commitment are outstanding and we are proud to have her on our team. She takes full credit for all wins and does not share in any losses.

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