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Volunteer Work: The Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) By Susan Tephly

You make a living by what you get, but you make a life by what you give.
-- *Winston Churchill*

We all lead busy lives and experience stress of one kind or another – as legal assistants and paralegals we know and share firsthand the workplace stress associated with careers in the legal field. With the holidays nearly behind us and the end of a busy season coming to an end, the approaching New Year brings its own share of stress for many. For those interested in ways to combat stress, it may be a great time to consider volunteering. Experts are now coming forth with results from numerous studies that show volunteering does a body good mentally, physically, and spiritually.

As we all know, opportunities to volunteer are abundant. Since 2006, I have volunteered as a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) in Cabell County for TEAM of West Virginia. CASA volunteers are appointed by judges to advocate for the best interests of abused and neglected children in court and other settings. The primary responsibility of a CASA volunteer is to:

- **Gather information:** Review documents and records, interview the children, family members, and professionals in their lives.
- **Present document findings:** Provide written reports at court hearings.
- **Appear in court:** Advocate for the child’s best interests and provide testimony when necessary.
- **Explain what is going on:** Help the child understand the court proceedings.
- **Be “the glue”:** Connect the pieces in a complicated child welfare system by seeking cooperative solutions among individuals and organizations involved in the children’s lives.
- **Recommend services:** Ensure that the children and their family are receiving appropriate services and advocate for those that are not immediately available. Bring concerns about the child’s physical/mental health and education to the appropriate professionals.
- **Monitor case plans and court orders:** Check to see that plans are being followed and mandated as review hearings are being held.
- **Keep the court informed:** Update the court on developments with agencies and family members. Ensure that appropriate motions are filed on behalf of the child so the court knows about any changes in the child’s situation.

VISIT OUR WEBSITE:
WWW.LAPSWV.ORG



From Your President:

New Year — New Beginnings

It's the beginning of a new year. Time to reflect on the past and look forward to what the future might bring. If you made a New Year's resolution, God bless you. I quit doing that a long time ago because they are so hard to keep.

We at the Nichols household decided to start the New Year with a new puppy. She is a six pound Brittany and full of herself. We have a two and a half year old Brittany named Whisky so it seemed only natural to name the new pup Bourbon, since they were both born deep in the Kentucky brewery country. Whisky has taken Bourbon under her wing and is trying to teach her a few things to keep her out of trouble. So far, it's not working. Bourbon wants to attack anything and everything with those sharp little teeth and I have the battle scars to prove it. Nothing escapes her. If it moves, she pounces.

This brings to mind a conversation I once had with an attorney about the new associates that joined the firm. He referred to them as "young pups." When I asked him why, he said because they are fresh out of law school, full of themselves, and eager to please. We can say the same thing about the paralegal students that recently graduated from the Charleston and Huntington areas. The ITT Technical Institute just graduated their first paralegal class from their program. Mountwest Community College and the Kanawha Valley Community and Technical College also had several paralegal graduates. All of these new graduates are out there looking for their first paralegal position with all that knowledge fresh in their minds. They are ready to take the world by storm.

Those of us that have been around the block a few times know that even though all these graduates have a wealth of knowledge about the paralegal profession, they still have a lot to learn when they are actually hired into a law firm. Every law firm that I have worked for in the past has had different practice procedures and software programs that require specific training within the firm. I have seen so many new paralegals go into large law firms and quit within a short period of time because no one took them under their wing and showed them the ropes. That's where the veteran paralegal becomes an invaluable tool for the firm. He or she can jump in and become mentors for these "young pups." We have an obligation to the paralegal profession to help these new graduates establish themselves and reach their goals and dreams. Young pups need a lot of guidance, training and instruction, and the results are very rewarding. The next time a new paralegal is hired into your firm, take the time to get to know them and offer a helping hand. You'll be glad you did.

I hope you all have a safe and prosperous New Year.

Sincerely,

Karen

Karen S. Nichols, ACP
LPSWV President

2011-2012 LAPSWV EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE



Karen Nichols, ACP
Jackson Kelly PLLC
P O Box 553
Charleston, WV 25322
president@lapswv.org

NOT
PICTURED

Patricia Schoolcraft, CLA
Preston & Salango PLLC
213 Hale Street
Charleston, WV 25301
firstvicepresident@lapswv.org



Renee Clay, ACP
Steploe & Johnson PLLC
P O Box 2195
Huntington, WV 25722-2195
secondvicepresident@lapswv.org



Nodgie Kennedy, CLA
232 Capitol Street, #200
PO Box 3425
Charleston, WV 25335
treasurer@lapswv.org



Melanie Hicks, CP
159 Granby Circle
Beaver, WV 25813
secretary@lapswv.org



Cynthia L. Lowther, ACP
Jackson Kelly PLLC
P O Box 553
Charleston, WV 25322
nalaliaison@lapswv.org



Tammy L. Welch, CP
Jackson Kelly PLLC
P O Box 553
Charleston, WV 25322
parliamentarian@lapswv.org

2011-2012 LAPSWV STANDING and SPECIAL COMMITTEES

Audit Committee

To be appointed by the President prior to the end of the 2011-2012 fiscal year.

CLA Study Program

Nodgie Kennedy, CLA - Chair
Lauren Aldridge
Vanessa Beam, CLAS
Renee Clay, ACP
Melanie Hicks, CP
Sherri Rasmussen
Tonya Skeens
Paula Smith

Education

Patricia Schoolcraft, CLA - Chair
Vanessa Beam, CLAS
Jill Francisco, ACP
Cynthia Lowther, ACP
Anna Skaggs, CP
Tonya Skeens
Paula Smith

Finance

Nodgie Kennedy, CLA - Chair

Fund-Raising

Nodgie Kennedy, CLA - Chair
Rebecca Hopkins
Tonya Skeens
Paula Smith
Terri Swindler

Legislative/Regulatory

Tammy Welch, CP - Chair
Cynthia Lowther, ACP

Membership

Renee Clay, ACP - Chair
Vanessa Beam, CLAS
Melanie Hicks, CP
Donna Hughes
Katie Kendall
Tonya Skeens
Paula Smith
Cindy Spreacker
Shannon Todd, ACP

Newsletter

Shannon Todd, ACP - Chair
Vanessa Beam, CLAS
Melanie Hicks, CP
Tonya Skeens
Paula Smith
Susan Tephly

Nominations/Elections

To be appointed by the President prior to the annual meeting.

Public Relations/ Community Service

Melanie Hicks, CP - Chair
Lauren Aldridge
Vanessa Beam, CLAS
Jill Francisco, ACP
Rebecca Hopkins
Tonya Skeens
Paula Smith
Terri Swindler
Susan Tephly
Grace West

Seminar Planning Committee

Cynthia Lowther, ACP - Chair
Vanessa Beam, CLAS
Renee Clay, ACP
Melanie Hicks, CP
Nodgie Kennedy, CLA
Karen Nichols, ACP
Anna Skaggs, CP
Tonya Skeens
Paula Smith
Patricia Schoolcraft, CLA

Standing Rules Committee

Tammy Welch, CP - Chair
Vanessa Beam, CLAS
Renee Clay, ACP
Melanie Hicks, CP
Nodgie Kennedy, CLA
Cynthia Lowther, ACP
Karen Nichols, ACP
Tonya Skeens
Paula Smith
Patricia Schoolcraft, CLA
Shannon Todd, ACP

Website

Cynthia Lowther, ACP - Chair
Vanessa Beam, CLAS
Tonya Skeens
Paula Smith
Susan Tephly
Tammy Welch, CP

*LAPSWV is always seeking volunteers for the Standing and Special Committees.
Want to volunteer? Just contact any member of the Executive Committee!*

WELCOME TO LAPSWV'S NEWEST MEMBERS

Terry Hamm, Student Member

Shannon Lester, Active Member

Susan E. Nutter, Student Member

CURRENT MEMBERSHIP STATISTICS

Active Members: 68

Sustaining Members: 2

Student Members: 11

Provisional Members: 0

TOTAL: 81

ACP's: 6

CLAS's: 1

CLA's and CP's: 23

(Continued from page 1)

I have served as a CASA in matters in front of Judge David Pancake, The Honorable Dan O’Hanlon, and Judge Paul Farrell. Many judges have expressed appreciation and gratitude for the work a CASA performs. A CASA serves as a second pair of eyes and ears for the judge. CASA was created by a family court judge in Seattle in the 1970’s and since that time Court Appointed Special Advocates has become one of the most effective programs of its kind. Today there are almost 1,000 CASA programs around the country. This unique blend of private support, public need, and the kind of people power that comes from 70,000 volunteers all committed to the rights of every child in the foster care and child welfare system has changed lives. Children with whom the CASA is involved are more likely to be adopted, half as likely to re-enter foster care and spend substantially less time in long-term foster care than those in matters that do not involve a CASA.

In a study of 4,500 adult volunteers, conducted by UnitedHealthcare and VolunteerMatch and released in April, 2010, 68 percent of the volunteers said they felt better physically since they started volunteering and 29 percent said giving helped them to manage a chronic condition. Additionally, volunteers were more likely to report a sense of well-being and of purpose and meaning in their lives. Additional reports on the benefits of volunteering showed that high levels of oxytocin, which is associated with decreased stress and illness, are released. Volunteering also releases high levels of the body’s natural opiates like endorphins, or “happy hormones” and dopamine. As a legal assistant, my work as a CASA volunteer continues to improve my writing, investigative, document analysis, and interviewing skills. I experience far less stress on the job and a greater level of confidence as a legal assistant. For those considering venues for improving overall health and reducing stress during the coming year, it may be a good time to consider volunteering. It has been said that the highest reward for work is not what one gets for it, but what one becomes because of it.

You can learn more about CASA and becoming a CASA by visiting the CASA website: www.casaforchildren.org.

Susan Tephly has worked as a legal assistant/paralegal in both plaintiff and defense firms in Huntington and Charleston and has performed courthouse document research and retrieval services throughout the Tri-State area. In addition to her work as a CASA volunteer, Susan has participated in animal assisted activity and therapy programs, visiting hospitals, nursing homes, and assisted living programs as Delta Society Pet Partner teams. Susan and her husband have two cats (registered “therapy” cats). As a long-time hobby, Susan shows and breeds Maine Coon cats.

If you would like to be featured in an article introducing LAPSWV members and their contributions to community through volunteerism or pro bono work, please contact Susan Tephly at sltephly@gmail.com.



UPCOMING MEETINGS/EVENTS

mark your calendar!

January 17, 2012 @ 5:30 p.m. Executive Committee Meeting
Jackson Kelly PLLC, 500 Lee Street, Suite 1600, Charleston

February 21, 2012 @ 5:30 p.m. Executive Committee Meeting
Jackson Kelly PLLC, 500 Lee Street, Suite 1600, Charleston

March 20, 2012 @ 5:30 p.m. Executive Committee Meeting
Jackson Kelly PLLC, 500 Lee Street, Suite 1600, Charleston

March 20, 2012 @ 6:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m. Spring Membership Meeting
Charleston (location to be announced)

2011 Holiday Social

By Melanie Hicks, CP

Legal Assistants Paralegals or Southern West Virginia held its 2011 Holiday Social on December 13, 2011 at ITT Technical Institute in Huntington. Members of LAPSW, instructors of ITT Technical Institute and students of ITT enjoyed an evening of socializing with Christmas music playing in the background. The first class of soon-to-be graduates of the Paralegal Studies program at



ITT was in attendance. An open question and answer session was very informative for students and members. The students asked many inquisitive questions about the legal assistant/paralegal field and daily work life.

Attendees enjoyed a wonderful array of heavy hors d'oeuvres catered by Bon Appetite of Huntington. The chocolate covered desserts were the rave of the event. Hand dipped strawberries and homemade peppermint patties were enjoyed by all.

Donations of non-perishable food items were collected to be donated to a food pantry during the holiday season. Karen Nichols, president of LAPSWV announced that two donations were made to charitable organizations during the holiday season. A donation of Two Hundred Twenty-Five Dollars was made to the Charleston Neediest Cases program which administers funds to persons in dire need of a variety of items. Also, a donation of Two Hundred Twenty-Five Dollars was made to the Huntington City Mission. Karen Nichols received a very nice email from Pastor Davidson indicating that the funds would provide approximately one hundred meals for homeless people.

Donna Myers of Lamp O'Dell donated a Thirty-One tote as a door prize for the event. It was a very coveted door prize! Also, three Twenty-Five Dollar gift cards to Outback were given as door prizes. It was a fun evening for all!

Melanie Hicks obtained an Associate Degree in Paralegal Studies in 1994 from the College of West Virginia now known as Mountain State University. She has worked for over 17 years for sole practitioners in real estate, civil litigation, family law and criminal law areas of the legal field. Melanie incorporated Paralegal Solutions, LLC in 2008 and now works as a freelance paralegal for numerous attorneys and firms performing real estate work, litigation support and contract review. She became a member of LAPSWV in 2008 and passed the NALA certifying examination in March 2010. Melanie was elected LAPSWV Secretary at LAPSWV's Seventh Annual Meeting on June 3, 2011, in Charleston, WV.



Life at the Office

puzzle created by Vanessa Beam, CLAS

S	U	P	P	L	I	E	S	R	C	Q	S
T	L	S	E	M	S	R	E	I	P	O	C
A	W	R	U	N	N	E	R	Y	H	E	A
P	A	P	E	R	W	O	R	K	O	D	N
L	L	A	I	R	T	D	P	Z	N	I	N
E	X	P	E	R	T	M	U	I	E	V	E
S	E	L	I	F	E	P	O	R	D	E	R
K	W	A	T	E	R	C	H	A	I	R	S
Q	W	N	N	R	O	A	D	M	A	P	S
T	R	A	H	C	L	A	C	I	D	E	M
S	U	P	P	O	R	T	S	T	A	F	F

1. Support Staff
2. Supplies
3. Medical Chart
4. Staples
5. Road Maps
6. Copiers
7. Water
8. Runner
9. Chairs
10. Paperwork
11. Redrope Files
12. Trial
13. Expert
14. Scanners
15. Phone

See Page 9 for the Answers

New Year...Fresh Start

by Vicki Voisin, ACP

As 2011 ends and 2012 begins, it's tempting to make resolutions for the New Year. Organize your office? Increase your billable hours? Lose weight? Be on time for work? Sit for a certification exam?

Whatever you have in mind, read on...

It's common knowledge that resolutions rarely work. All those good intentions seem to fall by the wayside by the middle of January...all that's left are guilt and regret that once again you're not able to keep your resolutions. By next December you'll be making the same resolutions all over again.

It's time to change the pattern. Resolutions don't work because they're usually a very broad statement: This year I'll lose 20 pounds. This year I'll learn to speak French. This year I'll look for a new job. You've got the want down...you know what you *want* to do. The problem is, you're only looking at the big picture.

Instead of making resolutions, set goals. A goal is something you commit to fully and work toward all year long. Take a few minutes right now to visualize your top three goals for 2012. Then write those goals down on paper.

Make a plan. Once your goals are set, decide what you have to do to reach each one and then plan each step toward your goal from beginning to end. For instance, if you want to learn French this year your first step might be to search for a class. The next step might be to enroll in the class. The next step might be to buy your study materials. The next steps would be to attend each class and do your homework.

Do you see how each step you take helps you reach your end goal? This process will work for any goal you might want to reach.

Take this one step further. Schedule each step in your planner...make an actual appointment. This ensures you will set aside the time to accomplish each step. Don't make the mistake of putting the steps on 'to do' lists because a 'to do' list is just a wish list and you will invariably run out of day before you run out of list. The 'to do' list just goes on and on. Your planner is a real guide for accomplishing your goals.

Your challenge: Plan to make 2012 your best year ever. Take a few minutes to set your goals. Break the goals down into achievable mini-goals. Decide when each mini-goal must be accomplished to reach the main goal by the end of the year. Enter those mini-goals in your planner. Make appointments with yourself for completing each one.

If you do your planning and then do your scheduling, you can accomplish absolutely anything you want and this time next year you'll be celebrating the fact that you actually reached your goals.

Here's to out with the old...in with the new...to a new year and a fresh start. Happy New Year!

Vicki Voisin, "The Paralegal Mentor", delivers simple strategies for paralegals and other professionals to create success and satisfaction by setting goals and determining the direction they will take their careers. Vicki spotlights resources, organizational tips, ethics issues, and other areas of continuing education to help paralegals and others reach their full potential. She publishes *Paralegal Strategies*, a weekly e-newsletter for paralegals, and co-hosts *The Paralegal Voice*, a monthly podcast produced by [Legal Talk Network](#).

More information is available at www.paralegalmentor.com where subscribers receive Vicki's *151 Tips for Your Career Success*.

NALA Campus LIVE!
Spring 2012 Schedule
(upcoming courses)

January 2012

Blue Book Review of Citing
Mary Kubichek, J.D.
January 27, 1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

February 2012

Filing in the Federal Court Using the CM/ECF System
Jeffrey Allsteadt
February 2, 1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

American Legal System: Part 1
Karen Sanders-West, ACP, J.D.
February 7, 4:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.

Spanish for Paralegals: The Initial Consult
Carla M. Valenzuela, CP
February 8, 1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Power Point 2010 for Paralegals
Kathleen H. Miller, ACP, CAS
February 9, 1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Electronic Discovery
Rachel Alexander
February 13, 1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Basic Business Organizations
Kelly A. LaGrave, ACP
February 14, Noon - 1:30 p.m.

Legal Descriptions
Glenn A. Leier, Attorney
February 15, 1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Intellectual Property Law
J. Nevin Shaffer Jr., P.A.
February 16, 1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Judgment and Legal Analysis
Virginia Koerselman Newman, Attorney
February 17, Noon - 2:00 p.m.

Deciphering the Medical Record
Amy Temkin
February 20, 1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

American Legal System: Part 2
Karen Sanders-West, ACP, J.D.
February 21, 4:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.

Applicable Exclusion Amount to Offset Federal Gift Taxes and Federal Estate Taxes; Annual Exclusions and Marital Deduction
Ed Armstrong, Attorney
February 22, 1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Basic Ethics: Part 1
Vicki Voisin, ACP
February 23, 1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Using Paralegals as Jury Consultants
Mary Kubichek, J.D.
February 24, 1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Deciphering the Medical Record Intermediate
Amy Temkin
February 27, 1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Legal Writing: You are Only as Good as Your Mistakes
Rebecca E. Patty
February 28, 1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Commercial Leases
Glenn A. Leier, Attorney
February 29, 1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

March 2012

Fundamentals of Employment Discrimination
Eric Matusewitch, PHR, CAAP
March 1, 1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Elder Law
Marci S. Johns, J.D.
March 6, 1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Civil Litigation: Part I
Karen Sanders-West, ACP, J.D.
March 6, 4:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.

Employment Eligibility Verification: The Importance of Form I-9
Bobby Rimas
March 7, 1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Basic Ethics: Part 2
Vicki Voisin, ACP
March 8, 1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

State and Federal Administration Law for the 2012 Paralegal
Rebecca E. Patty
March 9, 1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

View the full NALA Campus LIVE! Spring 2012 Schedule at <http://www.nala.org/spring2012schedule.aspx>

S	U	P	P	L	E	S	R	C	Q	S
T	L	S	E	M	S	R	E	I	P	O
A	W	R	U	N	N	E	R	Y	H	E
P	A	P	E	R	W	O	R	K	O	D
L	L	A	I	R	T	D	P	Z	N	I
E	X	P	E	R	T	M	U	I	E	V
S	E	L	I	F	E	P	O	R	D	E
K	W	A	T	E	R	C	H	A	I	R
Q	W	N	N	R	O	A	D	M	A	P
T	R	A	H	C	L	A	C	I	D	E
S	U	P	P	O	R	T	S	T	A	F



Legal Assistants/Paralegals
of Southern West Virginia
(LAPSWV)

Ab Initio is a quarterly publication of Legal Assistants/Paralegals of Southern West Virginia (LAPSWV). None of the information contained herein is intended to be nor should it be construed as legal advice.

**Legal Assistants/Paralegals
Of Southern West Virginia**
P.O. Box 11488
Charleston, WV 25339
Website: www.lapswv.org

Direct Comments/Questions
concerning this newsletter to:

Shannon Todd, ACP - Chair
LAPSWV Newsletter Committee
Email: shannon.todd@steptoe-johnson.com

Legal Assistants/Paralegals of Southern West Virginia ("LAPSWV") is a non-profit organization established in 2004 in Charleston and Huntington, West Virginia.

LAPSWV promotes high standards in the legal assistant profession, establishes networking resources for legal assistants/paralegals, and provides integrity in the legal community. LAPSWV also contributes to the community by participating in a number of charitable programs. LAPSWV strives to raise professional standards in the legal assistant/paralegal profession by providing opportunities for personal growth and development through educational experiences and the networking with other professionals.

Legal Assistants/Paralegals of Southern West Virginia was founded:

- To further education among members of the legal assistant/paralegal profession;
- To provide a forum for the exchange of viewpoints on matters involving the legal assistant/paralegal profession;
- To promote and involve the legal assistant/paralegal in the development of guidelines on the standardization of the legal assistant profession;
- To establish good fellowship among association members, the National Association of Legal Assistants, Inc. ("NALA"), and members of the legal community;
- To encourage a high order of ethical and professional attainment;
- To cooperate with bar associations and other law related organizations; and
- To support and carry out the programs, purposes, aims and goals of NALA.