

MCPA TODAY

The official Publication of the Montgomery County Paralegal Association

December 2007

www.montcoparalegals.org

Editor: Tracey L. Barnes, RP

Be always at war with your vices, at peace with your neighbors, and let each new year find you a better man.
~Benjamin Franklin

Best wishes for a very Happy New Year! It's the start of a new year for MCPA!

First, on behalf of the entire MCPA Board and MCPA membership, I would like to convey our heartfelt thanks to Tracey Barnes and Karen Garcia, our outgoing Board members. Tracey and Karen - your commitment, support and countless hours spent serving as Board members, volunteering your time for your committees and your dedication to the advancement of the paralegal profession has definitely made a difference!

Luckily for us, their commitment to MCPA has not ended – Tracey will continue as editor of *MCPA Today*, (I'm sure you'll agree that she has done an awesome job with our newsletter) and will also continue to chair the Membership Committee and the CLE Committee. Karen will continue as our Primary Representative with the Keystone Alliance and as a member of the Community Outreach Committee.

We welcome three new members to our Board this year – Debbie Long, Nancy Aiken and Debbie Arbuckle. Also, a warm welcome back to Kathy Zamorski and Harry Reichner who begin their second term on MCPA's Board of Directors.

MCPA's Installation Dinner is scheduled for January 16, 2008 at Village Caterers in Montgomeryville. Magisterial District Judge David Keightly will be our guest speaker and has graciously accepted our invitation to install the 2008 Board of Directors.

On another note, all of the committees are once again planning for another busy year. Our committees are in need of volunteers and would welcome your help, regardless of how much or how little time you can spare – there is always something to do and does not always require a big time commitment. Feel free to contact any Board member or Committee Chair – you will find their contact info in this newsletter.

We look forward to seeing you all on January 16th!

Beth Breckenridge,
President

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Beth Ann Breckenridge

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President

Mary Hoskinson

Secretary

Stephanie Dise

Treasurer

Harry Reichner

Deborah Long

Nancy Aiken

Deborah Arbuckle

SAVE THE DATE!!

January 16, 2008, MCPA Installation Meeting at Village Caterers

February 21, 2007 at O'Brien & Ryan

March 15, 2007 Breakfast at Otto's

April 23, 2008, Educational Conference

Welcome New Members

Lisa Thomer



NFPA Annual Convention
Tampa Bay, Florida
October 18, 2007-October 21, 2007



As MCPA's Primary Representative to the National Federation of Paralegal Associations, I attended this year's Annual convention in Tampa Bay, Florida. The convention consists of four days of meetings and workshops pertaining to the paralegal profession.

Thursday, workshops were held in various areas including Association management, PACE, Coordinator training and also CLE seminars in various areas of practice. A welcome reception was held from 5:00 to 6:30 and then the NFPA Board of Directors Meeting was held from 7:00 p.m. until approximately 10:00 p.m. During that meeting the consent calendar for the Board was discussed as well as any Board issues. Dallas Area Paralegal Association and Minnesota Paralegal Association both made presentations to the Board in an effort to win the bid for the 2011 Convention. Minnesota was the winner of the bid for that year. The conventions will be held in the following years and locations:

- 2008 Bentonville, Arkansas
- 2009 Seattle, Washington
- 2010 Philadelphia, PA (If anyone is interested in helping with the preparations of this convention, please contact Charlene Healy, RP at chealy@sattinlaw.com . The actual convention may be held in Valley Forge or King of Prussia so I hope you will all stop in to see what NFPA is really about!)
- 2011 Minnesota

On Friday the convention started at 7:30 a.m. with Region meetings all day except for the several lunchtime workshops. During the Region meetings presentations were made for the Foundation for the Advancement Paralegal Profession, and the Navy Legalman Support Project. Other topics included NFPA's Tech Institute recently held in Pittsburgh that received rave reviews and will become an annual event. It was brought to everyone's attention that several of the National organizations are attempting to communicate, meet and discuss national issues however NALA has not been interested in meeting with other organizations to create a consolidated front for the profession. Other

items discussed were the Agenda topics and a new listing of NFPA member benefits. (See the revised listing below.) The next Region meeting will be held in the Spring at a location yet to be determined. All MCPA members are invited to attend this Region meeting and anyone interested may feel free to contact me at chealy@sattinlaw.com for more information when the date and place has been determined.

Saturday and Sunday were spent in a flurry of activity on the policy room floor that began at 7:30 a.m. until approximately 5:30 p.m. This is the time that the agenda topics were discussed, argued, amended, approved or defeated. This year's debates were especially lively with several agenda topics regarding regulation. A caucus of the delegates was held on Saturday night from 7:30 p.m. until approximately 10:30 p.m. to re-word some agenda topics to incorporate concerns and changes discussed on the policy floor that day.

The policy floor was overseen by the Board of Directors and NFPA's parliamentarian. Robert's Rules of Parliamentary Procedure are followed for the order of business and the policy days can be compared to the US Senate or House of Representatives. The full text of the approved Agenda topics will be forthcoming from NFPA and will be included in the newsletter following the receipt of the official Resolutions.

On Saturday, the Navy Association made a very heartwarming and tearful presentation to all Associations that participate in the Navy Legalman Support Package program. Several Navy members spoke regarding how grateful they were to receive those packages while overseas. They are truly overwhelmed with how thoughtful everyone who contributes to those packages has been and were grateful to be remembered. I had the opportunity to speak with several Navy members that recently returned from Iraq. They all reiterated how much those packages meant and commented that many Legalman are tearful when receiving those packages as they are the only mail they ever receive. Lori Thompson, the originator of the project was awarded with a flag that was flown over the Baghdad headquarters in her Honor for her selflessness in starting this wonderful project. Please don't forget to contribute to MCPA's care packages!

On Sunday, NFPA's new Board of Directors was sworn into office and they are as follows:

President: Anita Haworth
Vice President & Director of Membership – Linda McGirr
Vice President & Director of Professional Development – Susan Ippoliti
Vice President & Director of Positions and Issues – Wayne Akin
Treasurer – Georgette Lovelace
Secretary – Stephen Imondi
Board Advisor – Kristine Farmer
Region IV Director – Bob Hrouda (MCPA's region)

The Convention concluded on Sunday and another NFPA Board meeting was held with the newly elected Board to discuss roles and responsibilities, the appointment of ad hoc committees and coordinators.

Conventions are a lot of work and everyone shares their Tylenol and aspirin with others but no one ever leaves a convention without being energized and very proud of their chosen profession. Please plan on attending the convention in Philadelphia and/or donating your time and efforts to helping with the huge undertaking of planning a convention!



REGION IV DIRECTOR, BOB HROUDA



STUDENT SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS



2008 BOARD OF DIRECTORS



ONE QUARTER OF POLICY FLOOR



REGION MEETING





NAVY LEGALMAN PRESENTATION



PRESENTATION OF FLAG TO LORI THOMPSON

Coming in 2008: MCPA Education Conference

Plans are now under way for MCPA's first Education Conference to be held at the **Doubletree Guest Suites Plymouth Meeting** on **April 23, 2008**.

Please contact a committee member if you would like to suggest a workshop topic and/or a speaker or if you would like to serve on the committee.

Education Conference Committee:

- Beth Breckenridge - bbreckenridge@highswartz.com
 - Karen Garcia - Karen.Garcia@us.henkel.com
 - Debbie Long - debbiel@dbyd.com
-



The Votes are In!

By Tracey L. Barnes, RP

On November 13, 2007, the MCPA held its annual membership and election meeting at LaBella Cucina in Center Point, Pennsylvania. The evening started with some general announcements by Beth Ann Breckenridge followed by a short presentation by Jeffrey Love of Love Court Reporting. Love Court Reporting completed their presentation with a raffle in which two lucky MCPA members received gift certificates—one to Toppers Spa and one a VISA card. Thank you Jeff Love and Love Court Reporting for speaking with our members regarding your services and for the prizes.

The evening continued with a presentation from James Breish, Assistant Vice President of Sovereign Bank. Jim spoke regarding identity theft and the many ways an individual can protect himself/herself from identity theft. Jim also gave a brief overview of managing a checkbook. He completed the presentation with a short writing activity which demonstrated how easy it is to forge a signature, even of a complete stranger. Jim also supplied a door prize to one lucky MCPA member.

During the evening the members were encouraged to complete Christmas cards to be sent to the troops overseas as well as thank you notes for the “A Million Thanks” program through the Community Outreach Committee. Donations were also collected that evening for Kevin Messmer’s unit in Iraq (Kevin is the son of Noreen Messmer, a MCPA member) as well as for Manna on Main Street.

The night culminated with the announcement of the new 2008-2009 MCPA Board of Directors. We had 7 candidates and although all were extremely qualified for the positions only 5 were to be chosen this night. Congratulations to the following members to the 2008-2009 MCPA Board of Directors:

Harry Reichner
Debbie Long
Kathleen Zamorski
Debbie Arbuckle
Nancy C. Aiken

They will join the remaining members of the Board (Beth Ann Breckenridge, Stephanie Dise, Lisa LaPenna, and Mary Hoskinson) to continue the progress, strength, and growth of the MCPA.

Beth Ann Breckenridge and Kathy Zamorski on behalf of the current Board of Directors gave a presentation of gifts to outgoing Board Members Karen Garcia and Tracey L. Barnes, RP, in appreciation for their years of commitment to the MCPA.





MONTGOMERY COUNTY
PARALEGAL ASSOCIATION



A Social Event

On December 6, 2007, the MCPA sponsored its annual Holiday Social at P.J. Whelihans, Blue Bell, Pennsylvania. It was a great break in the week during the busy holiday time. Tarot card readings by Lauren were both entertaining and very informative, though she wouldn't give out the Power Ball numbers to anyone! The hat/mitten tree was overflowing and thanks to everyone who donated. The hats/mittens were distributed to the Montgomery Head Start Facilities during that week.





Wrapping it up!

By: Kathleen M. Zamorski
Chairperson, Planning Committee

It's January again, and time to put the past year in perspective. On behalf of the Planning Committee, I want to thank our members for their continued interest in our seminars and CLE's. We try very hard to make the year's activities interesting and informative. Last January we had a very informative seminar about how our bodies handle stress and what dietary decisions we can make to help our bodies handle stress easier. This seminar was held at the Village Caterers in Montgomeryville and the speakers were Registered Nurses from Central Montgomery Hospital.

In February, an attorney from Kaplin Stewart held an informative session on "How to Challenge the IRS". This was just in time for us to ask and have answered all of our own personal IRS filing questions.

Anyone for pancakes, eggs, bacon? Well, that's what March brought. We had a nice breakfast meeting at Otto's in Hatboro. Janine Kelly from the Women's Center presented an empowering session regarding the Women's Center and the services available to Montgomery County residents. Ms. Kelly provided our members with an in depth look at domestic abuse and how you can help.

One of our own paralegals, Harry Reichner, held an April CLE seminar on Corporate Entities. He gave us very valuable information in distinguishing the different types of corporate entities.

If it's Family Law you are interested in (or ever wanted to know about), then you should have attended our May CLE! Dagmar Wolf, Esquire walked us through the filing process from the very beginning – giving us very important little details you won't find in legal books.


Drinks anyone? We hope that you were able to join us for drinks and appetizers at Justin's in Skippack. A huge thank you to Harris Investigations as they sponsored our June social! What a great way to start off the summer. We hope that you had a nice, fun-filled summer.

Back to fall and our first seminar in September was a CLE opportunity presented by RecordTrak. Through a detailed Power Point presentation and handouts, Debra Aisenstein, Esquire and Janet McCrossen, BSN, RN, presented ways to effectively and efficiently review medical documents. Their helpful tips will surely come in handy.

Fall leaves brought our 3rd annual MCPA Picnic. The picnic was held again at Mondauk Park in Horsham, Pa. There was food, adult and kids' games, appetizer contest and our annual favorite, bocce ball! Fun was had for all!

November was our annual election meeting. Look for the standalone article ("The Votes are In") in the *MCPA Today* for all the details! And last but not least, was our December Social at PJ Whelihan's. Lauren the card reader amazed all who was in attendance!


As always, the Planning Committee is committed to bringing informative and interesting seminars to our members. If you are interested in participating in the planning committee or just have some great ideas you would like us to incorporate in upcoming seminars, please feel free to email me at kmz@elliottgreenleaf.com. Have a Happy, Healthy Holiday Season from the Planning Committee!



Meghan prefers substance over hype.

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COMMUNITY OUTREACH COMMITTEE GOES GLOBAL

BY: JOYCE J. O'BRIEN

This year the Community Outreach Committee has had an extremely fruitful year, which extended beyond the realm of the Montgomery County area. We continued our Cell Phone Campaign in January. In the past, MCPA has donated used cell phones, pagers and palm pilots to benefit Special Olympics and also HIV/Aids research. Our last collection was donated to the Women's Center of Montgomery County, to be distributed to women who are affected by domestic abuse.

In February, COC joined hands with Aid for Friends to assemble breakfast bags for the homebound. Aid for Friends is a non-profit organization whose mission is to provide meals to the disabled and elderly homebound in the Greater Philadelphia area. Our members generously donated monetary contributions so that we could purchase non-perishable food items for the breakfast bags. The Community Outreach Committee assembled 64 breakfast bags that were delivered to the homebound.

On April 28, MCPA held its first Earth Day Project. Our volunteers arrived sporting their boots and old jeans to participate with the Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association in the annual Wissahickon Creek Clean Up. That morning all volunteers served as stewards of the environment. Our mission was completed after a few hours, and everyone left the clean up a bit dirty from the work, some of us sore the next day, but with a feeling of good will that we had contributed to preserve our environment and protect our natural resources.

On May 6, MCPA members gathered for the second year at the Elmwood Zoo Park to walk for the National Multiple Sclerosis Society. MCPA collected \$400.00 from our members, families and friends through pledges and donations to benefit MS in its research for fighting this deadly disease.

COC's collection of used eyeglasses was a huge success. It became apparent that many of us had at least one drawer storing our treasured granny glasses and bifocals dating back to the late 60's and early 70's. The Community Outreach Committee donated the eyeglasses to the Lions Eyeglass Recycling Club who repair the eyeglasses, on site, to underprivileged people living in third world countries. In this successful drive, MCPA

had extended its outreach program to our less fortunate brothers and sisters living outside of the United States.

On October 13, MCPA participated for the second year, in the Light the Night Walk that was held at the Gwynedd Mercy College campus. The proceeds generated from the walk support the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society in their fight against cancer. This year MCPA collected \$586.00 and we doubled the number of walkers from last year.

The Community Outreach Committee coordinated its efforts with the Norristown Head Start Program by collecting paper products and arts supplies from our members. We also received gift certificates from Staples and Target that were donated to Head Start in Norristown. This program provides educational assistance to assist low-income families within the area.

At our General Election Meeting on November 13, the Community Outreach Committee held its annual food drive for Manna on Main. We have participated in this worthy project for the last four years. Manna on Main does a spectacular job in feeding needy families in the Lansdale area. Our members have always been extremely generous in donating food as well volunteering their time to the various programs Manna offers to the community.

“A Million Thanks” was yet another Thanksgiving season project coordinated by COC. We requested our members and their families to write a short note of appreciation to our troops serving in the armed forces, thanking them for their sacrifices and dedication to our country.

Finally, we have coordinated our efforts with the Planning Committee for the Annual Hat and Mitten drive to benefit the Montgomery County Head Start Program. The goal this year was to collect 500 sets of hats and mittens for distribution to underprivileged children living in the Montgomery County area.

As you can see, the Community Outreach Committee is extremely committed to its mission in “promoting positive attitudes within the general population toward paralegals and the legal community through volunteering time for a variety of community groups.” If you have an idea for a project, or would like to join COC, please feel free to contact myself, or any member of the committee. I thank all of the committee members for a job well done. Your spirit and dedication to the various outreach programs has been overwhelming. I would also like to thank those who have donated their time, contributed to any of our campaigns, or merely offered your support. We couldn’t do it without you.



THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY PARALEGAL ASSOCIATION

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| When: | January 16, 2008 6:00 P.M. |
| Where: | Village Caterers 969 Bethlehem Pike (Route 309) Montgomeryville, Pennsylvania |
| Special Guest: | <i>Magisterial Judge David A. Keightly to speak regarding Judicial District Court Procedures</i> |
| Menu: | Choice of Chicken Florentine or Roast Top Sirloin of Beef |
| Cost: | \$15 for members and non-members |
| RSVP: | By Monday, January 14, 2007 To Tracey L. Barnes, RP, at Traceyb@dbyd.com |

**MARK YOUR CALENDARS NOW AND LET US KNOW THAT WE WILL SEE
YOU ON THE 16TH!!**



14 Tips Toward Effective Communication for Paralegals

Contributed by [Elizabeth Brantlinger Angus](#)

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Consider what you do on average day. For most paralegals, a conservative estimate has you spending 85% of your day communicating. Whether it is writing an inter-office memo, talking with a court clerk, discussing a case with your supervising attorney, or asking for a raise you are using the skill of communication. Enhancing your skills as a communicator is vital as you advance your career.

What is communication? It is the imparting and understanding of ideas and concepts. Note that in order to excel as a communicator you must be able to both articulate your thoughts and to understand others thoughts-it is truly a two way street. Everyone has had the experience of leaving a meeting and having no idea what was decided or even fully discussed. This is a result of lapsed communication-both on the part of the meeting facilitator and those attending. By applying the strategies discussed in this article, you will be able to avoid such unproductive meeting time and demonstrate your value to your organization.

The Basics of Oral and Non-Oral Communication

1. Always consider your audience. This core concept applies whether you are speaking to a colleague over the water cooler to speaking before a large group of attorneys at a meeting. By taking into consideration who you are speaking to and why you can target your remarks to that audience.

Using the example above of the unproductive meeting, the meeting facilitator should always determine prior to a meeting who will be there, for what purpose and draft an agenda accordingly. Following that agenda, drafted with particular audience in mind, allows the facilitator to guide the meeting more effectively and therefore communication among the group is far more productive.

2. Do your homework. Like a good boy scout, you should “always be prepared.” Know who will be in a meeting and know what their interests are. If you are reporting on the status of a project, have all your notes and materials neatly organized in a way you can access easily. Shuffling papers and making mad dashes back to your desk to retrieve items does not make a good impression.

3. Understand the occasion. While it is fine to stop a colleague in the hall to quickly update them on a case, it is not effective to try to conduct an in depth analysis of a problem there. If you stop your boss on the way to the elevator to ask for a raise, why should she take you seriously? If it wasn't important enough for you to make an appointment it probably isn't important enough for her to consider.

4. Don't underestimate the power of your appearance and environment. Related to the point above, it is important that your surroundings and appearance add to your professionalism, not detract from it. Your surroundings and appearance communicate

volumes; a messy desk, a loud radio, too much perfume or jewelry -- these things dilute your message.

5. Body language speaks for you. Just like your mother always told you, posture is important. Slumping in a chair, not standing to greet someone and avoiding eye contact all send the message that you are not engaged in the conversation. To clients this behavior indicates that they are not valued, to a supervisor this behavior indicates that you lack professionalism. Neither is an impression you want to make. If you're unsure what type of message your body language is sending, ask a trusted colleague to observe you in a meeting and report back problems they noted.

6. Listening is more than just hearing. People can listen nearly three to four times as fast as others can speak. Harrop Arthur Freeman, *Legal Interviewing and Counseling* (West Publishing, 1964) This means that it is easy for your mind to wander as a person speaks. Effective active listening requires that you listen without jumping to a response, to consider how something is being said, and to appreciate pauses and gaps in the conversation. By doing so, the effective paralegal understands what is being said and can make sense of it.

7. Always confirm your understanding. By actively listening, you can fully understand what the other person has said and give meaning to the feelings and content of the person's statements. To confirm that you understand what the person has communicated, it is important to "mirror" back what you have heard. Effective Client Communication, P.M. Lisnek, (West Publishing, 1992). In this process the listener repeats what he understands the speaker to have said. This process is vital when you are given an assignment orally. This mirroring is the only way both the speaker and the listener can be sure they have a mutual understanding of what has been decided. Simple phrases such as "To confirm, you want me to do a. b. c..." can do wonders in clarifying conversations.

The mirroring technique is equally effective in conversations with clients. By repeating your understanding of what they have said, clients feel valued and confident that their message has been heard and understood.

8. Speak clearly. It is always important to speak clearly and with enough volume that it is easy to hear you. Speak with confidence and everything you say will be more effective. Accurate and appropriate vocabulary is a must. Slang and curse words are never appropriate.

The Basics of Written Communication

"Because legal employers prize writing ability more highly than almost any other skill, you'll gain several immediate advantages:

- You'll be more likely to get whatever job you want.
- You'll be more likely to be promoted quickly.

- You'll have greater opportunities for career mobility, with a broad range of possibilities.”

Legal Writing in Plain English, B. Garner (University of Chicago Press, 2001)

1. No legalese! It is a common occurrence during a student's first year of law school to begin speaking and writing in sentences that sound like this: “The respondent has heretofore neglected to file such writs as are required by such parties of the first part.” Don't let this happen to you. The urge can be strong to demonstrate your legal knowledge by using “heretofores” but such legalese only makes your writing harder to understand and therefore less effective. Substitute legalese with “plain language” words.

2. Remember who you're writing for and why. As with oral communication, it is important that you always keep in mind who you are writing for. An inter-office memo to your supervising attorney requires a different kind of candor and research than a status letter written for a client. By keeping your audience foremost in your mind as you write, you can keep yourself focused on the proper tone.

3. Always use an outline. Justice Brandeis once said “There is no such thing and good writing, only good re-writing.” The writing begins with a good outline. That outline should be your roadmap and guide you through the writing and re-writing process. It should include all resource and research references and also provide the order in which you will address each issue.

4. Know your assignment. If you have been given a writing assignment by a superior be sure you know exactly what they want. Confirm what they have requested by reading back to them your understanding of the assignment. (Refer back to #) Working on assignment and then being told it “isn't what I asked for” can be demoralizing and certainly not good for your career. It is often a good idea to begin any written assignment with the statement “You asked me to...” This frames the questions for the reader and reminds them what they requested.

5. Style and grammar are important. There is no excuse for submitting any type of writing that is not grammatically correct. The same goes for spelling-no errors allowed. Spell Check is a lifesaver and there are many good websites that offer a grammar refresher online, however – be careful – automatic spell check often introduces errors. Use short sentences and paragraphs whenever possible. Also, all papers should be clean visually, and formatted in the style dictated by your office.

6. Email etiquette. Email is great but must be used smartly

- When submitting a written assignment, determine if the recipient wishes to receive it electronically or in paper form. Many attorneys still prefer to have a paper copy on which to make notes and comments.

- Don't fall into the trap of being too informal. All email messages should be professional and include a salutation and signature. Be sure to use proper grammar and spelling here too.
- Keep it short. No one likes to see a 12 page email pop up and even fewer will read them.
- Always review your message before you hit the send button. Sender's remorse is a terrible thing.
- When answering a question with an email, be sure to include the original email containing the question or include the question in the beginning of your answer.
- Be clear and specific in the subject line of your email. Many people will not open a message called "memo to Steve".

With these tips in hand, you are on your way to a big career!

Attorney Elizabeth Brantlinger Angus is a member of the Connecticut bar. She graduated from St. Lawrence University, Canton, NY with a BA in Government and from the University of Connecticut School of Law with a JD. A native of West Hartford, she has practiced in the Greater Hartford area for over 10 years. Attorney Angus developed the Paralegal Studies Program at St. Joseph College, West Hartford, CT and has taught there for over 4 years. Attorney Angus is the author of The Professional Paralegal Workbook, for Thomson Delmar, an imprint of West Publishing Group. Attorney Angus has served on the boards of the Simsbury Junior Women's Club and the Latimer Lane Elementary School PTO.



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