

WESTERN NEW YORK PARALEGAL ASSOCIATION, INC.
HIGHLIGHTS AND HISTORY

The Beginning
1976 - 1980

THE WESTERN NEW YORK PARALEGAL ASSOCIATION, INC. (WNYPA) evolved from the efforts of several paralegals who foresaw the advantages to be gained for the profession by joining together with others who were similarly employed.

In the summer of 1976, a luncheon meeting attracted 20 individuals representing both paralegals employed in downtown Buffalo law offices and students enrolled in a two-year paralegal program at Hilbert College. An organizational meeting held on October 13, 1976 resulted in the formation of several steering committees whose members formulated a "purposes clause" for the proposed organization and drafted qualifications for membership. Renee Brownstein, Ann Burstein and Patricia Gross were chosen as directors and Anne Joslin as treasurer in November, 1976, and on February 16, 1977, the WESTERN NEW YORK PARALEGAL ASSOCIATION, INC. was recognized as a Type A corporation under Section 201 of New York's Not-For-Profit Corporation Law.

The initial Board of Directors, elected in February, 1977, undertook to create Bylaws for the Association. The task of tailoring them to fit our particular ideas and circumstances proved much more difficult and time consuming than anticipated and, in April, 1978, four new directors joined with holdover board members in a concerted effort to complete the Bylaws. They were adopted by the membership in December, 1978. In April, 1979, the organization filed with the IRS and was recognized as a tax exempt organization in August of that year.

The Association's first member survey was promulgated in the spring of 1979, and area colleges were quick to recognize the role of our Association as a representative of the local paralegal community. In 1979, the Administration of Hilbert College asked for WNYPA representatives to serve on its advisory board and to meet with ABA members when the college was reviewed by that group's approval commission. Members were also invited to address students enrolled in Erie Community College's two-year program for legal assistants.

In the fall of 1979, at the invitation of the National Federation of Paralegal Associations (NFPA), five WNYPA representatives attended the Federation's Region IV conference in Cleveland, Ohio. Inspired by what other paralegal organizations were doing, the officers resolved to pursue our own goals with increased vigor. In 1980 a public relations committee designed to publicize Association activities and establish working relationships with the local and state bar associations was added, and a job bank was created and announced in a letter to members of the public and private sector. In addition, a bi-monthly newsletter was introduced with Geraldine Gaffney serving as editor.

Between February and October, 1980, our membership increased from 50 to 91 and, on November 5, WNYPA presented its first seminar at the Buffalo Convention Center. The subject was "Calendar Practice and Procedure in Erie County," and featured speakers included Hon. James B. Kane, Charles N. Orlando and local attorney Terrence M. Connors. The Association also held its first installation dinner in 1980, with Erie County bar President-Elect Basil Piazza as our guest speaker.

1980 also marked the first time that WNYPA was asked to expand its speaking engagements beyond the paralegal classroom by presenting workshops at a career day for students from several high schools.

1981 WAS A YEAR MARKED BY PHYSICAL GROWTH, new commitments and ambitious endeavors. An increase in membership (120 by April's annual meeting) enabled the Association to increase the number of directorships from eight to ten, and the newly elected board created several new committees. A publications committee, heading by Karen Crouthamel, accepted responsibility for commissioning a logo. Their efforts resulted in the adoption of the now-familiar Buffalo skyline. In addition, it prepared a message regarding the paralegal profession for possible incorporation in the State Bar's Tel-Law tape -- a series of pre-recorded telephone messages providing information to the general public -- and, together with the membership committee, it authored and informational brochure about the Association and the profession which was introduced at a November seminar. A publicity committee was also created in an attempt to expand our contacts and capitalize on various avenues of communications in the area. The Bar Liaison Committee, an offshoot of Public Relations, was established to concentrate on relationships with the Erie and Niagara County Bar Associations.

The Speakers Bureau was also instituted that year in response to the increased demand for information about our profession. Members addressed a Hilbert College seminar on law office management, graduates of the Hilbert paralegal studies program and three classes of incoming students, members of the Bar Association of the Tonawandas, paralegal students at Erie Community College, students from two high schools and workshop participants at a seminar conducted by the Paralegal Association of Rochester. In all, 15 members participated as spokespersons.

The Association applied for membership in the National Association of Paralegal Associations and affiliate status was conferred in the Spring. At the NFPA annual meeting held in Washington, D.C. in June, WNYPA accepted its first national committee assignment -- and in-depth study of the status of paralegals under the Fair Labor Standards Act.

1982

IN 1982 WE SAW THE EMERGENCE OF WNYPA AS A VOICE for paralegal interests at the national level. Under the direction of NFPA primary representative Nancy Langer, a national affairs committee was formed. Meeting weekly from June through October, the committee conducted a comprehensive study of the certification issue and presented its findings to the general membership in November. The study enabled the Association to prepare a position paper for submission to the Federation which was considering a proposed statement on certification. The committee also acted in an advisory capacity to the Association's Board on other national issues, including NFPA participation on the ABA Paralegal Program Approval Commission.

The membership was introduced to its first law-related pro bono project by local attorney Bruce Goldstein, the guest speaker at our third annual installation dinner. By October, four members had completed training as Court Advocates in a program conducted under the auspices of the Erie County Crisis Services, and were assisting victims of sexual assault and their families throughout the judicial process.

1983

IN 1983 WE EXTENDED OUR VISIBILITY and influence beyond the paralegal community. WNYPA members responded to a New York State Labor Department proposal to create a paralegal aptitude test, and the Association accepted the State Bar's invitation to seat a representative on its Professional Economics and Efficiency Research (PEER) Committee's paralegal task force.

With the support of the Damon & Morey firm, members prepared a statement on the subject of attorney/client privilege as it relates to paralegals. The statement was incorporated in oral argument before the New York State Court of Appeals by the appellant's attorney in People v. Mitchell, 36 A.D.2d 976, 448 N.Y.S.2d 332 (1982).

On October 15 and 16, delegates from the northeastern United States and Canada visited Buffalo for the NFPA's Region IV Fall Conference, hosted by WNYPA. Saturday sessions were held at the State University College on Elmwood, followed by "Buffalo's Welcome to NFPA" -- a "mixer" featuring regional delicacies on location along

the Elmwood Strip. Nancy Langer became the first WNYPA member to hold national office when she was elected Region IV Director at the Federation's annual meeting in Seattle, Washington.

1984

IN 1984, WNYPA ACCEPTED THE INVITATION of the Erie County Bar Association to participate in their "Noonday Lecture" series. On March 7, Susan Sessanna, Debra Bush and Nancy Kronen teamed in presenting "Paralegals: Not Just for Big Firms Anymore." The subject matter was designed to familiarize local attorneys with the role of legal assistants in the small firm setting, the economic advantages of proper utilization and the qualifications a prospective employer should look for when hiring.

WNYPA also increased its involvement on the national level. Nancy Langer was re-elected as Region IV Director at the Federation's annual meeting, and the Association accepted two committee assignments – funding and certification. The latter committee was comprised of five NFPA affiliates and chaired by WNYPA's Margaret Dick.

1985

IN 1985, President Janice Murrett inspired the revival of specialty sections, with the public sector and litigation groups enjoying the greatest success. Under the direction of Joanne Wilson, the professional development committee conducted a survey designed to assess job satisfaction and career goals among area paralegals, with results being published in December.

Nancy Langer was elected as NFPA Policy Vice President at the Federation's annual meeting in Chicago, thus becoming the first legal assistant from New York State to serve as an officer in either of the national paralegal associations.

1986

THE BEGINNING OF OUR TENTH ANNIVERSARY YEAR was highlighted by Buffalo Mayor James Griffin's declaration of March 21 as "Western New York Paralegal Association Day." A banquet to celebrate the occasion was held that evening at the Thirty-eighth Floor Restaurant in the Marine Midland Center. Entertainment featured light-hearted presentations recalling the Association's past and predicting its future, and charter member Margaret "Mickey" Dick received the Association's "Award for Distinguished Service."

It was a year distinguished by several successful joint endeavors with the organized Bar. Twenty-seven WNYPA members joined members of the Bar Association of Erie County in escorting secondary school students on "Law Day" tours of local court facilities. Maryann Saccomando Freedman, a Buffalo attorney and President-Elect of the New York State Bar Association ("NYSBA"), was the keynote speaker at our seventh annual installation dinner, held May 23 at Chef's Restaurant.

Two members continued to serve on the NYSBA's Law Office Economics and Management Committee and were contributing authors of "The Expanding Role of the Legal Assistant in New York State," a monograph published by the State Bar and introduced at its September 25-27 general meeting in Buffalo. In conjunction with that meeting – the first held outside of Albany or New York City – three WNYPA members planned a two-day seminar for paralegals and legal secretaries and included five other members among the panelists. Attendance at "The Education Connection: New Parameters for Legal Professionals" far exceeded that of any of the regular State Bar offerings and was adopted by the NYSBA as a prototype for similar seminars scheduled for New York City and Albany. WNYPA also hosted a reception and informal meeting for paralegals from throughout New York State who attended the seminar. The meeting was chaired by Magdalyn Cyganovich, a Rochester paralegal and Region IV Director of the National Federation of Paralegal Associations ("NFPA").

The Association continued its involvement in NFPA, with representatives actively participating in Region IV meetings in Hartford, CT and Philadelphia, PA, and the annual meeting in Oakland, CA at which WNYPA member Nancy M. Langer was elected NFPA President.

1986 was also the year that the American Bar Association ("ABA") Commission on Professionalism issued its report which contained the conclusion, at page 52, that "[t]he limited licensing of paralegals to perform certain functions seems to be a desirable step." NFPA President Langer included a discussion of what came to be known as "the page 52 controversy" in her address to our Association's December 16 general membership meeting.

WNYPA's Newsletter took on a new look, with the June issue being the first published in a magazine format. A real estate specialty section was formed, and the litigation specialty section increased its activity, moving to a monthly meeting schedule.

1987

CONTINUING LEGAL EDUCATION FOR MEMBERS WAS AS MUCH A PRIORITY for the 1987 directors as it had been when our original board included it in the Association's "purposes clause." On February 6, WNYPA and the Western New York Health Care Coalition co-sponsored a public forum on the topic of medical liability insurance and legislative proposals to cap jury awards for non-economic damages. The "blue ribbon" panel of speakers assembled by the two associations included attorney Philip H. Magner, Jr., Dr. Anthony P. Santomauro, State Assemblyman James R. Tallon, Jr. and Edward Amsler of the Medical Liability Mutual Insurance Company and was moderated by New York Supreme Court Justice Henry G. Gossel.

On March 14, the Association hosted its annual spring seminar in the Classroom Building on the Buff State campus. A number of speakers, including four members, combined forces and offered one presentation specifically for students and three for experienced paralegals.

WNYPA again hosted a NFPA Region IV meeting. As part of the October 17-19 gathering, Association members planned Friday's all day educational seminar. Several local speakers and two legal service providers covered litigation, corporate and real estate related topics. As a "break" from the business meetings which continued on Saturday and into Sunday, members and their spouses provided out-of-town delegates with a personally guided tour of Niagara Falls.

May 19, 1987 was the date of the first paralegal/attorney dinner at Samuel's Grande Manor in Clarence. More than 100 members and guests heard the Honorable Vincent E. Doyle, New York State Supreme Court Justice, who spoke about the merger of all state courts as proposed by the Dunn Bill then pending in the state legislature.

In addition to the NFPA's annual meeting in Boston, WNYPA also participated in two important sessions having to do with paralegal education. Paralegals joined forces with members of the NYSBA at a March 7 Education Task Force Hearing in Rochester, in an attempt to raise the standards by which the State Department of Education regulates or licenses schools. This was followed by a November 6 meeting in Albany at which representatives of the State Bar's LOEM Committee, including three WNYPA members, met with Department of Education officials.

In 1987, the LOEM subcommittee on legal assistants was chaired by WNYPA's immediate past president, Debra J. Bush.

1988

THE ASSOCIATION CONTINUED ITS STATEWIDE INVOLVEMENT in 1988. On January 27, Debra Bush attended the State Bar's LOEM Committee meeting in New York City and, as chair of the subcommittee on legal assistants,

reported on the outcome of the November 1987 meeting with State Department of Education officials regarding standards for licensure of paralegal training programs.

On January 30, WNYPA representatives joined with members of the Paralegal Association of Rochester, Long Island Paralegal Association, Manhattan Paralegal Association, and Legal Assistants of Broome County in Binghamton, New York and formed the Empire State Alliance. The statewide paralegal association met twice more on May 14 and September 24.

WNYPA also participated in national events, sending delegates to the April 22-25 NFPA annual meeting in Dallas, TX and the Federation's Region IV fall meeting in Atlantic City, NJ. The guest speaker at our September 20 general membership meeting was Laurie Roselle, a past NFPA president, who spoke about her role as a member of the ABA's Education Approval Commission. Her enthusiasm inspired at least one member to volunteer her assistance and, later in the year, Dawn Laidlaw served as a member of an ABA Approval Committee's on-site visitation team to evaluate the paralegal program at Marist College in Poughkeepsie, New York.

Locally, thirty members responded to a unique Law Day observance co-sponsored by WNYPA and The Buffalo Chapter of the American Red Cross and donated blood to the Red Cross as a symbolic gesture of support for victims of violent crime. And, for the first time since 1983, the Association gave a presentation as part of the Bar Association of Erie County's "Noonday Lecture" series. Speakers at "It's 1988: Can You Effectively Utilize a Paralegal in Your Practice? Can You Afford Not To?" included a New York State Supreme Court Justice, two attorneys, one paralegal educator and five WNYPA members. Their December 7 presentation drew an overflow crowd to the ceremonial courtroom of City Court.

WNYPA's membership topped 200 for the first time in 1988 and, responding to the needs of a growing organization, a Bylaws Committee met throughout the year and drafted bylaw amendments. The proposed amendments were approved at the December 19 general membership meeting.

The Paralegal/Attorney Dinner was held on May 24 under sunny skies in the tent area beyond centerfield at Pilot Field, the new home of baseball's Buffalo Bisons. More than 125 members and guests were entertained by Bison President, Robert E. Rich, Jr.

1989

1989 SAW A RENEWED COMMITMENT TO PRO BONO activities. In addition to our continued involvement in the Volunteer Supportive Advocate Program of Crisis Services, eight members prepared and served meals and sized and sorted donated clothing at the Little Portion Friary. Later, the Association conducted a food drive for this temporary shelter for homeless men and women. Members also assisted with food service at the Night People Drop-in Center, another facility for the homeless, assisted at the Channel 17 (local PBS affiliate) auction, and participated in the March of Dimes 30 km Walk-A-Thon.

As a result of the Bylaw amendments approved in 1988, an Advisory Committee consisting of four former directors was formed to provide "a historical perspective of the Corporation for the guidance and assistance of its officers and directors."

WNYPA activities were wide-ranging, including the annual spring seminar with workshops on successful job hunting and advanced legal writing; the Third Paralegal/Attorney Dinner on May 16 at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery; a July 17 "WNYPA Night" at Pilot Field; a September 28 dinner meeting at Chef's Restaurant featuring a motivational speech by Manhattan Paralegal Association President Laurie Roselle on how to make things happen in your career; and a December 19 Holiday Luncheon meeting at The Glass Abbey Restaurant.

The Association also remained active in professional activities beyond our immediate locale. Representatives attended meetings of the Empire Alliance in March and October and traveled to Erie, PA to attend a September

16 meeting of the Keystone Alliance. Delegates also participated in the NFPA Annual Meeting in Portland, OR and a Region IV meeting in Wilmington, DE.

The months of effort which went into submitting a bid to host a NFPA Annual Meeting were rewarded on August 4 when the Federation's Board of Directors awarded the 1993 conclave to WNYPA. At the invitation of NFPA, a WNYPA member staffed the Federation's informational table at the Association of Legal Administrator's Annual Conference held in Toronto, Ontario. By mayoral proclamation, May 16 was declared "WNY Paralegal Day."

Members also continued to work with the Bar Association of Erie County's Joint Childcare Committee assessing the childcare needs of the local legal community. Area law firms were surveyed and various downtown locations evaluated as possible sites.

1990

THE ANNUAL SEMINAR BECAME AN "INTERNATIONAL AFFAIR" as WNYPA joined with the Canadian Association of Legal Assistants in presenting "Across the Border" on March 23 and 24 at the Buffalo Hyatt Regency. Buffalo Mayor James Griffin recognized the event by proclaiming March 23 "Canadian/American Paralegal Day."

The Association introduced its first official Mentor Program and a medical specialty section was formed.

In May, at the invitation of the Union of Lawyers of the Soviet Union, WNYPA member Beverly Woolson visited Moscow, Minsk and Lenigrad as part of an American delegation of paralegals. She later recounted her adventures at a general membership meeting.

Pro Bono activities again included the March of Dimes 20 km "Walk-A-Thon" on April 29 and the Channel 17 "Great American Auction" in May. Through the efforts of Bar Liaison Anita D'Aquino, WNYPA participated in the planning stages of a pilot project to bring free legal services to the homeless in area shelters. At Ms. D'Aquino's behest, members who attended the December Holiday Luncheon at Shayleen's contributed toiletry items for guests at The Little Portion Friary.

The Fourth Annual Paralegal/Attorney Dinner took place on May 15 at the Brierwood County Club with the Hon. Matthew J. Jasen as keynote speaker. On September 18, NFPA Policy Vice President Merle Isgett addressed the general membership meeting on the issue of paralegal regulation.

Deborah J. Healy, a former WNYPA President and NFPA representative, was elected as Region IV Director at the Federation's May 48 Annual Meeting in Philadelphia, PA and presided at her first regional meeting in Rochester, NY from October 12-14. In November, Beverly Woolson was appointed to fill the unexpired term of the NFPA secretary.

The Association was also represented at the April 7 and September 15 meetings of the Empire State Alliance in Binghamton. At the latter, WNYPA's Nancy Bowen was elected Alliance Chair.

1991

WNYPA MEMBERS CONTINUED TO SHOW THEIR COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY in 1991 by working with attorneys from Neighborhood Legal Services and law students from the State University in the Bar Association of Erie County's Homeless Task Force. Members and guests who attended the December 17 Holiday Luncheon also contributed gifts for residents of Haven House, a shelter for battered women and their children.

The annual spring seminar was held on March 16 at the Buffalo State College campus and included presentations on assisting at trial, preparation of federal estate tax returns, interviewing public sector clientele, and job responsibilities of paralegals in various specialties. More than fifty members and students attended.

The May 14 Paralegal/Attorney Dinner was held at the Brierwood Country Club with guest speakers Col. Paul R. Cooper, Commander of the 914th T.A.G., and Neil E. Nolf, Base Public Affairs Officer, offering a personal view of Operation "Desert Storm." The Association also donated \$200 to the Niagara Falls, NY Chapter of the American Red Cross to be used in assisting families of armed services personnel serving in Desert Storm. Steven Seen was honored as "Paralegal of the Year" for his participation as a paralegal/student member.

On the state level, representatives attended a legal assistant subcommittee meeting of the State Bar's LOEM Committee held in Syracuse, NY on June 13 and contributed to the subcommittee's projects. Delegates also journeyed to Binghamton for a September 21 meeting of the Empire State Alliance.

At the Federation's 1991 Annual Meeting held April 26-29 in Indianapolis, IN, Beverly Woolson was elected Secretary and Deborah Healy re-elected as Region IV Director. WNYPA also participated in a regional NFPA meeting held in New York City from October 18-20. Locally, committees were formed and a "theme contest" was held as planning began for the 1993 NFPA Annual Meeting to be held in Buffalo.

1992

THE 1992-93 BOARD TRIED SEVERAL "FIRSTS" including an incentive program, "More for Me in '93," designed to increase active involvement in the Association. WNYPA also presented its first "Chinese Auction" on February 11 at Garcia's Irish Pub, and a small but determined group of Estates and Trusts paralegals formed their own specialty section.

The annual spring seminar was held on April 4 at the Erie Community College City Campus. Participants were able to choose from among CLE offerings on bankruptcy procedure, default judgments, real estate forms, financial planning and a unique look at three different paralegal specialties.

WNYPA member Anita D'Aquino was nominated for the Law Day "Special Services Award" in recognition of her contributions to the Bar Association of Erie County's Homeless Task Force and the Crisis Services Volunteer Supportive Advocate Program of Erie County, and a WNYPA delegation was present at the April 30 Law Day Luncheon when Committee Chair Salvatore R. Martoche recognized Jane Pigut for her contributions to the committee.

NFPA President Merle Isgett addressed the May 19 Paralegal/Attorney Dinner in the Golden Ballroom at Statler Towers and charter member Shirley Hughes reflected on WNYPA's growth over the past fifteen years. Carolyn A.DeLacy received the Student Appreciation Award; Gibson, McAskill & Crosby was given the Employer Appreciation Award, and Jack W. Hunt and Associates, Inc. was recognized for its long-standing support of WNYPA.

The September 15 dinner meeting at Chef's Restaurant featured A. Lee Gagnon, Chief Clerk of Buffalo City Court, who spoke about the "Spring of Life" anti-abortion protests in Buffalo and their effect on the operations of City Court. The December 15 Holiday Luncheon at The Thirty-eighth Floor Restaurant attracted a large crowd who heard a presentation by Marlene Leone on behalf of "Headway for Brain Injured, Inc.," a support and advocacy organization for the head injured and their families.

The NFPA's 1992 Annual Meeting took place in San Diego, CA from May 1-4 and was attended by WNYPA representatives. During the summer months, WNYPA held a series of mini-forums to fully apprise members of issues surrounding regulation and a paralegal code of ethics and solicit member opinion in preparation for debate on these topics at the September 25-27 mid-year meeting in Chicago, IL. Beverly Woolson was appointed co-coordinator of pro bono activities by the NFPA Board of Directors.

In preparation for the 1993 Annual Meeting in Buffalo, WNYPA hosted a September 1 breakfast meeting at the Midday Club to solicit the support of area attorneys in publicizing the national meeting. The Board also announced the winning entry for meeting theme, "Charging Toward the Future," and the convention logo featured a charging American bison.

