

Western  
Association of  
Legal  
Assistants

# NEWS

March 1991 Edition

P.O. BOX 4127, MAIN POST OFFICE, VANCOUVER B.C. V6B 3Z6

## PRESIDENT'S CORNER



TERRY WILSON

As some of you may be aware, I have accepted the position of Claims Adjudicator at the Worker's Compensation Board and have effectively "left" the legal assistant profession. Being somewhat removed from the legal world, I feel that the Association would be unjustly served if I were to continue holding the office of President. The legal assistant and Association matters that need attending to in 1991 require more time and attention than I will be able to offer given my new position.

As a result, at the last Directors' meeting, Debra Rowbotham was appointed President in my stead. I

will act as Vice-President and will continue as a Director for at least the remainder of this year, participating as fully as possible in activities promoting the legal assistant profession.

In this respect, I have attended the Law Society's first Subcommittee meeting held on February 25th. The Subcommittee's mandate is to work out the logistics of the initial subcommittee's recommendation to implement the Certification of legal Assistants. I would appreciate receiving as many job descriptions as possible from our members. They will be submitted to the Committee and will be valuable in helping the Committee to determine the role legal assistant fulfill in the law firm and to establish the educational requirements for certification.

This isn't goodbye. I hope to see you all at the next Members' meeting.

Terry Wilson



## UPCOMING EVENT !!!!!!

SPRING DINNER

APRIL 11, 1991

KEG CAESARS

595 Hornby St.  
Vancouver, B.C.

5:30pm

Cost: \$12.65 w/ GST  
(tip & beverages extra)

*Its time to celebrate a new season!  
Join us for the Keg's Appetizer  
Buffet and an interesting evening.  
Wynne Smith will be our guest  
speaker.*

*Please R.S.V.P. (with your cheque,  
made payable to WALA) to Viviane  
Dufrane, later than April 3, 1991.*

c/o Epstein Wood Wong & Logie  
650 - 1500 W. Georgia St.  
Vancouver, B.C. V6G 3A9  
(phone: 685-4321)



## VCC UPDATE

The Vancouver Community College "Legal Assistant" program has received approval from the VCC Board and as many of you will be aware, course brochures have been circulated to many law firms for distribution amongst their staff.

This eight month long, part-time Program offers education in 3 areas of specialty: Conveyancing, Corporate Law and Litigation.

Classes commenced February 22, 1991 for the Winter Session. Sessions for Spring and Fall will commence May 21st and September 3rd respectively.

The programs for the three specialties appear to be mainly procedural as the substantive content seems limited to a reading of some statutes and one or two lectures on contract law or torts for each specialty.

Tuition for the program is \$1295 plus possible costs for handout materials.

They do not propose to use any textbooks but instead, will rely on handouts prepared by the instructor.

Despite the hefty tuition costs, there appears to be quite a bit of interest in this eight month program. It may be perceived (and promoted) as a quick and easy alternative to the five year commitment required for the

Capilano College Options Program (the evening program). We suspect concern about tuition costs will disappear if law firms are willing to reimburse the tuition to staff members taking the program.

The VCC Legal Assistant program is being promoted as a "Specialist" program and an alternative to the "Generalist" program offered by Capilano College. The Program may have been designed on the basis of the Paralegalism Subcommittee's recommendations that legal Assistants be certified by area of specialty. The Association is hopeful that this intention does not preclude a requirement that legal assistants have a minimum level of substantive law training in many areas of the law. VCC may be capitalizing on this yet unresolved issue and its graduates may not be recognized by the Law Society, if and when certification is implemented.



## Firm Spotlight.....

### **DOUGLAS, SYMES & BRISSENDEN**

Douglas, Symes & Brissenden, one of Vancouver's mid-sized law firms, was founded in 1925. It occupies 3 floors at One Bentall Centre, 505 Burrard Street.

The firm consists of 41 lawyers, five articulated students, two summer students, and approximately 79 staff members.

Douglas, Symes & Brissenden is a progressive, full service law firm with practice groups in the areas of Litigation, Corporate/Commercial, Banking, Wills and Estates, Trusts and Charities, Real Estate and Foreclosures.

Of the 79 staff members, the firm employs 11 legal assistants who work in a variety of areas: Creditor's Remedies, Franchising, Banking and Insolvency, Will and Estates, Real Estate, Corporate Commercial, Corporate Records, Foreclosures and Personal Injury.

The firm's legal assistants are encouraged to assume considerable responsibility and work independently under the supervision of their department heads. Douglas, Symes & Brissenden recognizes the value of using legal assistants and they are well utilized. Several legal

assistants have their own secretaries, while some share secretarial services with another legal assistant.

The firm's legal assistants are held in very high regard by both the administration and the lawyers. It is obvious from its practices that Douglas, Symes & Brissenden realizes that legal assistants are a valuable and cost-effective tool in running an efficient law firm in today's competitive market.



### ***IN TOUCH*** by Sarah Hanna

They asked me to write about what a Legal Assistant working in the area of Corporate Commercial Law does. The answer "it depends" is hardly the stuff enlightening articles are made of so I will try to be a bit more specific. We assist lawyers who are helping clients and their companies to reorganize, refinance or amalgamate with other companies, to register the companies in other provinces, wind them up or restore them when they're wound up by mistake (otherwise known as being struck from the register of Companies).

Capital reorganizations are interesting because of the unique terminology involved: "flow through share transactions", "Rollovers", "Corporate Butterflies" etc. (Corporate Butterflies come as

single winged and double winged! - romantic eh?).

In the course of providing assistance, the Legal Assistant will find herself:

\*incorporating and organizing companies, transferring shares, preparing dividend documentation, exporting or importing companies into provincial or federal jurisdictions;

\*doing searches on a provincial and federal basis as well as reviewing, organizing and reporting on these searches;

\*working on provincial companies, federal corporations, limited partnerships, provincial societies or federal societies (which aren't societies at all but rather corporations without share capital);

\*preparing closing agendas and many of the documents contained therein such as agreements, supporting resolutions and other security documents;

\*organizing the closing documentation, assisting with the closings and later preparing the reporting for the transaction;

\*attending to registrations at various registries, including the new Personal Property Registry which has replaced the Central Registry and changed many old procedures.

....This is not an exhaustive list of actual duties - but you get the idea.

In the final analysis, as a general Corporate / Commercial Legal Assistant you find yourself working on all kinds of deals which are as varied as the lawyers with whom you work. So really, when trying to describe what you do as a Corporate / Commercial Legal Assistant - "it depends" is a pretty accurate answer - you might add however, "its rarely dull".



### ***T H E P L A I N L A N G U A G E I N S T I T U T E O F B . C . - delivering leadership in plain language***

The Access to Justice Report of the 1988 Justice Reform Commission advocated the use of plain language in government, law and business, saying "The justice system of this province must commit itself to speaking in plain language". It suggested that use of plain language increases the citizen's ability to understand the rights and obligations in a democratic society and *increases the citizen's access to justice*. A popular quote from the Report says "The laws that govern people's lives should be intelligible to them.

Although the Report recommended the establishment of a senior level government policy committee to lead the introduction of plain language, the then Attorney-General Bud Smith, chose to establish a nominally independent society to undertake this work with a broadened mandate which included representations from business sectors and lawyers as well as government. Thus was born the Plain Language Institute Society of British Columbia ("PLI").

The happy parents are the Attorney-General's Ministry and the Law Foundation who have jointly given the Institute \$1.5 million dollars over three years. Time started running in November, 1990 when the newly hired Executive Director, Phil Knight arrived from Manitoba where he had headed an organization providing public legal education.

The PLI board now has a working definition of its mandate: "To promote public access to justice and understanding of the law, the Institute will provide leadership in the use of plain language in government, business and the legal community so that people can easily understand the communications, documents and processes that are important to them". The Institute defines plain language as "language which succeeds in communicating the intended message to the intended audience" and it describes the use of plain language as an orientation to the process of communication rather

than an adherence to certain criteria of grammar and vocabulary and so on.

With six lawyers and a legal assistant on the 13 member Board of Directors, the PLI Board has naturally selected a focus on the legal profession: in private practice, in continuing education and in the training years at the law schools. The Institute's draft working plan call for "promotion of demand of Plain Language, and support, encouragement and resources for 'suppliers' of plain language". The ambitious core program consists of: education, networking and resource development, research, writing and promotional activities.

For more information about the Plain Language Institute, write 1500 - 555 West Hastings Street, Vancouver V6B 4N6, or call 687-8895.



## **NETWORK NEWS**

Hello and welcome again to the NETWORK NEWS. In the last newsletter I reviewed our process as to how The Legal Assistant Network ("TLAN") general evaluates, screens and refers candidates for positions. I emphasized specifically that we act in strict confidence and only release information with the consent of the candidate. I also noted that there is no fee or cost to the candidate for our service. All fees are paid by the employer.

In this issue I am going to change direction somewhat, partly due to recent recruitment campaigns that we have been involved in. In particular, most or all of you may recall receiving a position notice referring to an opportunity for a legal assistant with a major downtown law firm. In conducting the recruitment for this and other positions we find we are running into three significant and unanticipated difficulties. Firstly, due perhaps, to the specialized nature of the positions, the relatively small number of qualified legal assistants, the inherent stability of legal assistants, the novelty of our service and the time frame involved, the general response to opportunities we made available has been much lower than expected. Secondly, unlike lawyer recruitment, where there is an abundance of information on individual lawyers, including specialty, years of experience

etc., there is no similar body of information concerning legal assistants. Consequently we have no source of information ourselves as to who might be appropriate to contact about a given opportunity. Finally, the majority of member legal assistants have not registered with us. Again this leaves TLAN without any source information for potential recruits or even contacts.

The reason I am bringing this situation to your attention is because I am of the opinion that if greater numbers do not register and I am unable to obtain this information, the service will, quite simply, fail. In short, potential clients will not see any value in the service unless:

- (a) I have a number of qualified people on file;
- (b) I have sufficient contact information to enable me to find the right people (ie: a resource).

While I am quite pleased with the people who have registered so far, further people are needed.

I have now discussed this situation with a committee of the executive. We are all agreed that perhaps the best way to encourage everyone is to make the process as easy and convenient as possible and to, essentially, take it to the candidates. Accordingly, with this newsletter you will find a two page confidential registration form. Please take the

time and effort to fill in this form and return it to WALA as soon as possible. By doing so you will not only be providing WALA with needed statistical data, by you will also be registering with TLAN and providing us with the resource to make this service function effectively.

Stephen Nash



## ***DID YOU KNOW?***

It's always interesting to see what other members of your profession are doing and what challenges and rewards they are experiencing.... all in the theme of finding out whether the grass is really greener across the street, province, country or even across the border.

So.... did you know there is a Canadian Association of Legal Assistants ("CALA")? The goals of this Association are to provide support and a network of communication for the exchange of information to Legal Assistants. Fees for a voting member are \$70. They publish a quarterly, bilingual newsletter and last year co-sponsored a Canadian/American Joint Seminar in Buffalo, New York.

There is also a National Association of Legal Assistants ("NALA"), an American organization which promotes the Legal Assistant profession in the U.S. and also offers a voluntary certification program. They issue a bi-monthly publication entitled "Facts and Findings". They also organize semi-annual conventions which are held in different parts of the country. Fees for membership range from \$50 - 110 USD depending on whether the membership is voting or non-voting.

(Ed. Note: WALA has declined affiliation with these organizations on the basis of their non-requirement of an educational component in their membership qualifications).

A U.S publication called "Legal Assistant Today" is published bi-monthly and costs \$41.95 for an annual subscription. The magazine contains interesting and informative articles about legal assistants in the United States as well as articles about legal issues which often transcend border differences.

For more information on membership in either of these associations or regarding subscriptions to Legal Assistant Today, contact Sarah Hanna at 631-4742.



**WELCOME!!!**



Since the last Newsletter, the Association has acquired 14 new members. The Association now has 137 members of whom 57 are student members. We take this opportunity to introduce our new members who have joined the Association since our November 1990 Newsletter:

- Rochell Bryce (s)
- Cindy Chambers (s)
- Wendy Chan (la)
- Linda Bunch (s)
- Belinda DeRegt (la)
- Katarina Hodak (s)
- Lynn Hoskins (s)
- Lynda Hunsbedt (s)
- Patricia Hunt (la)
- Judy Leigh (la)
- Darlene LeRoux (s)
- Nancy Vianello (s)
- Rosalee Windall (s)
- Debbie J. Wong (la)



**Introducing the WALA directors...continued!**



**Sarah Hanna**

A number of you have been wondering what happened to the rest of my history since it was reported last time that I graduated from Capilano College in the Spring of.... Since I have stepped in for Debra Rowbotham to chair the Newsletter Committee, I have the dubious pleasure of writing my own profile. I graduated from Cap in the Spring of 1989, did my practicum and have been working ever since at Russell & DuMoulin in the area of Corporate Commercial Law. When not working or taking night school courses (anything from re-upolstery to more law courses) I like to get out sailing, skiing, kayaking, wine touring, you name it.

This article could become a permanent feature given the number of career changes the directors have undertaken in the last few months.

Heather Pellow has transferred at I.C.B.C from litigation to working as a claims adjuster, and has stepped down as a director of WALA as well. We wish Heather the best of luck and success in her new endeavour.



**Sylvia Kern**

Sylvia Kern, formerly a director of WALA, was re-appointed at the last directors' meeting.

Sylvia graduated from Capilano College in 1985, and is currently working in the area of litigation at Russell & DuMoulin. When she is not working, Sylvia finds time to work out, play the piano, take cooking classes, sew and enjoy her favorite past-time - skiing. As you can tell, she leads a very quiet life!



## CAPILANO COLLEGE UPDATE...

In 1974, Capilano College and the Joint Legal Support Services Committee initiated an evening Legal Assistant Program. By 1976, Capilano College had incorporated a full time, two year long, day program.

Today, both the evening and day programs are running full force. While the day-time program is offered only at the North Vancouver campus, the evening program is held both downtown and in New Westminister.

Valerie Cochrane and Donna Phillips are the Program Co-ordinators. Donna also teaches Litigation I, II and III. John Fairlie teaches Contracts, Torts, and Real Property. David Thompson teaches Legal Research and also does research on a contract basis. Doug Cochrane is responsible for Evidence, Family and Criminal Law. Doug has a Masters of Education. The Legal Assistant Co-ordinators, understandably, take great pride in their faculty.

For those of you who are curious as to the whereabouts of Marion Craig and Leslie Baker, Marion has relocated to Calgary with her husband and four children and Leslie is now working with the Law Society.

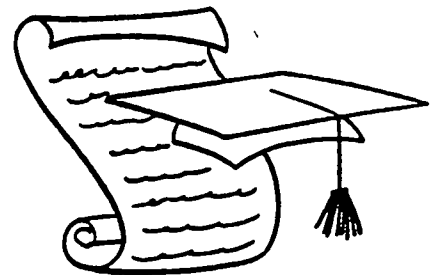
It has now become much easier for legal assistants to obtain practicums. Last year, 97% of the students were successful in obtaining practicums. Donna Phillips has developed a Practicum Course, which, she feels, the program lacked for some time. This course focuses on interviewing skills, techniques and job search strategies. The course includes a one to one consultation with each student. This gives Donna an opportunity to get to know each student on a personal level to help determine his or her needs in a legal assistant position.

Many lawyers and personnel managers are becoming more active in seeking legal assistants. Those law firms who are familiar with the Program are in touch with the program advisors at Capilano College by the beginning of the second year. As well, many lawyers and personnel managers conduct interviews at the College.

Although it is the responsibility of each instructor to update his or her course materials, the Program Co-ordinators at Capilano College ensure that the Legal Assistant Program covers a good range of both substantive and procedural law. One objective of the program is to streamline the courses to cover substantive law areas where job opportunities are more favourable for legal assistants. Maintaining a good relationship with the publishing houses also ensures that the materials are up to date.

Donna Phillips expressed some disapproval regarding the legal assistant program offered at Vancouver Community College, who, she feels, use the term "Legal Assistant" loosely. The program they offer is based upon the concept of "procedural law only". Donna feels there is a good indication that the Attorney General will not grant billing numbers to those students once they are in the work force. All in all, she commented that the course was a "good refresher" for legal secretaries.

Oh and by the way, the rumour that Donna Phillips has tied the knot is true. Her husband's last name is Atchison, but for professional reasons, Donna has decided to remain with "Phillips".



## CONTEST!!!

ALTHOUGH YOU'VE BEEN TOO POLITE TO SAY ANYTHING, IT HASN'T ESCAPED OUR ATTENTION THAT THE NAME OF THIS PUBLICATION IS ...POSSIBLY...A BIT DULL! OKAY OKAY...ITS SHORT AND TO THE POINT BUT ASIDE FROM THAT... HO HUM!

WELL THIS IS YOUR CHANCE! GIVE THE NEWSLETTER A NEW NAME! MAKE IT CATCHY, CLEVER, WITTY, OR WHATEVER.

ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS WRITE YOUR SUGGESTION IN THE SPACE ON THE BOTTOM OF YOUR COMPLETED TLAN QUESTIONNAIRE (OKAY - THERE'S A SMALL CATCH - WE REALLY WANT YOU TO FILL OUT THE QUESTIONNAIRES SO WE ARE OFFERING A BRIBE - BUT A NICE ONE!) AND SEND IT IN TO WALA.

THIS IS A CONTEST! - THERE'S A PRIZE! YES, THE WINNING ENTRY WILL RECEIVE A FABULOUS BASKET FULL OF DELICIOUS GOURMET GOODIES WORTHY OF A ROMANTIC PICNIC OR A PRIVATE PIG-OUT.

THE WINNER IS TO BE ANNOUNCED IN THE NEXT NEWSLETTER SO GET YOUR ENTRIES (AND QUESTIONNAIRES) IN NOW!!!



### NOTICE

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EDITORIAL TEAM: Sarah Hanna (ed.), Debbie Rowbotham, Sherry Kuyek, Terry Wilson, Wendy Mulligan, Cheryl Stevens,

