



Western
Association of
Legal
Assistants

FALL 1989

NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT

I take this opportunity to introduce myself as President of the Association for 89/90 year. I have been a member of WALA since July of 1986 and a Director since April of 1988.

My motivation for becoming a member remains today: after 2 years in college I held a Diploma which I felt imperative for my chosen career, yet the legal profession was reluctant in accepting my professed abilities. Fortunately, I did not take it personally as many of my classmates apparently did. Too many have returned to their former occupations or have been lulled into complacency by lawyers grateful to have a competent secretary. I have no statistics but expect that far too many educated Legal Assistants have compromised their initial goals.

I became a member in the hopes that the Association would work towards informing the legal community of the role that educated legal assistants can effectively fulfill. To accomplish this I felt the primary goal of the Association was to pursue certification. I now realize that this is a long term goal that must be built up to in a patient, directed fashion.

Probably more than any other profession, law is the slowest at accepting new ways of doing business. The acceptance of Legal Assistants is growing but it is my concern that the lawyers and administrators hiring Legal Assistants have little understanding of what a Legal Assistant is or can do. I am also concerned about the arbitrary use of the Legal Assistant title by employers and employees. These issues, I feel, are our immediate target.

To be honest, I fully expect that when certification is available it will be administered by the Law Society or similar organization. However, I do not see this as contrary to the intent of the Association. Realizing this eventuality enables us to focus our attention to the real concern: Promotion of an educational standard comparable to that expected by WALA as a pre-requisite to certification.

The goal of WALA is only to the benefit of lawyers -- competent, reliable legal assistance.

I therefore propose that all members make every attempt to recruit potential members. That is where our strength will lie.

The Directors and myself welcome your comments (and time) on how you would like to see the Association move towards greater recognition of legal Assistants in British Columbia.

- TERRY WILSON



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

On June 14, 1989, the Association held its A.G.M. The following members were elected Directors:

TERRY WILSON	-	PRESIDENT
SYLVIA KERN	-	VICE-PRESIDENT
ANN HEWLETT	-	SECRETARY
VIVIANNE DUFRANE	-	TREASURER
ANNE ERLEBACH		
MOIRA HOFSTEDT		

CANADIAN BAR ASSOCIATION ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

At the recent Annual General Meeting of the Canadian Bar Association held in Vancouver, Past-President, Pat Peacock tabled the 18 page report of the Special Committee on the Status of Paralegals to the CBA Council. The Special Committee was formed in August 1988 to present a report at the 1989 AGM which would express the CBA's position on independent paralegals operating without the supervision of lawyers and provide support materials for CBA branches for assistance in dealing with paralegals attempting to set up practices in various provinces.

Mr. Peacock's speech was referred to in a BCTV news broadcast; some WALA members may have been misled as to the content of Peacock's speech.

A transcript of the speech is not available until later this month, however, in a telephone conversation with Mr. Peacock we asked if he could repeat to us the highlights of his speech.

Mr. Peacock, on tabling the report, spoke to the CBA Council on the need to attempt to restrict or prohibit the practise of unsupervised paralegals providing services to the public. These services cannot equal the services provided by lawyers with their extensive legal training.

Mr. Peacock noted there is a need to properly train paralegals, to govern their education requirements and to ensure they are supervised by lawyers.

Mr. Peacock repeated the CBA's position of encouraging the use of paralegals. The CBA recognizes that the use of paralegals can help to reduce legal costs and thereby make legal services more accessible to the public.

We are in the process of obtaining a copy of the full report of the Special Committee along with the background materials supporting the Special Committee's recommendations.



COMMITTEES

Any and all of the committees would love to have your input and assistance.

The committees have been working on the following since the AGM:

MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE

It is a full time and ongoing task for this committee to review applications for membership, remind existing members of their dues and maintain a current list of members, which includes keeping track of members as they move. Quite a formidable task!

Our number currently stands at 46 Legal Assistant members, 11 Student members and 3 Honorary members. A list of members is attached to this newsletter. If there is somebody not on that list that you feel might want to be, give that person an application form, or call Moira Hofstedt to have an application form sent out.

The membership committee is also gearing up for a membership drive directed at Capilano College and details of that should be worked out shortly.

In addition, this committee is also putting together a Directory of Members. This Directory will contain each member and that member's area(s) of familiarity or speciality, and to compile this directory, we need each member to complete the attached Questionnaire and return it to the Association's address at P.O. Box 4127, Main Station, 349 West Georgia Street, Vancouver, B.C.

For any information on this committee, please contact the Chairperson, Moira Hofstedt at 687-3216. The members of this committee presently are Lori Engas, Cindy Brandes and Terry Wilson.

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

This Committee's function is to keep abreast of developments in courses for Legal Assistants throughout North America. It regularly receives materials from Colleges in Canada and the United States.

The Committee has recently written to the Institute of Law Clerks in Ontario requesting information on its Programme, offered courses and exams it sets.

Also, a request has been made by the Committee to the National Magazine published by the CBA about inviting discussion from its members on the task force on Legal Assistants. The Committee hopes to learn what opinions some CBA members may have on Legal Assistants.

Also, if you're interested the Legal Assistant Programme at Capilano College currently has 140 students enrolled in the day courses and 70 students enrolled in the night courses.

A major function of this Committee is to assist the Membership Committee when they receive an application from a prospective member that completed a course outside of British Columbia and also to be aware of what courses institutions throughout North America teach their Legal Assistant students and how we in B.C. measure up. This is useful information to any Legal Assistant who may be mobile in the future and also for us to better assess others coming into the Province.

If you have any enquiries or are interested in this Committee, please contact the Chairperson, Sylvia Kern at 682-5466. The other members of this committee are Fran Brett and Gemma McDonald.

NEWSLETTER COMMITTEE

This committee would love to hear from all budding journalists. A flair for writing is not necessary, anyone with some ideas or requests for articles need only contact us.

It is a serious intention of this year's committee to publish quarterly newsletters (Spring - April, Summer - July, Fall - October and Winter - January).

This newsletter is our contact with each other and our mouthpiece. You do not have to be a regular member of this committee to submit something for publication.



If you have any ideas or would like to assist, please contact the Chairperson, Ann Hewlett at 688-1351. The other members of this committee are Terry Wilson, Michele Dore and Madenka Maretic.



P R O G R A M C O M M I T T E E

The Program Committee gets a bigger space in this newsletter as it wants to get your attention to announce the next meeting. This committee is organizing a wine and cheese reception, at no charge, on Wednesday, November 15, 1989, at the Offices of Russell & DuMoulin, 1500 - 885 West Georgia Street, Vancouver, at 5:30 p.m.

This has been organized for members to get to know each other and to share their ideas on the future of the Association.

You are invited to bring along one other Legal Assistant/ Student who could qualify for membership with the Association as your guest.

In addition, there will be in attendance a Mr. Nash who would like to speak to us about a proposal he has for promoting Legal Assistants and the Association through a job placement service to lawyers in British Columbia. He is hoping to hear your comments

Please RSVP to Thora Arnason at 685-6000.

QUESTIONNAIRE

As mentioned in the Members Committee Report, interest has been expressed in compiling a directory of practicing members. Such a directory would assist in discovering who we are and could prove to be a great resource for members.

Please take a moment to complete the questionnaire below and return it to the Association at your earliest convenience.