

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

New Feature:
Click on page number to
be brought right there!!

MONTGOMERY COUNTY
PARALEGAL ASSOCIATION

PAGE 2
NEW MEMBERS

PAGE 3
Where to Start: Building Your
Paralegal Foundation

PAGE 5
UPCOMING CLE: How to Survive
Business Taxes

CLE Recap: The Burned Out Paralegal

PAGE 6
UPCOMING Legal Expo

PAGE 8
Credential Reminders

Montgomery County Mock Trial
Semi-Finals and Final

PAGE 9
Editor's Corner

PAGE 10
Who We Are

PAGE 12
Where to Find Us

EDITOR: VICTORIA MOLLOY
(VMOLLOY@EASTBURNGRAY.COM)

FELLOW MEMBERS,

THERE CONTINUES TO BE ONE OPEN AND VACANT DIRECTOR POSITION FOR MONTGOMERY COUNTY PARALEGAL ASSOCIATION. HAVING MEMBERS WITH THE RIGHT SKILL SET HELPS AN ORGANIZATION ACHIEVE ITS STRATEGIC GOALS.

ARE YOU A PARALEGAL WHO WOULD LIKE TO GIVE BACK TO YOUR PEERS? IF YOU ARE INTERESTED OR KNOW SOMEONE WHO WOULD BE AN ASSET TO THE MEMBERS IN SUCH A ROLE, PLEASE FEEL FREE TO REACH OUT TO ANY OF THE OFFICERS FOR MORE INFORMATION.



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Erisa Fonda, at Kane Pugh Knoell Troy & Kramer, LLP

Hope Wheaton, at Montgomery County Board of Assessment

La'Tasha Thompson, a student at Villanova University

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WHERE TO START: BUILDING YOUR PARALEGAL FOUNDATION

BY VICTORIA MOLLOY

It has been twenty-plus years since I walked down the aisle at graduation, holding my freshly earned degree in Paralegal Studies. The program I went through required a semester's worth of internship provided by a local law firm and overseen by their senior paralegal. During interviews, inexperience led me to refrain from asking questions regarding the opportunities they were willing to provide. I will be honest; my expectations did not meet the reality of the experience. Most of the hours they utilized me to update law books, assist with file management, and Court running (this was pre-online filing capability); teaching me was minimal.

When I entered the work field, I realized my years in school provided some book knowledge in different areas of law and a semester of legal writing and research. There was never a course on "What to Expect As A Paralegal" or direction for "This Is How To Be A Paralegal," nor was there any one avenue laid out for success. Looking back, seasoned me would impart upon fresh me a lesson about professional evolution. Therefore, I share with whoever may benefit:

volunteer, volunteer, **VOLUNTEER**

Life after college took me to a place where being a paralegal was reserved only for military members, putting my intended career on hold for an undetermined amount of time. A bit of "Why did I even bother?" crept into my mind. Kismet provided that I saw a volunteer notice in the Post Office for a "signing event" to assist those stationed overseas. If I looked at it purely as a data entry position, which is what it was, I would not have gained hands-on experience with types of Powers of Attorney, Wills, and the parts of simple sales contracts. Yes, it started as simple fill-in-the-blank using information gathered from a form questionnaire, but I took the opportunity full on. Once Legal Aid learned that I was willing to be trained (as a volunteer), they were more than happy to expand my responsibilities to interviewing; I gained first-hand "client interaction skills." News traveled, and another volunteer slot emerged to help the JAG office with criminal matters, such as DUIs, disorderly conduct, etc. I learned the military court process and the importance of keeping solid records for use in disciplinary proceedings.

ENTRY LEVEL POSITIONS

Once back stateside, my employment search again revealed how light my resume was. I recognized that many of the want ads in the newspaper for paralegals included the requirement of 3-5 years of experience. The question, "How will I get experience if no one hires me?" came to mind. In talking with the paralegals I knew from college, they shared that firms would often promote from within-I would have to get in on the ground level and pay my dues. In my first paying legal job, a firm hired me as a receptionist and the duties included light overflow legal secretary work. I took every opportunity to make myself available and learn. My knowledge of the inner workings of a firm expanded, whether it was how to load the Pitney Bowes machine with postage or assisting with redaction. As such, they were willing to give me more responsibility. When one of the associate's workload came to a point where having an assistant was necessary, they offered me a paralegal position.

IN SUMMARY, if seasoned me could sit down with fresh me, we would discuss opportunities outside an internship to gain experience. No direct gateway exists between earning your degree and being hired as a paralegal without in-the-field training and on-the-job education. There are valuable experiences in volunteering and entry-level positions; be willing to learn as much as someone will teach you, no matter the title. Working as a paralegal can also sometimes mean running the copier, overseeing billing, organizing a file, and scanning documents; it is not just drafting legal documents, discovery review, and assisting at trial-that kind of high-level legal work I have professionally grown into over the years. Experience has taught me the greatest lesson, be willing to continue learning. Putting in the work to gain experience makes you well-rounded, knowledgeable, and indispensable.



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DID YOU MISS...

BY VICTORIA MOLLOY

We would like to thank Brian S. Quinn, Esquire, the Education and Outreach Coordinator with Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers of PA, Inc., for presenting on February 8, 2023, a one-hour substantive CLE. The topic discussed was “The Burned Out Paralegal – Recognition and Prevention Strategies in the Post-COVID World.”

As Mr. Quinn discussed, the post-pandemic workplace, either in-person or virtual, has brought with it a whole new level of stress. Burnout, which affects us both physically and mentally, continues to grow among those in the legal profession. The question, “What Is Burnout?” was asked. He answered with, “fatigue, cynicism, inefficacy,” along with a list of other symptoms we should be mindful of, both in others and ourselves.

When it comes to stress in the legal workplace, it is not the typical “fight” or “flight” responses seen; more and more prevalent are maladaptive perfectionism and Imposter Syndrome. Mr. Quinn explained that “...people in this field face a unique conundrum: for many, the drive and dedication that make them successful as a paralegal is also what’s causing stress and burning them out!”

While Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers of Pennsylvania primarily supports lawyers, judges, and law students, Mr. Quinn expressed that LCL never turns anyone away. Should you need help due to burnout and stress, you can call the CONFIDENTIAL helpline at 1-888-999-1941, 24/7/365, and they will guide you to additional resources or organizations.



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Each year, the Young Lawyers Section of the Montgomery Bar Association organizes the district and regional high school mock trial competition in Montgomery County, one of the largest in the nation. Teams from approximately 29 area high school teams present their cases in the courtrooms of the Montgomery County Court House, making arguments before actual Common Pleas Court Judges, Magisterial District Judges and Discovery Masters of Montgomery County. Lawyers, law office staff, and community leaders serve as jurors and provide feedback throughout the competition. The winning team advances to the statewide competition in Harrisburg.

There is a need for Semi-Final and Final Volunteers for March 2nd and March 7th.

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At the Worst Possible Moment...

Do you have an idea or article that could be used or published in an upcoming newsletter?
Please contact me at vmolloy@eastburngray.com

WHO WE ARE

OFFICERS



Jennifer L. Echikson, Pa.C.P. — President

Materese Family Law, P.C.

MCPApres@gmail.com

Jenn is a Family Law Paralegal at Materese Family Law, P.C. She graduated from Peirce College in 2009 with a Bachelor of Science in Paralegal Studies and became a certified paralegal through the Keystone Alliance of Paralegal Association in 2015. Jenn is co-chair of the MCPA Planning Committee, is MCPA's secondary delegate to the National Federation of Paralegal Association, and serves as Vice President and membership chair of the Family Law Paralegals of Pennsylvania.



Dana Jorna, Pa.C.P. — Vice President

Kane Pugh Knoell Troy & Kramer, LLP

MCPAvp@gmail.com

Dana is a Paralegal at the law firm Kane Pugh Knoell Troy & Kramer, LLP. She has been a member of the Montgomery County Paralegal Association since 2013, and a board member since 2018. More recently, she has become the National Federation of Paralegal Association secondary delegate, and chair of the Community Outreach & Pro Bono committee. Former President 2020-2021.



Trista Davis — Treasurer

Grim, Beihn & Thatcher, P.C.

MCPAbursar@gmail.com

Trista is an Trust and Estate Paralegal at the law firm of Grim, Biehn & Thatcher, P.C. She attended Central Pennsylvania College completing the Paralegal Program and graduated in 2009. In 2014, she received her Pa.C.P. certification through the Keystone Alliance of Paralegal Association. Trista lives in Douglassville with her husband and two children.



Jennifer Kozlowski — Secretary

MCPAsteno@gmail.com

Jen earned her Associates Degree in 2011 from LCCC's Paralegal Studies Program. She has experience with estates and real estate law and also previously worked in litigation, municipal law, and juvenile dependency. Jen joined the MCPA in 2020 and has been on the Board since 2022. She has recently taken over the roll of Co-chair of the Planning Committee. Outside of work Jen is the mother of 2 boys, wife and best friend to Andy, and dog-mom to Ruby.

***Tracey Barnes, Pa.C.P.***

Tracey is a Paralegal at the law firm of Dischell Bartle & Dooley P.C. in its Lansdale office. She has been an active member since the organizations inception in 1999 and has been a Board Member, Secretary, Treasurer, President and Vice President. She is currently the Keystone Alliance of Paralegal Associations Credentialing Chair. In 2017, she was appointed as the CLE-Associations Co-Coordinator for the National Federation of Paralegal Associations (NFPA).

***Kharissa L. Donahue***

Kharissa is a Litigation Paralegal at the law firm Kane Pugh Knoell Troy & Kramer, LLP. She recently graduated from Bryan University with a degree in Paralegal Studies in 2021. Kharissa's experience is in motor vehicle accidents and personal injury law. She lives in Pottstown, with her two cats where she mainly reads and gardens.

***Kelly A. Bresadola***

Kelly is a paralegal at Liberty Mutual Insurance Company. She does insurance defense work. Kelly has been a member of the Montgomery County Paralegal Assoc. for 4 years and part of the planning committee for the last 3 years. She lives in Montgomeryville with her husband and 2 of her 3 children.

***Victoria Molloy, Pa.C.P.***

Vic is a paralegal at Eastburn & Gray, PC, in Doylestown, PA. She graduated from Manor College and has spent the last two decades primarily working in Bucks County; however, she has also supported attorneys overseas while living on a military base. Vic's experience has a broad range and is not limited to having supported attorneys who litigate and practice estate planning, employment discrimination, municipal, school, and special education law. She lives in Montgomeryville, with her husband, two sons, and sweet, bowtie-wearing dogs.



COMMITTEE CHAIRS

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COMMUNITY OUTREACH & PRO BONO	Dana Jorna, Pa.C.P. djorna@kanepugh.com
HOSPITALITY & EVENTS PLANNING	Jennifer Echikson, Pa.C.P. jechikson@mflpa.com Jennifer Kozlowski jenniferkozlowski81@gmail.com Noreen Messmer, Pa.C.P. nmessmer@fordbuckman.com
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MEMBERSHIP	Tracey L. Barnes, RP, Pa.C.P. tbarnes@dbdlaw.com
NEWSLETTER	Victoria Molloy, Pa.C.P. vmolloy@eastburngray.com

STUDENT AFFAIRS & MENTORING	Laura O'Halloran, Pa.C.P. lpohalloran520@gmail.com
NFPA DELEGATES	Primary: Dana Jorna, Pa.C.P. djorna@kanepugh.com Secondary: Jennifer Echikson, Pa.C.P. jechikson@mflpa.com
PUBLIC RELATIONS	Jennifer Echikson, Pa.C.P. jechikson@mflpa.com
SOCIAL MEDIA	Christopher Gregg, Pa.C.P. cgregg@kanepugh.com
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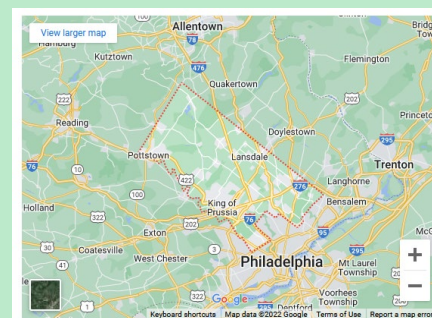
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