



Roanoke Valley Paralegal Association

P.O. Box 1505, Roanoke, Virginia 24007

<http://www.rvpa.org>

**September 2011
Edition**

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And now, a word from our President...

Happy Fall! I hope everyone had a great summer. Personally it was a very memorable one for me.

RVPA has some great community service opportunities coming up in October and November. In October we will be participating in "Clean Valley Day at Wasena Park." If you would like to participate, please contact Eva Gray or Beth Reed. In November, we will be volunteering our time to assist Feeding America, the Roanoke Co-Op, where we will sort, inspect and package donated grocery items. With the Holidays right around the corner, it's a very busy time at Feeding America. They appreciate any extra help they can get. Friends and family are welcome at both events. For additional information re: Feeding America, please contact Beth Reed.

Finally, our annual Elections are right around the corner. Nomination ballots will be going out in early October. Please return your ballots to Sandra Grisso. Elections will be held at our November meeting. The new slate of Officers and Board Members will be sworn-in at our December Social. I would like to encourage all our members to consider taking on a leadership role by becoming a Board Member or Officer. It's a chance to grow both personally and professionally and is very rewarding.

See you at the next meeting...

- Kara

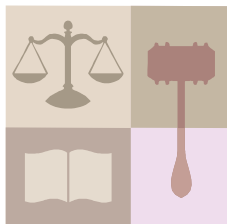
RVPA is now on Facebook! Become a fan and/or member to see all of the upcoming meeting and event information. Invite your paralegal/legal assistant friends and colleagues to become our friend.

Facebook is updated on a regular basis and provides RVPA members with all of the latest RVPA news and information.

<http://www.facebook.com/home.php#!/group.php?gid=327204826804>

COMMITTEE REPORTS

CLE Committee



Upcoming Speakers:

October – Rick Lucas, Lucas & Kite. Mr. Lucas will speak on Virginia Workers' Compensation Updates.

November – Ruth Hendrick, Coordinator for Career Services of VWCC. Ms. Hendrick will speak on promoting yourself through your resume.

Community Relations



If you belong to or support an organization or group that is in need of volunteer work, send an email to Beth Reed at reeddome@verizon.net.

Upcoming:

November 19, 2011 – Feeding America, Roanoke Co-Op. We will sort, inspect, and box donated grocery items at the Salem Warehouse. With Thanksgiving right around the corner, they can use the extra help. Contact Beth Reed to sign up.

Finance Committee



RVPA Member Betsy Biesenbach has authored a book, "Bits O' Betsy Bisenbach," that is available for purchase at Amazon.com. For every book purchased through RVPA, Betsy has generously offered to donate a portion of the proceeds to RVPA. To check it out, visit Amazon.com. To place an order, please contact Lisa Wirt at lwirt@glenncob.com.

Membership Committee



RVPA Welcomes New Members!

If you haven't joined or are interested in joining our organization, please contact our Secretary, Beth Reed, at reeddome@verizon.net or 540.580.4376, for more information.

Social Committee



Our Annual Holiday Social is scheduled for December 8, 2011, at Noon, in the Red Room at Blue 5 Restaurant. Plans are underway to make this year's Social the best ever. Stay tuned to your email for more information.

VAPA Report

reported by Lisa Woodson
VAPA Liaison

Next VAPA meeting is scheduled for:

November 4-5, 2011 - Fredericksburg, VA

Virginia Alliance of Paralegal Associations
VAPA Semi-Annual Seminar
October 10-13, 2012

For more information visit: <http://www.vaparalegalalliance.org/events>



NALA Report

reported by Colleen Doyle
NALA Liaison

NALA Headquarters

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Upcoming NALA Event: November 10-12, 2011



For 2011 CLE Opportunities via "NALA Campus Live!," visit our website at www.rvpa.org and click on the VAPA & NALA tab for a list of upcoming programs!



**Lambda Epsilon Chi (LEX)
The National Honor Society in Paralegal/Legal Assistant Studies.**

**Lambda Epsilon Chi (LEX)
c/o American Association for Paralegal Education
19 Mantua Road
Mt. Royal, NJ 08061
(856) 423-2829 Fax: (856) 423-3420
E-mail: info@aafpe.org**

**For a list of Paralegal Schools in the Commonwealth of Virginia,
visit www.rvpa.org under the Newsletter tab!**

How to Choose a Paralegal Program

Here are some important factors to consider in evaluating the quality of paralegal programs:

- ❖ Is the program ABA Approved?
- ❖ What is the reputation of the institution and the paralegal program?
- ❖ What services are offered to students?
- ❖ What facilities are available to students?
- ❖ What activities are available to students?
- ❖ What is the mission of the institution and what are the goals of the paralegal program?
- ❖ What is the content and nature of the curriculum?
- ❖ What are the graduation requirements?
- ❖ What are the backgrounds of the program director and faculty?
- ❖ What are the special considerations of enrolling in a distance education program?

The Paralegal Mentor

Certification – Is it the Right Path for You?

by Vicki Voisin, aka The Paralegal Mentor

Vicki Voisin, "The Paralegal Mentor," delivers simple strategies for paralegals and other professionals to create success and satisfaction by achieving goals and determining the direction they will take their careers. Vicki spotlights resources, organizational tips, ethics issues, and other areas of continuing education to help paralegals and others reach their full potential. She publishes a weekly ezine titled *Paralegal Strategies*. More information is available at www.paralegalmentor.com.

The issue of certification has long been debated. Here are a few questions I'm frequently asked:

- I graduated from a paralegal program, why should I sit for a certification exam?
- I have a paralegal certificate from a university, doesn't that make me 'certified'?
- I have a good job and several years of experience, how will being certified make a difference?
- What will those letters after my name really do for me?
- My boss doesn't care if I'm certified so why should I bother?

I wholeheartedly support the certification process for paralegals and believe that it is an important professional goal. Please consider the following points:

Having a *certificate* does not mean you're *certified*. A certificate is issued upon completion of an educational program, at which time you are *certificated*. Certification involves passing an examination established by a sponsoring organization that usually has specific requirements of education and experience for persons taking the exam. Upon completion of the examination, you are certified.

The American Bar Association defines certification as: 'a process by which a non-governmental agency or association grants recognition to an individual who has met

certain predetermined qualifications specified by that agency or association.'

I'm certainly not minimizing the importance of completing a paralegal program and obtaining your certificate or your degree. In fact, I view paralegal education as essential. I am merely pointing out that there is an additional step you can take that will increase your professional profile. That step is certification.

Credential = credibility. Certification is a voluntary process and is not a prerequisite for paralegal employment. However, certification gives you credibility. It demonstrates that you have the knowledge base and the skill required to pass the examination. It may also make you more marketable and may increase your income potential.

Certification takes you off the level playing field. Graduation from a paralegal program (and, thus, being certificated) is the primary avenue by which people enter the paralegal profession. If everyone has a certificate, how is a potential employer to judge the best candidate for the job? Think about the following:

Two paralegals standing side by side with the same certificate from the same school and the same amount of experience. How can one be distinguished from the other? The answer is certification. The certified paralegal demonstrates that he or she is a multi-skilled professional with diverse knowledge and effective communication skills.

Certification provides paralegals an avenue for self-regulation. The issue of licensure for paralegals is old news...it's been discussed ad nauseum for more than a quarter century. Paralegals work under the supervision of a licensed attorney and do not provide their services directly to the public. For this reason, licensure of paralegals is not required.

Further, licensure says a person is 'qualified' to do work. It does not demonstrate advanced knowledge and skills. An example is a hair dresser (and I have the highest regard for my hair dresser, believe me!). Hair dressers are allowed to enter the profession when they are licensed by a state agency. The license does not say they have fantastic skills, it only says that they can perform the services. The certification credential is awarded to people who prove their advanced knowledge and skills by meeting the standards of the credentialing organization.

Certification will do much for you personally. Ask anyone who has a credential and they will tell you that the achievement made them walk a little taller, made them feel stronger professionally, gave them incredible personal satisfaction and increased their level of professional confidence. They set a goal and they achieved it. They took a risk and they survived it. They have the credibility that the credential provides. They literally stand out above the crowd. Their accomplishment gave them great pride. You, too, can have all that with professional certification.

One additional benefit you will reap from the certification exam: the learning that takes place in the preparation for the examination. Even the most experienced paralegal will learn something new and benefit from the intense review.

You will usually be required to participate in continuing education programs to maintain your certification. This requirement will help you keep up to date with changes in the

profession and in the legal arena. Also, the credentialing organization will usually set high ethical standards for those using the credential. Unethical behavior will result in the loss of the credential.

Certification may give you a 'leg up' when you're searching for a job. In today's economy, you need all the ammunition you can muster to prove that you are the person for the job. Having the certification credential behind you exhibits not only the advanced knowledge I mentioned earlier, it also shows discipline, ambition, motivation and willingness to accept a challenge.

Which certification examination/credential is right for you?

That's a personal decision. Many paralegal associations provide certification examinations (ie NALA, NFPA, NALS, and AAPI). There are also voluntary certification programs offered by some states...examples are North Carolina and Florida, but there are others. All have different structure and eligibility requirements, as well as different continuing education and re-certification requirements.

What is important is that the credentialing organization you choose is a bona fide entity, that the exam is administered under rules and regulations in accordance with governmental acts and in accordance with such issues as anti-trust and fairness.

It is essential that the organization agrees to keep applications and records confidential. It is crucial that the organization prepares an examination under the guidance of professional testing consultants, that the exam be continually reviewed for accuracy, and that it be updated on a regular basis.

Usually the certification designation is a certification mark duly registered with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

Claims of certified status must be verifiable...in other words, if a paralegal claims to be certified, he or she must have

the credential to prove it.

Can you ethically use the credential after your name? Yes! Whether it is CLA, CP, PP, RP, AACP, ACP, PLS, AVA, ALS, NCCP etc. you can use it. The U.S. Supreme Court has addressed the issue concerning the utilization of credentials awarded by private organizations. In *Peal v Attorney Registration and Disciplinary Committee of Illinois*, 110 S.Ct. 2281 (1990), the Court suggested that a claim of certification is truthful and not misleading if:

- The claim itself is true
- The bases on which certification was awarded are factual and verifiable
- The certification in question is available to all professionals in the field who meet relevant, objective and consistently applied standards
- The certification claim does not suggest any greater degree of professional qualification than reasonably may be inferred from an evaluation of the certification program's requirements.
- There is a qualified organization behind the certification process

Of course, the credential cannot be used to mislead the public and represent something you are not.

How do you prepare for a certification examination? The thought of all that study may sound overwhelming. The idea of taking such a critical examination may be frightening. The key to success is in the

preparation and planning. The best thing to do is to break the process into steps:

- Decide which examination you will take.
- Decide when you will take the examination
- Working backward from the examination date, block a period of time for study and determine a study schedule (I recommend three months but that is an individual decision)
- Plan how you will study and what reference materials you will need (these may be available from the credentialing organization)
- Join a study group and enlist 'study buddies' to hold you accountable
- Take advantage of preparation and educational opportunities offered by the credentialing organization, as well as your professional association. For instance, NALA offers a three-day intense CLA review course, as well as CLA preparation courses at its convention.

Your challenge: If you already have a professional credential, congratulations! If you don't, please put that at the top of your list. Follow the steps above and begin planning for the examination. You will never regret the time and effort it takes. You will always feel immense professional pride when you put those initials after your name!