

PRESIDENT'S Message

by Theresa (Terry) Irvin, CLA



Did you have a chance to visit your hometown this past summer for a reunion or celebration? Or did you make an annual trek to your favorite beach with family and friends?

Or perhaps, you

were able to enjoy a mountain retreat that has become tradition? If you had a few moments, you might have reflected on the subtle changes that have occurred with the passage of time. Maybe it was the closing of your favorite ice cream shop when Mr. and Mrs. Smith retired several years ago, and the opening of a new breakfast café by the family who moved to town last year. Or it could have been the renovation of a public facility, such as the addition of a fountain to the town park. It may have been a memorial fountain that since you can remember, has been on your charitable contribution list. Each year the town holds an annual fund-raising bake sale and you would not miss it for the world. Since the fountain has been built, they hold a town festival that includes the annual bake sale, arts, and crafts.

I had the chance to visit the rural area in which I grew up, western North Carolina. Driving between the various small towns, I noticed the addition of large, yellow signs for semi-tractor trailers warning of steep hill grades. Some highways even had mandatory turnouts for truck drivers to stop and review a map of the road up ahead. I had learned to drive on these roads and remembered how the vehicle quickly picked up speed and was all too familiar with the smell of hot brakes. The signs were subtle changes that were added over the course of many years.

Our profession has been like that - subtle change over many years. While people in other professions may argue the definition of "many years," we have developed to a point to see the subtle changes that when

reflected upon, appear dramatic. The paralegal working in 2002 is handling a greater assortment of substantive tasks than the paralegal that worked in 1978, 1988, or even 1998. This may be due to experience as the work force grows older; however, entry level paralegals are also being given more challenging work as attorneys learn how to effectively utilize paralegals.

Our choice for work environments has exceeded to span the spectrum. While the sole practitioner or the traditional law firm is still the main source for jobs; governments, municipalities, public and private corporations are realizing the skill set of paralegals, and are increasingly becoming the environment of choice. We are learning how to effectively teach attorneys to utilize us.

Opportunities for advancement abound as experience and skill sets mature, and the way in which the practice of law evolves. Did firms have case managers in 1977? Were corporations preparing to hire trademark administrators in the late eighties? In 1997, did the personal injury attorney dream of employing a legal nurse consultant to assist with a case? These are just a few examples of the choices we have as our profession moves forward.

These changes were gradual, but have occurred because we have taken a proactive view and have advanced ourselves through education, assertiveness, and professionalism. North Carolina paralegals may currently feel as though their lives are about to change abruptly. If you are a notary, you will need to be aware of draft legislation requiring a journal along with the signatory's thumb print. How many documents do you notarize each week? Will this impact you or others in your office? Please read the article later in this issue for more information on this unfolding issue.

Real estate paralegals should be aware of recent proposals to repeal the North Carolina State Bar's ethics opinions on the re-

quirement of attorneys to conduct real estate closings. North Carolina Lawyer's Weekly has published articles on this issue which may be obtained from its web site. You may also find information relating to this matter on the web site of the Federal Trade Commission. NCPA is following this issue and will keep you advised through future articles and postings on the Discussion Board on our web site. At the time of writing this message, new developments were transpiring almost daily. The proposed opinions have the ability to possibly change the way a real estate closing is conducted in our State. Is the attorney you work for aware of this issue? Be proactive and discuss this with him or her.

The other issue on your mind should be the proposal by the Alliance for Paralegal Professional Standards ("APPS") due to come out later this year. Many of you had the opportunity to attend the panel discussion of APPS at the Annual Seminar in March, and all of you have been kept apprised of APPS developments through articles in this publication. NCPA has been pursuing the issue of regulation for over six years and the proposal by APPS is coming to fruition. Are you prepared to make an educated decision on this issue?

The road improvements in western North Carolina have reduced the number of run away truck incidents and accidents. It took several years of designing and construction to build the memorial fountain. While it may appear the events of today affecting us as paralegals are happening overnight, we only need to pause, reflect, and remember the gradual materialization, the growth, and the transformation along the way that are shaping our future.

"We live in a moment of history where change is so speeded up that we begin to see the present only when it is already disappearing."

—R. D. Laing, The Politics of Experience

