

EMPLOYER SUPPORT FOR PACE

By: Reneé Rothweiler Cipriani and Deborah Baer McKinney

Will your employer provide financial support for your interest in taking PACE? You may want to use the following language in writing a proposal to your employer:

In 1994, the National Federation of Paralegal Associations (NFPA) voted overwhelmingly to develop an exam to test the proficiency level of experienced practicing paralegals. This voluntary exam, which became available in July, 1996, is called the Paralegal Advanced Competency Exam (PACE). The strong, positive vote to develop PACE was a conscientious effort by the membership of NFPA to address the issues challenging the profession and is a direct response to other organizations trying to set the direction of the profession. PACE provides experienced paralegals with an option to validate experience and job skills, establish credentials and confirm their value to the legal industry. PACE was developed by an independent testing firm, Professional Examination Service (PES), and is administered by Sylvan Learning Centers. Sylvan will also monitor exam results for fairness. These two steps will ensure the exam consistently passes competent professionals.

Tier I includes general and ethical questions; state specific sections may also be developed in the future for this tier. Tier II, which has not yet been developed, will include specialty sections.

Before a paralegal can sit for either exam, the individual must meet established criteria.

Requirements for Tier I are:

- ◆ Bachelor degree and completion of a paralegal program at an accredited school - the paralegal program may be part of the four year degree; and
- ◆ A minimum of two years work experience as a paralegal.

Requirements for Tier II are:

- ◆ Successful completion of Tier I; and
- ◆ A minimum of four years experience as a paralegal.

Recognizing that many practicing paralegals already have extensive experience, the educational requirement for Tier I will be waived for those paralegals with a minimum of four years experience if they apply to take the exam before December 31, 2000.

To prepare for the exam, paralegals can use the PACE Study Manual, seminars and study information provided through the Internet. When notified by PES that you have passed PACE, you receive a Certificate which authorizes you to use the credential "PACE Registered Paralegal" or "RP".

Paralegals have become integrated into the legal team and the nature of the work delegated to paralegals has become more substantive. Attorneys have begun to include time for paralegal services in fee petitions permitted by state or federal statute. In the early 1980's, courts recognized that paralegals were separate and distinct from support staff and encouraged attorneys to provide legal services in the most efficient manner possible.

Courts awarding fees for paralegal services consistently point out that if the work had not been performed by paralegals, it would have been necessary to charge fees based upon attorneys' rates. Therefore, the allowance of fees for paralegal services is equitable.

Along this same line, the professional designation of PACE Registered Paralegal provides clients with a standard by which to evaluate a paralegal's competency. Some classes of clients, such as insurance companies, request that "certified" paralegals be assigned to its cases. The professional designation also gives clients from the general public a standard by which to evaluate a paralegal's competency and distinguishes the paralegals' role from that of the support staff.

We are asking for your support in our endeavor to advance our profession as a whole and ourselves as individuals. We would like (name of employer) to establish a policy of reimbursement for the cost of the PACE exam fee of \$225.00. The cost of the Study Manual, which is necessary to prepare for the exam, is \$55.00.

We firmly believe this professional credential will substantiate a paralegal's value to the legal industry and will strengthen the clients' confidence in paralegals' professional abilities.

Reneé Rothweiler Cipriani and Deborah Baer McKinney are Estate, Tax and Trust Paralegals with the law firm of Santen & Hughes. They are participating in the first CPA PACE Study Group and plan to take PACE in the spring.

SECRETARY'S REPORT NOVEMBER BOARD MEETING

The Board of Trustees met on Wednesday, November 5, 1997 and the highlights of the meeting are as follows:

Paralegal Referral Committee

Mark Vogeles was appointed as Paralegal Referral Chair to serve the remaining term until the annual elections in May 1998.

Membership Committee

Judy Bufler was appointed as Second Vice President to serve the remaining term until the annual elections in May 1998.

NFPA Committee

The first PACE Study Group has been formed and will meet every other Monday at noon at Santen & Hughes.