

2009 NFPA® Convention

By Sharon Lucia, NFPA® Secondary

NFPA® held its annual convention this year in a city with weather reminiscent of Vermont's. As I was flying to Portland, Ore., I could see what looked like desert and thought I might be flying over Montana or Idaho. Once we passed over the snow-covered, spectacular Mount Hood mountain range, though, I was back in a climate similar to Vermont. As we were driving to the hotel and talking with the driver, I discovered that Oregon has two very distinct climates: the desert on the east side of the mountain range; and the rainforest with lots of greenery on the west side. Weather aside, Portland is an urban city with lots of hustle and bustle. Unlike Vermont, it has a train-and-bus system that goes anywhere in the city and reminds me of New York City. It's always interesting to visit other parts of this great country.

Seminars are held on the first day of the convention. I attended the seminar on the changes to the Federal Civil and Criminal Rules of Procedure and another meeting on Dealing With Corporate and In-House counsel. I work in a corporate environment, and I rarely have the opportunity to take a seminar dedicated solely to corporation law. There were several attendees, and I made new contacts in the corporate world. I also attended an informative seminar on witness preparation and the myths about discerning if someone is lying. It was very interesting, and all of the presenters were very good.

We also enjoyed a presentation by Robert Dugoni, a mystery-novel author, who signed books for us at the luncheon on Thursday. Dugoni has written four books and is working on a fifth. His books are available in some Montpelier bookstores and through Amazon. It is always a joy to find a new author. Give him a try.

Region meetings are held on the second day of the convention to set out the agenda topics for the policy meetings on Saturday and Sunday. The following is a list of agenda topics prepared at this year's convention.

- Resolution 09-01: [bylaw change] Military personnel are allowed membership from any of the regions, not just through the military region.
- Resolution 09-02: The NFPA® board voted against the proposal to "require" committee meetings to be held using the services of SKYPE.
- Resolution 09-03: Introduction of a Basic Competency Exam.
- Resolution 09-04: Approval to enter into negotiations to create a Basic Competency Exam.
- Resolution 09-05: Approval of a budget for the Basic Competency Exam.
- Resolution 09-06: [bylaw change] Membership rights and privileges were clarified and made consistent.
- Resolution 09-07: All NFPA® board meetings are open to the membership.
- Resolution 09-08: [new topic and bylaw change] Change the title of Vice President & Director of PACE® to Vice President & Director of Paralegal Certification.

Three agenda topics were voted down:

- Require special elections for vacant NFPA[®] board positions.
- Extend the PACE[®] Grandparenting eligibility requirements.
- Submit the proposed budget 60 days rather than 30 days prior to the Annual Convention.

As always, delegates were passionate when speaking about topics that mean a great deal to them. One subject that garnered attention was the proposal to introduce a basic competency exam. Delegates in favor of an exam reasoned that the NALA (National Association of Legal Assistants - Paralegals) has an entry-level exam that college graduates can take and add to their resumes. Delegates noted that offering an NFPA[®] an entry-level exam would give perspective members the choice to be a part of either organization. The next step in the process is for NFPA[®] to start negotiations with a vendor who will assist with the process of creating a basic competency exam.

There was also an election for three NFPA[®] board positions, and a new NFPA[®] board position was created. The four new board members are:

VP & Director of Profession Development, Theresa Prader, RP[®] (Region I Director, Arizona)
 VP & Director of Membership, Mary McLaughlin RP[®] (San Francisco)
 VP & Director of Marketing, Isabelle Quintana (San Francisco) (new position)
 Treasurer and Director of Finance, Karen Santagata, RP[®]

The convention was not all hard work. The Friday night social was great fun this year, and everyone wore a Halloween costume. The NFPA[®] board outdid themselves this year.

Some NFPA[®] board members prior to elections, left to right: Karen Santagata, RP[®], Linda McGirr, Jay Williams, Anne Price, RP[®], Anita Haworth, RP[®], Georgette Lovelace, RP[®], and Tracey Young, RP[®].



The Region V delegates came as Red Sox and Yankee baseball players, with our Region V director as the umpire.



The entertainer for the evening was comedian Jan McInnis, aka The Work Lady. Laughter was had by all.

As always, several awards were given at the luncheon on Saturday. The NFPA[®] recognized individuals for their hard work and leadership in the following categories:

Altep, Inc/NFPA[®]
PACE[®] Ambassador Award
Michael P. Wallace, RP[®]
Central Connecticut Paralegal Association

Pearson/NFPA[®]
PACE[®] Scholarship
Kelly Kolibaba, Oregon Paralegal
Association

NFPA[®]
Association Pro Bono Award
Philadelphia Association of Paralegals

NFPA[®]

NFPA[®]
Outstanding Local Leader
Patricia C. Gagnon, RP[®]
Central Connecticut Paralegal Association

NFPA[®]
Paralegal of the Year
Debra Hindin-King
Rocky Mountain Paralegal Association

NFPA[®]
William R. Robie Aware
S. Kristine Farmer, RP[®]
Dallas Area Paralegal Association

Individual Pro Bono Award
Beth Wilkins
Rocky Mountain Paralegal Association

In addition, the Washington State Paralegal Association earned an award for meeting the NFPA[®] President's challenge of having the most new RP[®]s in the past year; the Washington association added eight new RP[®]s to its listing. Illinois, Indiana, New Hampshire, and Northern Virginia each met the challenge to add two new RP[®]s.

Next year's convention will be held Oct. 7–10, 2010, in Cherry Hill, N.J., and will be hosted by the Philadelphia Association of Paralegals. All VPO members are welcome to attend and observe the policy meeting. If anyone is interested, please contact me or Carie Tarte, VPO's NFPA[®] Primary Representative.