



## **2014 NFPA Annual Convention and Policy Meeting Dallas, Texas**

*By Diane L. Brown, NFPA Primary*

The National Federation of Paralegal Associations (“NFPA”) held its 2014 Annual Convention and Policy Meeting from October 9 through October 12, 2014 in Dallas, Texas (“Convention”). I had the privilege of attending the Convention as the NFPA Primary Representative for the Vermont Paralegal Organization (“VPO”). Laurie Noyes, RP® was in attendance at this year’s NFPA Convention as a nominee for the Region V Director position. One of our VPO members, Monica Larose, was able to attend the CLE seminars through the generosity of her employer. I would like to thank both the VPO and my employer, GE Healthcare, for providing the funds necessary to attend Convention.

Yes, it is true that everything in Texas is BIG with lots of spicy food and plenty of cowboy boots. The Convention logo did live up to its name – “LIVE LARGE. THINK BIG.” The Convention was hosted by the Dallas Area Paralegal Association (“DAPA”). They did a great job, and made it a lasting experience for all. DAPA showed their southern hospitality and did a fabulous job with the meetings, activities, policy meetings, vendors, and all of the accommodations. Even with the outbreak of Ebola in the Dallas region, the associations and DAPA came together to make this year’s Convention a successful event.

### **Thursday, October 9, 2014 – Continuing Legal Education**

The Convention kicked off with attendee registrations with each attendee receiving a Convention bag filled with important information and goodies. There were 367 individuals who registered for the Convention and that number broke down as follows: 279 attendees which accounted for 157 members, 107 non-members, and 15 board members; and 88 non-attendees which accounted for 24 speakers and 64 exhibitors.

Thursday was full of concurrent continuing legal education seminars. I attended the following seminars: Technology and Ethics: Inadvertent Disclosure of Confidential Information; Focus on Paralegal Ethics: Panel of two attorneys, a paralegal and a judge; Everything a Paralegal Wants to Know About FOIA; and Comparison of International and Domestic Corporate Entities. The seminars were very interesting with great presentations by the well-qualified speakers.

At Thursday's luncheon, keynote speaker, Harriet Miers, Esq., provided her insight on "A Different Kind of War: Access to Justice for All." She illustrated the distinct need for legal assistance to all, especially those less fortunate and living in poverty and turmoil. She certainly touched the minds and hearts of many during her speech. Attorney Miers is well-known throughout the United States because she served in the administration of President George W. Bush as Staff Secretary, Deputy Chief of Staff, and Counsel to the President.

I attended the NFPA workshop which reviewed the basics about the Wild Apricot Member Management Software. Lisa Vessels' presentation was designed for local associations interested in learning more about Wild Apricot's features and how to streamline membership management. She also showed the basics behind the website builder templates, integrated event registration, online payments, and email templates used with the contact database. The VPO recently rolled out the Wild Apricot Membership Management software to its members for membership renewals and for gathering of all membership information.

I finished the day with a cocktail reception celebrating NFPA's 40th Anniversary, and then moved onto the NFPA Board of Directors' Meeting.

### **Friday, October 10, 2014 – Region V Meeting**

Friday consisted of day-long region meetings where the delegates split up into each of their five regions. Our Region V meeting was led by Pat Gagnon, the current Region V Director, and we discussed the following items: preparing questions for the candidates, introductions, discussing and commenting on the upcoming bylaw resolution and agenda topics, webinars, a recap of the Thursday night Board Meeting, taking a region picture, overview of the Summer Board meeting, commenting on the NFPA website, reporting of membership numbers, the upcoming Joint Conference in Portland, Oregon, processing of Inside reports, existing committees and the need for committee members, calling out for coordinators, reviewing the 2015 Budget with the Treasurer, and the upcoming Spring Region V Meeting.

After the Region meetings, I attended the Treasurer's Meeting to review the 2015 NFPA Budget and hear the delegates' questions for the NFPA Treasurer. NFPA promotes transparency of the NFPA Budget and many asked several questions concerning the potential increase in membership dues on the agenda, where costs could be cut, and why it is important to build a reserve. After the Treasurer's Meeting, I was off to the Friday night social event.

The Friday night social event took place at the Sixth Floor Museum at Dealey Plaza which chronicles the legacy of President John F. Kennedy, interprets the Dealey Plaza National Historic Landmark District and the John F. Kennedy Memorial Plaza, and presents contemporary culture within the context of presidential history. The Sixth Floor Museum provides history through one of the world's most significant repositories of original photographs, film, video footage, documents and artifacts related to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. This was a truly memorable experience and really brought you back to the time and surroundings of the unbelievable assassination of President Kennedy, leaving you with a chilling affect and memory.

The social event was filled with fun with a margarita machine, a photo booth, good ole' Tex Mex food, and the ice-breaker of the selfie speed meet and greet. It was a good way to network with the attendees and to socialize away from the formal Convention events.

**Saturday, October 11, 2014 and Sunday, October 12, 2014– NFPA Policy Meeting**

There were 112 people in attendance at the Policy Meeting which broke down to 62 delegates, 1 local officer and 49 observers. There were 40 out of 49 associations in attendance at the Convention and represented by their delegates.

The NFPA Policy Meeting promptly commenced at 9:00 a.m. with the color guard marching up to the front of the room and leading the Pledge of Allegiance. President Robert S. Hrouda, RP made the introductions of the Board Members, special guests and certification recognitions. Tracey Young presented the NFPA memorial for the loss of three NFPA members. The meeting continued with the association roll call, credentialing report, adoption of the standing rules of order, adoption of the agenda and notification of meeting minutes. The meeting continued with the welcome and annual convention report, state of the federation address, overview of Robert's Rules of Order, report on the Thursday evening Board meeting, presentation and vote on the consent calendar, report by the nominations coordinator, call and close of nominations, introduction of candidates, candidates' statements and the balloting for Board of Directors' positions.

There were three contested Board positions: President; Secretary and Director of Operations; and Vice President and Director of Paralegal Certification. The announcement of election results was made and there was a tie for the position of President between Valerie Wilus, RP, Pa.C.P., and Lisa Vessels, RP, CP, FRP. Each delegate had to re-vote for that position and Lisa Vessels, RP, CP, FRP was finally elected. In addition, the following were elected: Lynne-Marie Reveliotis as Vice President and Director of Positions and Issues; Cherylan Shearer as Secretary and Director of Operations; and Juanita (Nita) Serrano, RP as Vice President and Director of Paralegal Certification. The complete listing of the 2014-2015 NFPA Board of Directors is provided herein.

The Policy Meeting was temporarily adjourned for the luncheon, and at the luncheon there were various presentations of awards as follows: Certification Ambassador Award, PACE® and PCCET™ Scholarships, Individual and Association Pro Bono Publico Awards, NFPA-Thomson Reuters Award, Local Outstanding Leader Award and The Honorable William R. Robie Award.

The Policy Meeting continued with the 40th Anniversary Presentation slide show. I believe I got a glimpse of our very own Kristin Mattes, RP and Corinne Deering, RP, and it was quite remarkable how some people had changed. The presentation was very well created with great background music and showed the various Conventions throughout the years.

The first agenda topic presented was Agenda Topic #3 – PCCE to PACE requirements for eligibility. The proposal was to expand the eligibility requirements to sit for PACE to include eligibility through having held a CRP credential for two years or more, and having met certain additional requirements. The sponsors and co-sponsors were of the opinion that the PACE eligibility requirement should be expanded to include, inter alia, the holding of a CRP designation for more than two years with at least one successful renewal, with six years of substantive paralegal experience. There was some discussion on this matter and the agenda topic was tabled for voting after lunch.

After the luncheon, the Policy Meeting continued with reports by the Strategic Planning Committee and the Ad Hoc Committee. There was also an Association Recognition representation for those members who recruited a member to join in order to increase local membership which increases NFPA membership.

At this point, the Policy Meeting circled back to Agenda Topic #3 for a vote and a two-thirds vote was needed. The delegates voted as follows: 18-yes, 20-no, and 2-abstained. The agenda item was not adopted.

Agenda Topic #2 was presented which covered the PCCE™ and PACE® CLE requirements for dual credentials. The sponsors and co-sponsors of this agenda topic proposed the adoption of a resolution to redefine the CLE requirements for PACE and PCCE to state that those candidates in good standing with both the RP® and CRP™ credentials could use the same CLE hours to maintain both credentials. There was some discussion, and then it was put to vote where a two-thirds vote was needed. The delegates voted as follows: 34-yes, 5-no, and 1-abstained. The agenda item passed.

Agenda Topic #1 was presented which covers community service administrative matters. The sponsors and co-sponsors of this agenda topic are of the opinion that administrative hours and contributions NFPA paralegals spend on the planning, logistics, design and implementation of Community Service projects should be specifically defined and more publicly acknowledged, which will inspire other NFPA paralegals to support and more actively participate in Community Service projects to attain NFPA's suggested 24 hours annually. There were discussions and recommendations to modify the language of the resolution for better clarity. It was then put to vote and the delegates voted unanimously in the affirmative, thereby passing the agenda item.

Discussion Topic #1 on Proxy Voting was brought up for discussion. The purpose of this topic was to provide a manner in which NFPA member associations could vote by proxy on agenda topics that come before the assembly of delegates at the annual NFPA policy meetings in order to actively represent the interest of their local associations. This type of circumstance would occur when the financial viability of the local association precluded their in-person attendance at the annual policy meeting. There was very little discussion on this point and no voting took place.

Bylaws Resolution #1 on the dues increase was presented and brought up for discussion. The proposal was to amend Bylaw Section 4.1A.1 to provide for a dues increase of \$5.00 per member to be assessed against all voting member associations. This was the most contested item during the Policy Meeting and the discussions were lengthy. Many delegates called upon the opponents of this resolution to ask them why they opposed. A delegate then asked if a straw vote could be made to see what the current vote would be. The straw vote produced 28 affirmative votes and 12 negative votes, and there needed to be 30 votes to pass this resolution. A huge discussion ensued, and then some delegates asked the opponents to contact their respective associations in order to see if they could obtain authorization to change their vote. This item was set aside to allow delegates additional time. The Bylaws Resolution #1 was brought back for a vote and the delegates voted as follows: 31-yes and 9-no. The resolution passed and was approved.

The next agenda item was the nominations for Region directors and nominations were closed. The delegates then voted on the nominations. The Policy Meeting was adjourned for the day and remaining agenda items would be covered on Sunday.

On Saturday night, the Region V delegates and a few guests headed out to the House of Blues, and had a wonderful time enjoying each other, having a great meal and bobbing to the bluesy music.

On Sunday morning, the Region Directors were announced. We were all delighted that Laurie Noyes, RP was nominated and elected as our Region V Director. Congratulations, Laurie!

The Policy Meeting wrapped up with the adoption of the 2015 budget, retiring of the colors, and the passing of the torch. DAPA passed the torch to Hawaii, and Hawaii provided a presentation about their beautiful state. The installation of the officers and Board of Directors took place, and then the newly elected President, Lisa Vessels, gave a speech on her future vision and goals for NFPA over her tenure. The Policy Meeting was adjourned quite early as there was no further business to address.

### **VPO Receives Two Awards at the 2014 NFPA Convention**

At the Convention, the VPO was honored with a certificate of NFPA's Award of Distinction for meeting the President's PACE® Challenge. In 2013, Carie Tarte, RP® and Kristin Mattes, RP® passed the PACE exam and were recognized among the 49 new RPs that have passed the PACE exam since the last convention. During the NFPA Policy Meeting, the names of all new RPs and CRPs were recognized.

I was personally awarded a certificate of NFPA's Award of Distinction for superior achievement and excellence in performance as part of the 2015 Budget Committee from Region V.

### **Upcoming Conventions**

The 2015 NFPA Annual Convention and Policy Meeting will be held in Honolulu, Hawaii; 2016 will be held in Burlington, Vermont; 2017 will be held in New Orleans, Louisiana; and 2018 will be held in Seattle, Washington. The 2015 Joint Conference (Regulation/Leadership/Paralegal Certification) will be held in Portland, Oregon, and the 2016 Joint Conference will be held in Kansas City, Kansas.

The benefits of attending a NFPA Annual Convention and Policy Meeting are as follows:

**Personal Contacts** – A personal connection, resulting from face-to-face contact, generates a higher level of trust. It is a great way to build your business relationships with others in the profession.

**Networking Opportunities** – A convention provides a great opportunity to expand your network and make valuable connections.

**Continuing Legal Education** – The educational sessions are designed specifically to provide paralegals with continuing legal education. Attending the educational sessions will enhance your knowledge in specific areas, which can directly impact your professional status.

**Get Inspired** – Many paralegals find that they have a significantly renewed passion for the profession and an increased level of confidence in building the paralegal profession after attending a NFPA convention.

### **Recap**

It was very exciting to attend the 2014 Convention in Dallas, and as my second convention, I gained a better appreciation and enhanced knowledge about being involved on the national level within the paralegal profession and community. Being at the Dallas Convention will be a lasting and memorable experience, and I encourage each and every one of you to get involved both on the local/state level, as well as the national level. One voice can, and will, make a difference!





2014 - 2015 NFPA Board Members

