

MICHIGAN LAWYERS WEEKLY

Vol. 17, No. 39

August 9, 2004

www.milawyersweekly.com

Spotlight Draws Record Crowd To Honor Paralegals

On June 24, the Gem Theatre hosted the Detroit Metropolitan Bar Association Legal Assistants Committee in an event that will be talked about for a long time to come.

"Spotlight on Paralegals" drew an exhilarating crowd of more than 140 members of the legal community in southeast Michigan. The festivities began with a one-hour strolling reception. Cocktails and appetizers were served in a delightful backdrop of live piano music, after which the group assembled in the theatre for a variety of unique presentations. The energy of this two-year anniversary was euphoric.

Over the last 35 years, paralegals have evolved into one of the most essential elements of the law practice. The "Successful Legal Assistant" is not a role to be taken lightly. After all is said and done, this profit-making member of the team is crucial to better client services. What's the bottom line? Don't leave the office without one.

Louis Theros, member of Dickinson Wright as well as president-elect of the DMBA, opened the program with some inspiring remarks.

"Truly the practice of law would not be what it is today, at a firm of any size, but for the contributions made by paralegals," he



Speakers: Louis Theros, Dickinson Wright PLLC; Michigan Supreme Court Justice Marilyn Kelly; Peter Tassie, managing counsel, Ford Motor Company; Linda Jevahirian, Legal Search & Management, Inc.; William Parsons, Miller, Canfield, Paddock, and Stone, P.L.C.



Spotlight Committee: Linda S. Jevahirian, Legal Search & Management, Inc.; Vanessa Lozzi, Miller, Canfield, Paddock and Stone, P.L.C.; Susan Brey, Ford Motor Company; Keonda Buford, Mediation Tribunal

said. "I can only say that I am the lawyer I am today because of the paralegals I have been able to work with for the past 15 years."

An ardent supporter of legal assistants, Justice Marilyn J. Kelly commented on their importance.

"I can tell you from personal experience how much I appreciate the work you do and how well I understand how vital your work is to attorneys who are usually the ones who get the credit," she said.

William Parsons, Miller Canfield Paddock and Stone director administration, lauds paralegals.

"They really deliver a service at the most efficient cost and clients want cost efficient production," he said. "One way to deliver that service is for organizations to employ legal assistants at all skill levels."

Parsons urged paralegals to design their own career.

"Determine what level you want to excel in and develop the skills that will get you there," he said.

As managing counsel of the product litigation group of Ford Motor Company, Peter

Tassie sees how making a commitment to paralegal utilization pays off. Tassie outlined three ways.

"In our area, if a legal assistant is employed to do the same work an attorney was doing it is a cost reduction," he said. "A second way corporations reduce costs is by engaging firms with a knowledgeable application of paralegals."

Finally, stated Tassie, "At Ford we truly believe that by having diverse input and different viewpoints we make a better product. The paralegals in our group service a huge function when we evaluate cases for settlement or discuss case strategy."

In a historical retrospective, Linda Jevahirian highlighted some of the most critical achievements of the profession. Jevahirian is the chairperson of the Legal Assistants Committee and founder and president of Legal Search & Management, Inc.

"Watching the profession advance is an adventure I am proud to have been a part of," stated Jevahirian. "I honestly believe that the spotlight is on paralegals. Take the magic of this moment and go for it."