

Humphreys College

NEWSLETTER SUPPLEMENT

FALL QUARTER

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OUR INTERVIEW WITH YVONNE FENNER, MEMBER OF THE COURT REPORTER'S BOARD OF CALIFORNIA **COURT REPORTING IS AN AWESOME WAY TO MAKE A LIVING**

Yvonne Fenner was appointed to the Court Reporters Board of California in May 2006 by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger to a term expiring June 1, 2009 and confirmed by the Senate. She has been self-employed as a freelance court reporter since 1996. From 1986 to 1995, she was a meeting coordinator and trade show manager for the California Landscape Contractors Association. Yvonne Fenner is a member of the National Court Reporters Association and past president of the California and Northern California Court Reporters Associations.

In your address to Humphreys students and faculty, you underscored the growing employment opportunities for court reporters in California.

“Just as California’s judicial system has grown, so has its demand for court reporters. If you check with the job listings, you will find many counties across the state with vacancies. Los Angeles County, with a larger force of court reporters than many other states, regularly conducts its application test. The court system has to compete for reporters with not only the traditional freelance market, but also now the captioning and CART industries. The demand for our services remains strong.”

However, the court reporters are challenged by the changing market conditions.

“Business everywhere is tightening its belt, looking for ways to streamline administrative costs and become more cost effective. While enjoying the benefits of a tight labor supply, simple economics teaches court reporters the value of customer service. The days of saying, “This is what you get, take it, or leave it,” are gone, in our industry as well as every other. The State of California might have an enormous budget for its judiciary, but the Administrative Office of the Courts is faced with the same budget pressures as everyone else. As in every budget, labor, people, is one of the biggest line items and naturally scrutinized as an area to cut.”



Is not this pressure even more evident under the freelance labor conditions?

“In the freelance arena, we see this shaking out in fewer depositions being taken. Instead of getting the testimony of absolutely anyone who might know anything, attorneys are choosing a few key witnesses to depose. We are also seeing growth in mediation and arbitration services. Parties involved in binding arbitration often require a court reporter to ensure their appeal rights are adequately protected.”

No discussion of the marketplace for court reporters is complete without addressing the topic of electronic recording.

“Technology is only a threat to the people who are unwilling to embrace it. I believe that everybody who ever en-

(Continued on page 2)

(Continued from page 1)

tered a court reporting program was told by someone, ‘You’re going to be replaced by a tape recorder... It’s only a matter of time.’ In a historical perspective, those skeptics are right: I’m willing to bet that when any of Humphreys students entered the program, there wasn’t a single piece of stone nor chisel, not one sheet of papyrus, not even a steno pad and a pen! Technology is not going to go away. Our challenge as reporters is to find ways of making technology work for us.”

What would be your core advice to a reporter entering the real world?

“To protect yourself, stay well informed. Join a local trade association. Get its newsletter, attend as many local meetings as you can. All three state associations in California are doing their best to keep the working reporters informed of changes in the industry. Join the National Court Reporters Association to keep abreast of major trends. The legislative impact by the associations is a key component. They work through lobbyists and grass-root campaigns, both critical to the welfare of our industry. None of these associations can do it alone, however. They are only as strong as their members.”

In retrospect, after a decade of your own freelance reporting work, what is most important to start a successful career?

“The first job I ever reported was an hour and a half workers’ compensation deposition. It took me every bit of a week to turn out that 40-page transcript. Be aware that the first year is basically a paid internship. Your teachers have done their best to equip you with a good knowledge of your field and excellent reporting skills, but they have no idea where you are going to land. Like with any new job, there are policies and procedures to learn. Additionally, you will work on your dictionary and increasing both your writing and editing skills. You will quickly learn how to use your software. Hopefully, you have learned to take full advantage of the timesaving features that are built into every program.”

Obviously, the immediate goal of each student is to pass the CSR exam...

“The college program teaches you not only the exam-related shorthand skills. You have been learning other things along the way, probably even unconsciously: time management and the importance of prioritizing by juggling demands of family and work with school; perseverance by taking test after test, sometimes going forward, sometimes slipping back but always building; how to be tough, working doggedly through the low spots, week after week at a new speed level.”

Some of your listeners at Humphreys College appeared to be a bit surprised when you said that court reporting might include two jobs in one.

“The field of court reporting might attract many with promises of big money, but those of us who are successful with it quickly learn that just like in the corporate world, big money comes at the expense of hard work and long hours. Corporate executives may be getting over a hundred thousand a year, but that is not happening in a 40-hour work-week. You are really taking on two jobs! There is the job of actually taking down the testimony or the proceeding, potentially a 40-hour week itself, and then there is the job of turning that into a usable product for the consumer, a transcript. I am not trying to scare anyone off, I just want your students to be prepared because, like anything else they do, they will get out of it what they put into it. However, the court reporting field is flexible. There is the right spot for everyone. If you need the security of knowing where you will be working every day, there are court positions available. If you crave the adventure of a new assignment at a new location every day, the freelance market is available. Every reporter can work to his or her own potential.”

Currently, you serve as a member of the California Court Reporters Board. What is its main goal?

“In general the board’s mission is to protect the public health, safety, and welfare by ensuring the integrity of judicial records through oversight of the court reporting profession. The board carries out this mission by testing, licensing,

(Continued on page 3)

and disciplining court reporters, and by recognizing the schools of court reporting that meet state curriculum standards.”

Tell us, at least briefly, about the current board’s priorities.

“One of the top initiatives is mandatory continuing education for certified court reporters. The courts have already instituted mandatory continuing-education units, beginning this year. We are also looking at some type of firm-owner registration to ensure that firms are being held to the same standards as individual licensees are. The board is also addressing the controversial issue of ‘backup audio media,’ commonly referred to in the industry as audiosync. Although the name audiosync is proprietary to one software, it is a feature being built into most softwares. It allows the reporter to create a digital audio recording of the proceedings, which is then linked to the transcript being produced. This extremely complex issue has prompted consumer complaints and confusion among reporters. The board is working to establish guidelines to protect consumers while bringing some standardization to the industry.”

~ Stanislav Perkner

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