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2005 NALS
Award of
Excellence
recipient
Patricia E. Infanti, PP, PLS



Close your eyes and just let your mind wander for a moment. Imagine you were put in the position of being “honored, humbled, and thrilled” with having been nominated as one of NALS’ Award of Excellence participants. If you have a hard time conjuring up that image, imagine how hard-pressed you would be to express your feelings and emotions if you were awarded NALS’ highest honor. Only former recipients of the award could express those feelings. Welcome to the world of NALS 2005-2006 Award of Excellence Recipient—Patricia E. Infanti, PP, PLS! Native and life-long resident of Gloucester Township in Camden County, New Jersey, Patti has that honor and the emotions associated with it embossed in her mind, possibly forever. Patti sums the experience up by noting that “it is absolutely wonderful when someone takes notice of the work that you do. . . . It has been a great experience and one that I will recall often and fondly throughout the rest of my life.”

Patti has been a member of our tri-level association for a relatively short time—only ten years—but, as you may know, the qualifications for receiving this award are not just based on membership or participation associated with NALS or its state and local affiliates. Work history and experience, community service, and the recommendations of employers, members, and others are considered. Also, a grueling interview with select, prestigious judges is involved. Let’s take a short tour of Patti’s life—from legal secretary to Chair of NALS Education Committee—to see what may have made her stand out just a little bit more in the eyes of the judges.

The value of education is a deep-rooted belief in Patti. This does not just include elementary, high school, and college education, it also includes special and continuing education. For Patti, education is a passion. She started college life with a desire to become a special education teacher, but switched gears and went on to earn her associate’s degree in Executive Secretarial Science from Camden County Community College in 1977. She received her New Jersey Certificate as Teacher of Part-Time Evening Vo-Tech Occupations in 1993 in the field of Legal Assisting. From 1993 to 1996, Patti taught the Legal Secretarial Class I and II

at Gloucester County Institute of Technology in Sewell, New Jersey. In 1998, Patti authored Study Unit One for a distance-learning course entitled “The Legal Secretary for ICS Learning Systems.” She still has plans to earn her bachelor’s degree, although she is “not certain where that will take” her. However, there seems to be no end to Patti’s aspirations and accomplishments.

Patti does not take education lightly. She believes learning is an opportunity that should be available to everyone. To that end, she has participated in Philadelphia Reads (a program that pairs first-grade students with members of Philadelphia area law firms to foster and improve reading skills); has been on the Stakeholders Partnership, Law & Public Safety Strikeforce (an advisory council that links industry with the School-to-Career system in the Philadelphia School District); and has participated in and led many workshops, seminars, and roundtable discussions, both locally and nationally. Recently, Patti had the opportunity to discuss a career as a legal secretary with students and staff at the Mercer County Community College Career Training Institute. In addition, she writes numerous articles for Philadelphia’s legal newspaper, *The Legal Intelligencer*, regarding opportunities and tips for professional legal secretaries and illustrating the value of NALS. Also, she received a NALS CLE Award in 2001 and renewed it in both 2002 and 2004. In 2002-2003, she earned the NALS of Pennsylvania CLE Award and renewed it in 2003-2004. Patti has been honored with the NALS of Pennsylvania Award of Excellence (2002) and also has attained NALS professional paralegal certification (2003).

Twenty-eight years ago, Patti began her legal career when she took a position in the office of matrimonial attorney Saverio R. Principato in Camden, New Jersey. Even though Patti had a degree evidencing her secretarial knowledge, she needed on-the-job experience to enhance that knowledge and to gain greater skills. She credits Mr. Principato’s legal secretary/office manager as having been “an excellent teacher and mentor who taught me the skills which later helped me to pass the PLS exam.” A variety of learning experiences awaited Patti at her

first job—law firm accounting, as well as procedures for several areas of law (matrimonial, personal injury, wills and estates, real estate, and business organizations). After seven years and the birth of her older son, Patti moved to a position working with Joseph A. McCormick, Jr., at Weinberg and McCormick, P.C., in Haddonfield, New Jersey. While in that position, she continued to increase and hone her knowledge and skills in the areas of bankruptcy, real estate, landlord and tenant, and replevins.

For the past 15 years, she has been a legal secretary in the commercial real estate department of Ballard Spahr Andrews & Ingersoll, LLP, in Philadelphia. There is a deep mutual respect among Patti and her coworkers and the attorneys with whom she works. That respect is evidenced by the recommendations submitted by two of her attorneys, Richard R. Goldberg and Neil Sklaroff.

Mr. Goldberg says that Patti “conducts herself with extraordinary professionalism and is extremely knowledgeable about her craft. . . . Our working relationship is wonderful. She is cooperative, takes care of my professional needs, and is a true administrative assistant as well as legal secretary. . . . I have never had an assistant who has been more deserving of this recognition.”

Mr. Sklaroff made it a point to mention that he was preparing his recommendation “with great enthusiasm” and pride. He said that he is “fortunate to have Patti as my secretary . . . [She] makes sure that all of the many support systems of our office work in concert . . . to provide the highest level of service to our clients. . . . What sets Patti apart is the manner in which she facilitates my practice with her ability to anticipate circumstances that require unexpected attention. She has the interest to learn about our clients and about components of the legal systems with which we work; she has a unique ability to apply that knowledge. In short, Patti is a valued problem solver.” Mr. Sklaroff wants Patti to be assured that the “seamless way in which Patti integrates all of her responsibilities” does not go unnoticed.

Patti's professional life did not and does not stop when she leaves the office. As mentioned earlier, Patti taught legal secretarial classes from 1993 to 1996. While she was in the process of choosing a textbook for her course, the textbook she chose mentioned NALS and PLS certification. Patti wanted to know what the PLS certification was about in case any of her students asked her about it. She not only wrote NALS for the information, she decided to study and sit for the exam. She must have studied pretty hard—she passed the exam on her first try! Although she was not a member of the Philadelphia Legal Secretaries Association, she was invited to attend its annual Secretaries Day Dinner. At that dinner, she was honored for having passed the exam. Needless to say, Patti soon joined PLSA, went to her first board meeting and, within three months, was serving as the chapter's recording secretary. From that point on, NALS became Patti's "biggest hobby."

Since Patti loves to sink her teeth into a project and see it to conclusion, she jumped into the world of NALS with both feet and planted them firmly. On the local front, Patti has held many offices and has chaired or co-chaired many committees. She currently serves as Vendor Member Chair and Bulletin Editor. There are two things of special note: Patti established a Membership Incentive Program in connection with PLSA's PLS study group. The program culminated in 19 new members, and it received the NALS Founders Award in 1998. Then in 2002, she and co-member Debra A. Coulbourn, PLS, established a vendor member program that allowed vendors to become limited members of the chapter for a yearly fee, providing vendors with access to local members for business development while substantially increasing the chapter's treasury. The program was recognized by NALS when it received the Keystone Award in 2003.

Always moving forward, Patti has served her state association (NALS of Pennsylvania) as president, president-elect, corresponding secretary, state publication editor, and "features" editor. While serving as president-elect, she and the state parliamentarian helped a troubled chapter re-establish itself, appoint chapter officers, and offer education to its members. Currently, Patti is serving as

State Publication Editor and on the state's Annual Meeting Committee.

Patti's involvement on the national level is especially noteworthy. Over the past ten years, Patti has volunteered her time and energy to numerous NALS committees. While serving on the NALS Membership Committee, Patti, together with other members of the Student Membership Brochure Task Force, created a brochure specifically designed to show student members the benefits of belonging to NALS. As NALS Membership Chair, she presented the Membership Chair Leadership session in Tulsa in 2001, along with then Membership Director, Mary E. Burns, PP, PLS. While serving as Education Products Subcommittee Chair, she organized and formatted the first ALS Mock Exam. She currently serves NALS as its Education Committee Chair.

Patti's first NALS conference experience was in Boston in July 1997. She fondly remembers her experiences at that conference, especially having had the opportunity to meet Tammy Hailey and then NALS President Judy Snider, PLS. Patti sums up her impression of the conference as follows: "What a treat! . . . [T]he entire experience was thrilling." Patti's enthusiasm for and thrill at attending NALS conferences continues to this day.

Because of her enthusiasm and hard work for and on behalf of others, Patti has become a true leader in our tri-level association. But, what may set her apart from other leaders? "Her ability to see the big picture," says NALS former president September D. Holmblad, PP, PLS. September believes so strongly in Patti's abilities and professionalism, she nominated her for the Award of Excellence. September's recommendation notes that Patti's strengths lie in her "compassion in wanting others to achieve their maximum potential; her honesty and integrity; and her ability to get the job done, regardless of whether it's a NALS project, a work project, or something her family needs. She is a doer. . . . [S]he does not look inside, she jumps inside and does what needs to be done." Patti wrote an article while September was NALS President that truly left an impression, not only on September but on all who read it. At the time Patti wrote the article, it was a

year of challenging NALS members to Maximize Their Potential and to realize the value of NALS membership. Patti did an excellent job of emphasizing all of the values of networking and NALS membership in that article. The article, entitled "The Value of Networking," has become a very special one to September. September also points out that "Patti is a professional. She does everything she can to maximize her potential to stay on the cutting edge in her chosen career."

Patti attributes her professional and personal growth to her membership and participation in our tri-level association. She notes that she has "stretched and grown through [her] NALS experiences." She strongly believes that becoming certified was the single most important event which prompted her to volunteer and to believe that she could handle anything and everything that may be thrown at her. Patti sums it all up by saying, "I would not be where I am today, confident and supported, if it weren't for NALS."

Even though "NALS has been a driving force for me [Patti] to strengthen my skills, challenge my complacency, and support me as a legal professional," NALS and work are not the only outlets and joys in Patti's life. Patti has been married to her high school sweetheart, Mike, for the past 25 years. She and Mike make it a point to have a special annual out-of-town weekend together each year. Adding to Patti's happiness are her two sons, Anthony (21), a junior at St. Charles Borromeo Seminary in Wynnewood, Pennsylvania, and Joseph (17), a junior at Triton High School. When not working on NALS projects, Patti loves gardening and singing in the St. Agnes R.C. Church Adult Choir. She spends what little leisure time she has watching classic movies, reading novels, and crocheting.

Congratulations, Patricia E. Infanti, PP, PLS, on having earned NALS' highest honor—recipient of its 2005-2006 Award of Excellence!