



Profile: Cathy Kohr, Paralegal, Lavery, Faherty, Young & Patterson

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Having recently won a national award for her work in organizing paralegal pro bono efforts in Harrisburg, PA, Cathy Kohr talks with LawCrossing about her profession, her charity work, and how both provide her a fulfilling career in the law.

It takes a creative mind, serious organizational skills and a passion for the law to be a great paralegal, according to Cathleen Kohr, who was recently honored by the National Federation of Paralegal Associations for her pro-bono work.

Kohr, a litigation paralegal at Lavery, Faherty, Young & Patterson, P.C. in Harrisburg, PA, won the NFPA's 2004 Individual Pro Bono Award for creating an innovative training program and recruiting volunteers to offer legal aid to the poor.

"Cathy has truly made a difference in the lives of the most needy through her outstanding efforts, dedication, and service in the area of pro bono service to the public," said Sandy Ballard, public services coordinator with the Dauphin County Bar Association. "Cathy's leadership and creative ideas have enhanced the delivery of quality legal services to the less fortunate population in Dauphin County Pennsylvania. In fact, her efforts can be a model for other paralegal associations and legal services across the country."

In July 2003, Kohr became aware that MidPenn Legal Services was turning people away because they didn't have enough time or manpower to fill the legal services need in the community.

"There were issues with regard to government cutbacks and Mid-Penn Legal Services was hit fairly hard," she told LawCrossing. "They lost a lot of attorneys and a lot of paralegals and there was a greater demand from the public for these services and they just

couldn't process people fast enough."

So Kohr helped create a program which pooled volunteers of paralegals from various firms and trained them how to help with legal aid.

Paralegals responded to Kohr's call for help and MidPenn Legal Services held two training sessions to teach volunteers how to support the center's programs. The volunteer paralegals now perform pro bono services for the needy, who now have increased access to the justice system.

Kohr, who has been a paralegal for 15 years, says it's a great career for people who love the law, but don't necessarily want to become attorneys.

"If you are interested in the legal field and you don't want to undergo the seven years of education required to be an attorney, that's one of the reasons I got into it," she said.

"You have to be a very detailed and organized individual, and if you meet those criteria and are still interested in the legal profession, then I think it's a great fit.

"During trial, the attorneys heavily rely on paralegals because they have their hands full as it is with testimony. It helps if they have a second set of eyes, so it's a little bit more than just organizational skills; you've got to use your brain too," she says.

Kohr, 37, graduated from the Central Pennsylvania Business School with an Associate's degree in paralegal studies in 1987. She has always worked in litigation and enjoys it

because every day is different.

"When you're preparing for a trial, of course, you kind of eat, live and breathe it," she said. "I encourage anyone who is interested in the legal field to pursue a paralegal job. It is fun. My days are never the same. I have things that come up. Some days I'm on trial, some days I'm in the office, some days I'm out interviewing individuals, whether they be the witnesses or clients - it's an array of things. It's a very rewarding occupation."