



Kristen Noll: President, St. Louis Association of Legal Assistants and Paralegal, Lewis, Rice & Fingersh, L.C.

[Charisse Dengler]

Kristen Noll is a litigation paralegal for Lewis, Rice & Fingersh, L.C., a position that has exposed her to many different areas of law, including labor, environmental, patent and trademark infringements, product liability, admiralty, and personal injury.

"I am not assigned to any specific team or attorney so I can accept assignments from anyone who requests my assistance," she said. "Typically, I manage and organize case files. I also analyze and review discovery materials, prepare subpoenas and subpoena duces tecums, maintain logs of document productions, assist in case preparation, draft legal documents, and communicate with clients and witnesses. However, this is not an exhaustive list."

While pursuing her paralegal education, Noll interned at the Macon County State's Attorney's Office in Decatur, IL; and upon graduation, the State's Attorney created a paralegal position especially for her.

"I reviewed police reports, drafted criminal charges, prepared criminal histories, and communicated with witnesses," she said. "I thoroughly enjoyed working with criminal law, but had to leave the State's Attorney's Office due to relocating to the St. Louis area in September 1999, after marrying my husband."

Noll then interviewed with Lewis, Rice & Fingersh, and she has been with the firm for eight years.

"I really enjoy working for my firm," she said. "I have a good relationship with my superiors and respect the firm and feel they respect me, as well. Since I am not assigned to a group of attorneys, or a particular one for that matter, I can assist any attorney who requests my assistance. Therefore, I work with such a variety of attorneys and areas

of law. I obtain more experience and learn more by working with a variety. The diversity enables me to expand my knowledge in other areas and, in another aspect, prevents continuous burnout."

However, Noll said that sometimes it can be challenging to juggle her career and her family. As a mother of two, she has to be wary of spreading herself too thin.

"I find it very challenging to be a full-time mother and have a full-time career," she said. "I deal with this by being balanced and organized, which I find helps tremendously. If I have order and discipline in my life, things seem to go much more smoothly."

In addition to these two roles, Noll is also President of the St. Louis Association of Legal Assistants (SLALA), an association she has been a member of since July 2001. It was during the National Association of Legal Assistants' annual convention in Savannah, GA, that Noll first met the SLALA's President-Elect.

"From reviewing the roster, she found I was from St. Louis and called me," she said. "I expressed my interest in becoming involved, and that was all it took. I became the chair of programs and education, which I held for about two years. In addition, I served as director, vice president, and president-elect. I was asked if I would be interested in becoming the next president, but wasn't sure because I felt that I should have been on the board longer than what I was before accepting such a position. However, I talked

about it with my husband and decided that now is as good a time as any to be the president."

As President of SLALA, Noll said she thinks professional associations help meet the emotional need that all people have to belong somewhere, as well as meet practical needs such as job placement.

"I feel a paralegal association brings identification to the individual paralegal and paralegal community.... An association allows for its members to connect with each other through thoughts and ideas and is a wonderful source for networking and mentoring," she said.

"Among other things, SLALA offers educational membership meetings and a job bank to assist in job placement," she said. "In addition, SLALA supports programs and fund-raisers to help the underprivileged, whether it be for legal advice or to provide gifts to needy children."

Noll thinks networking is something that's very important in the paralegal profession, and she actually found her current position through a friend she met while serving as President of the Organization of Paralegal Students at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. Her friend, who was vice president at the time, decided to go on to law school and did an internship at Lewis, Rice & Fingersh. When she learned that Noll was relocating to the St. Louis area, she put in a good word for her; and shortly afterward, Noll was told to submit her resume.



Therefore, Noll encourages paralegal students to start building contacts as early as possible.

"Study hard and network," she said.

"Networking begins in college. Take advantage of internships, externships, and job-shadowing. You have to work for what you want. Desire and commitment shine through, and you have to prove yourself to advance. If there aren't any paralegal positions available at the time, take a case assistant position. Everyone has to start somewhere."

Noll, who lives in Edwardsville, IL, and commutes to St. Louis, MO, loves to travel. In fact, at her 10-year class reunion, she said she would like to visit all 50 states before her 20-year reunion; and after an Alaskan cruise this fall, she'll only have 9 states left.

"I am content with my life and career and wouldn't do anything differently," she said.

"I can't help but think if I did do anything differently, I wouldn't be where I am now. And I am definitely in my happy place."