



## Elizabeth Vance: Paralegal, Wyatt Early Harris Wheeler, LLP, High Point, NC

[By Judith Earley]

Elizabeth Vance comes from a family of law enforcement officers and said that while she was fascinated by the law, she did not want to be in law enforcement and definitely did not want to go to law school. A paralegal career seemed like the perfect blend of behind-the-scenes work and interesting legal issues. She found her current job through a placement agency for legal support staff.

Presently she lives in Greensboro, NC, and works in High Point at Wyatt Early Harris Wheeler, LLP. She is a family law paralegal with a small law firm—24 attorneys—and works for a senior partner and an associate. Vance has been in her current position for three years.

Vance said she enjoys working with clients from the beginning of their cases until their resolution and seeing clients put their lives back together and move forward. “I assist clients in coming to terms with their situations and making positive changes and improvements to their lives,” said Vance. She added that it is a challenge to work with clients in very difficult emotional circumstances.

“I spent most of my time in criminal law working with a felony child abuse prosecutor. It was very satisfying to get convictions for child abusers and either [see] them go to prison or get probation with restrictions that could prevent other children from being abused,” said Vance.

“It is also very rewarding to get a favorable verdict or settlement for our family law clients. Although there is no real ‘winner’ in family law litigation, it is satisfying to see our clients get custody and financial arrangements settled, which benefits them and their children.”

Vance said she sees the expense of legal fees, access to services, and ethics and professionalism among attorneys and staff as the most important issues facing the legal community.

Over the course of her career as a paralegal, Vance said a significant change in the legal industry that she has witnessed is the increased emphasis on credentials and education requirements for paralegals. “There

are greater expectations of paralegals to obtain continuing education and credentials; [there is a] blurring of lines separating paralegals and secretaries,” said Vance.

Paralegal associations are a great source of formal education, but also serve their members in the informal networking and information sharing that occurs at meetings and events, according to Vance. “The associations are essential in keeping current with the profession.”

“I have gotten new ideas about how to work more efficiently, how to enjoy my job more, and how to deal with difficult supervisors, opposing counsel, clients, and witnesses. I have also learned how to be more useful to my firm and serve our clients better with increased knowledge and skills,” said Vance. She currently serves as President of the Guilford Paralegal Association and as Secretary of the North Carolina Paralegal Association.

According to Vance, paralegal associations present a positive view of paralegals to both the legal and larger communities. “For example, my local association does community service projects and participates in fundraising events that I believe foster camaraderie among our members and positive opinions of our profession as a whole. Attorneys who speak at our continuing-education seminars often leave impressed with the knowledge and professionalism of our members,” said Vance.

Vance worked and paid her way through college, paralegal school, and graduate school. “My ability to juggle lots of priorities and responsibilities has served me very well,” said Vance. “From my early part-time jobs and first jobs after college, I learned to communicate with people from all economic and social

levels. I also have the conviction that no matter where our clients find themselves, they can improve their circumstances, because I was able to do that for myself.”

Although Vance joined several paralegal associations while she was a paralegal student, she said she did not consistently maintain her memberships or participate in the meetings and seminars. “If I could do it over again, I would have maintained those memberships and attended continuing-education seminars, even if my employers did not pay for them. I would have taken the CLA exam soon after paralegal school and would not have waited 12 years!” said Vance.

Vance recommends that paralegal students have hobbies outside of work and not let work squeeze those hobbies and friends out of their lives. Additionally, Vance said that students should get a national certification through NALA or NFPA, as that will provide them with “portable” credentials and a great sense of accomplishment.

Describing herself as single but attached, Vance enjoys trips to the “bark park” with her boyfriend, Jeff, and puppy, Zorro. She also relaxes with crocheting and is an avid reader. Vance volunteers at a nearby homeless shelter and her church, and she does website design and maintenance for her local paralegal association.

### ON THE NET

Wyatt Early Harris Wheeler, LLP  
[www.wehwlaw.com](http://www.wehwlaw.com)

North Carolina Paralegal Association  
[www.ncparalegal.org/mc/page.do](http://www.ncparalegal.org/mc/page.do)

Guilford Paralegal Association  
[www.guilfordparalegalassociation.org](http://www.guilfordparalegalassociation.org)