



Dorothy Secol, CLA and Peggy E. Stalford, LA

[By Judith Earley]

Experienced legal assistants Dorothy Secol and Peggy Stalford knew they could succeed producing legal work outside of the traditional law office for a wide range of practitioners, and in 1986, Paralegal Services was born.

Secol started out many years ago as a legal secretary, before there were schools that offered paralegal training. "I worked for a solo practitioner, and he would say to me, 'We have this to do; you have to learn how to do it; you better get the books out and read.' I would go to the attorney seminars with him," said Secol.

"I loved what I did, and I read as much as I could, and I learned as much as I could," she went on. "In 1978, I sat for the CLA examination given by the National Association of Legal Assistants." In 1980, she decided to branch out on her own, and she has been freelancing ever since.



"Peggy worked for a firm that I did real estate closing for. After working for them for a couple of years, Peggy went out on her own and was working from her house," said Secol. "I got the idea that maybe we could pool our resources-we both did different things, and we complemented each other. I

asked if she wanted to come work with me, and in 1986, we started Paralegal Services."

The freelance paralegal business is booming, and Stalford summed up the industry this way: "I can tell you that the hardest part of being a freelance paralegal is marketing your services and growing your business. You cannot wait for attorneys to come to you. You must be visible, and your work has to be as close to perfect as possible. You have to be ready to handle what we call 'radiator-burned' files on an emergent basis because, of course, the file has been sitting around on the radiator and the hearing is tomorrow morning."

"Your reputation for excellence is your best marketing tool. Your dedication to the profession and your business savvy play a big part, as well. Our biggest challenge has always been to keep pushing ourselves to be better than we were yesterday. We ask a lot of our employees and enjoy watching them grow professionally and personally with us," Stalford continued.

"We belong to community associations, paralegal associations, and our state bar association. We volunteer in the community and constantly support our profession. One

also must learn how to juggle a business and home life. We've raised our children and now enjoy our grandchildren and always make time for our husbands. Our reward for all of our hard work is self-satisfaction, a genuine feeling of accomplishment, and our respect and love for each other."

Secol and Stalford are now launching a franchise business and will be selling Paralegal Services nationally in the very near future. They have received numerous inquiries about purchasing a franchise-even some regarding a franchise based overseas. They will be America's first paralegal-services franchisors and will offer a specialized operations-and-marketing system designed specifically for the freelance paralegal.

ON THE NET

Paralegal Services USA
www.paralegalservicesusa.com/about.html

Allenhurst, NJ
www.allenhurst-nj.com

Paralegal's Guide to Freelancing
www.amazon.com/Paralegals-Guide-Freelancing-Services-Paralegal/dp/0471152692