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## Paralegal PERSPECTIVES

### Membership has its privileges

What is a paralegal?

You're likely to receive different answers to that question depending on who you ask, but the Paralegal Association of Rochester defines a paralegal based on the National Federal of Paralegal Association's standards: "[A] person, qualified through education, training or work experience to perform substantive legal work that requires knowledge of legal concepts and is customarily, but not exclusively, performed by a lawyer."

PAR uses those same parameters when approving our membership. We currently have 99 members, 88 of whom are voting members. Being accepted as a member entitles our members to be part of NFPA, founded in 1974 to unite paralegal associations nationwide and advance the paralegal profession.

NFPA's Annual Convention will be held in Portland, Ore., from Oct. 29 through Nov. 1. Each year, all NFPA members and association delegates are invited to attend the convention.

NFPA consists of more than 50 associations throughout the country, including more than 21,000 paralegal professionals. Being an individual member of NFPA allows you to have a direct hand in affecting the paralegal profession as a whole. NFPA members also receive a bi-monthly subscription to National Paralegal Reporter, which provides articles on relevant career activities and legislative updates.

I was elected for a two-year term as PAR's NFPA Primary Representative this year, and Debbi King, a paralegal for Volunteer Legal Services Project, is serving as PAR's NFPA Secondary Representative.

Paralegal associations from throughout the country attend NFPA's board of directors meetings, regional meetings and pol-



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icy meetings, as well as participate in educational seminars. The convention is the delegates' opportunity to bring the voices of their local associations to NFPA's directors and their peers. The agenda topics, typically covering specific issues that may affect NFPA, individual member associations and the profession as a whole, are debated and voted on by the delegates.

Prior to the annual convention, agenda topics are provided to the associations, which share them with their members. This year's agenda includes entry-level paralegal exams and changes to various bylaws. All agenda topics are currently posted on PAR's Web site — [www.rochesterparalegal.org](http://www.rochesterparalegal.org) — so they can be viewed at our members' convenience.

We have a responsibility to address any questions or concerns our members may have about any agenda topics and/or any part of any agenda topic and to vote on each topic based on the opinion of a majority of our members.

Whether titled "paralegal" based on education, training, work experience or any combination thereof, membership in PAR and the NFPA allow an individual to be part of organizations that promote and encourage paralegal professionals. The annual convention is a way for our members to have a presence on a national level.

As the voice of all of PAR's members, our representatives will be in Portland at the end of the month to ensure our members' voices are heard loud and clear.

*Bonnie Brooks is a litigation paralegal at Woods Oviatt Gilman LLP. She sits on PAR's Board of Directors and is the newly-elected NFPA Primary Representative, having served as the chairwoman of the membership committee last year.*