

As seen in the November/December 2007 issue of *Legal Assistant Today*. Copyright 2007 James Publishing, Inc. Reprinted courtesy of *Legal Assistant Today* magazine. For subscription information call (800) 394-2626, or visit www.legalassistanttoday.com.

**AAPI Hold National Paralegal Summit
Exemption, regulation and education are key topics.
By Ashley Johnson**

The American Alliance of Paralegals, Inc.'s Annual Meeting and second National Paralegal Summit, held Sept. 14, in Wilmington, Del., brought together paralegals from 10 different states to discuss the importance of education and other issues affecting the profession.

Instead of holding educational seminars as in years past, the annual meeting format concentrated on a keynote speaker and the National Paralegal Summit. "The presenters and attendees were from diverse backgrounds and offered new insight to the profession for practicing paralegals," said Laura Ahtes, AACP, RP, DCP, a paralegal with Potter Anderson & Corroon in Wilmington, Del., and recently elected vice president of AAPI.

The first summit topic focused on a recent case in the United States District Court for the District of Delaware, *Wersinger v. Bank of America*, which involves the exempt status of a paralegal. The outcome of the case could affect the title of paralegal because the state issues in the case have been waived, leaving only federal issues. "Over the past year, we have kept our members abreast of legislative issues and various cases, and we are following the *Wersinger* case carefully since this could have a big impact on us all," said Carolyn Saenz, AACP, a senior paralegal at Western-Southern Life Insurance Co., in Cincinnati, who was re-elected as director of membership for AAPI at the summit.

The status of regulation also was discussed. "Regulation, certification and licensure with updates from attendees in the states of Wisconsin, California, Kentucky and New Jersey highlighted the increased possibility that licensure may soon be a reality and that it is likely to create a domino effect once enacted," said Debbie Repass, AACP, RP, a legal assistant for Pentagon Federal Credit Union in Alexandria, Va., and president of AAPI.

Education, the theme of last year's summit, continued to be discussed this year. "Paralegals will be faced with the issue that post high school education, and in particular a bachelor's degree and paralegal certificate, are going to be requirements for the profession," Repass said. Paralegals also expressed the need for streamlined educational standards among national paralegal associations and reciprocity in recognizing various paralegal continuing legal education programs.

The keynote speaker for the summit, Richard S. Gebelein, chief deputy attorney general for Delaware, discussed the structure of the attorney general's office in Delaware and how paralegals are utilized.

As the new vice president, Ahtes said, "I plan to travel to region meetings and summits offered by paralegal alliances, legal educators and legal organizations to increase networking opportunities and to share in the ever-expanding paralegal role and practice for the profession." Saenz has similar plans as director of membership. "The goals of the membership committee are to reach out to as many paralegals as possible,

especially those paralegals who have no national affiliation, and tell them about the importance of belonging to a paralegal organization,” she said.

In addition to Saenz and Ahtes, Barbara Wallace, AACP, RP, DCP, was re-elected as treasurer at the annual meeting. Board members’ terms are staggered so only a few positions are up for election each year. Repass, who was re-elected as president at last year’s annual meeting, will continue to serve as president until December 2009. The other board members’ terms will begin on Jan. 1 and end Dec. 31, 2010.

Based on the success of this year’s summit, members already are planning on another summit next year, although a location has yet to be determined.