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My Specialty: Bankruptcy Law

Laura Ahtes, RP, DCP

Paralegal

Potter Anderson & Corroon

Wilmington, Del.

www.potteranderson.com

I am a bankruptcy paralegal for Potter Anderson & Corroon, which employs 67 attorneys and 19 paralegals. The firm's bankruptcy department focuses on representations in large Chapter 11 cases of creditors' committees, individual creditors, debtor-in-possession financiers, acquirers and shareholders. The group also counsels clients in out-of-court restructuring/workouts, foreclosures on mortgages and other liens, state law receiverships and secured transactions.

I have been a paralegal for 17 years and have worked at Potter Anderson for almost five years. I obtained a bachelor's degree in business administration in 1986 and graduated with honors from the Widener Law School Paralegal Certificate Program in 1989. I received my Registered Paralegal designation in 1999 and my Delaware Certified Paralegal designation in 2005.

I am a charter member of the American Alliance of Paralegals Inc. and currently serve on the board of directors as the education director. I also have been a member of the Delaware Paralegal Association for 17 years. I am the chair of the Delaware State Bar Association's Paralegal Committee.

Responsibilities

As a paralegal in the bankruptcy department, I provide support services to bankruptcy attorneys per assigned case. These duties include reviewing and drafting legal pleadings and correspondence, reviewing case docket sheets, assisting in preference/adversary action litigation, organizing discovery documents and responding to client inquiries as directed by the attorney.

I also maintain the calendar for cases, maintain a log for claims, organize service lists, handle routine calls and correspondence to and from clients, review recently filed adversary and bankruptcy proceedings and keep track of Chambers Procedures. Additional duties include updating the firm bankruptcy database system, retrieving case law as directed by the attorney, assisting with briefs and memoranda, distributing weekly critical dates and case count reports, compiling legal information and documentation, drafting attorney fee applications and compiling supporting documentation. Reviewing and drafting agenda letters for upcoming hearings, communicating with court personnel and providing all other legal assistance required by attorneys also are among my duties.

How Did You Get Into This Specialty?

In the late 1980s, my first paralegal position was in the corporate field. The firm for which I was employed at the time received a bankruptcy creditor representation case. It made sense for me to assist the attorneys with the case because I had the corporate background and was familiar with the corporate structure for a Chapter 11 proceeding. After that time, the bankruptcy field accelerated in Delaware, and I started taking on more bankruptcy cases. Bankruptcy became a prosperous field for paralegals, and I continued on in this specialty.

What Are Some Challenges in This Field?

Expect paperwork and a lot of it. For a paralegal, this field is fast-paced with deadlines and is a good fit for a high-energy person dedicated to assisting busy attorneys. As a bankruptcy paralegal, you must be highly organized, detail-oriented and accept constant change. One challenge is keeping abreast of local rules, procedures and forms in all jurisdictions, as well as the Federal Rules, which recently were amended. A bankruptcy paralegal must be knowledgeable regarding all recent changes to thoroughly assist attorneys on a daily basis.

Favorite Bankruptcy Resources

- All U.S. Case Management/Electronic Case Filing bankruptcy Web sites and Delaware's site — www.deb.uscourts.gov
- Free daily e-mail newsletter from Bankruptcy Data — www.bankruptcydata.com
- U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the District of Delaware Local Rules and the U.S. District Court for the District of Delaware Local
- Rules, General Procedures and Chambers Procedures — www.deb.uscourts.gov
- Bankruptcy Code and the Federal Rules of Bankruptcy Procedure — www.access.gpo.gov
- Bankruptcy Law and Procedure: A Guide for Paralegals (Paralegal Practice Library), Third Edition, Volumes 1 and 2 by Steven N. Berger and J. Daria Westland (Wiley Law Publishing, 1994).