



Probate Sectional Celebrates 20th Birthday



The Probate Sectional has been meeting for 20 years.



Sharon Beberich, Pat Moe and Julie Staebler discuss ideas for speakers for future meetings.



Claudia Flaska, Bev Wentworth and Kathy Kodadek joke about the very technical nature of probate practice, which probably makes their meetings seem myopic to paralegals who do not practice in the probate area.



The Probate Section always enjoys great attendance at its meetings.

The practice sectionals are one of the oldest benefits of MPA membership. And one of the original and continuously meeting sectionals is the Probate Sectional. Started in 1981, the Probate Sectional celebrates its 20th birthday this year.

The sectional co chairs Kathy Kodadek and Cindy Costello estimate that this sectional has 20-25 regularly active participants. Attendance at monthly meetings ranges from 12 to 45. The highest meeting attendance was for speaker Alona Tungsten, the Deputy Probate Registrar for Hennepin County.

Kodadek and Costello say that they try to have speakers at half of the meetings. The other meetings provide a place for paralegals to meet, share practice tips and knowledge about resources and otherwise network.

The *Citations* visited the sectional's September 12 meeting. Despite the somber day, 14 people attended. Of those attending, only three of the attendees had less than 15 years experience in the field, and only five had less than 20 years experience.

There was no speaker planned for the September meeting, and sectional participants reported on practice successes. Sectional participant Mara Golin reported transferring a motor vehicle in Hennepin County using the new Notice of Informal Probate in less than a half-hour (everyone cheered), but one participant countered with "it depends on the clerk you get." Another participant reported a rare, successful dealing with a stock transfer agent (more cheers). Another participant suggested the sec-

tion plan a speaker on the separate share rule. This suggestion elicited other knowing remarks about 1041 reporting and 643(b) returns and the best software for gift tax returns. [Editor's Note: This sectional knows how to have a good time.]

Sectional participant Julie O'Brien credits the long term success of the section with the non-adversarial nature of probate practice. Practice strategy and knowledge can be shared freely, she said, without the concern of "helping the other side." They also believe that the variety of the practice area encourages open communication between paralegals. Kodadek pointed out that no two estates are alike, and almost every estate has a quirk—a piece of property that a paralegal has not encountered before or a relationship between the personal representative and heirs that creates a story; and both of those characteristics create questions and ideas around which the meetings can easily be planned.

Costello agreed: The practice area supports, perhaps more than most others, meeting with other paralegals to share experiences or research questions, and that has kept them meeting for 20 years. When further pressed for reasons for the enduring tenure of the sectional and its members, Kodadek quipped, "probate involves the two sure things in life: death and taxes."

Ironically tax reform proposals may change part of that mantra, but Kodadek doesn't think tax reform will change probate practice too much. "At first I was worried," she said, "that the inheritance taxes may be repealed and (Continued on page 14.)

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my job would go away,” but she said she soon realized that the laws changes made estate planning as complicated as ever, and probate would always be needed to transfer some types of property.

This sectional may also have the distinction of having the most former MPA Presidents. At least six former MPA Presidents were probate paralegals, including Denise Webster Templeton, Shirley Wick, Barbara Peppersack, Mary Beth Schultz, Janet Mahaney and Nan Reichel.

For more information on the Probate Sectional and its meeting schedule for 2002, please contact either Cindy Costello at (612) 672-8380 or Kathy Kodadek at (612) 335-1486.◆