



SUMMONS WDALA

An Association for
Paralegals/Legal Assistants

AUGUST 2025
www.wdala.org

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From the PRESIDENT

Let's take a moment to think about and appreciate the little things that make life a little more enjoyable. Maybe it's a cup of coffee, the smell of rain, a colorful sunset, or finding a \$10 bill in your pocket! Whatever your little things are, realizing these simple joys in our lives and appreciating them in that moment, improves our mood and increases our happiness. And we could all use a little more happiness!

So, go grab yourself a cup of coffee or a warm blanket and let's take a look at what has been happening in WDALA!

In regards to the Paralegal Outreach program, a few of us attended SBAND's Annual Conference on June 12th in Bismarck. We arranged a vendor booth, handing out perpetual calendars and our brochures. We didn't have as much foot traffic as we had hoped for but hopefully our mere presence at the event helps build our name recognition. We did visit with another vendor booth- UND's Mary Feller. We discussed an interest in having a group do a round table on the benefits of Paralegals in the legal profession for one of UND's 3rd year law classes. She sounded extremely interested and told us she would look into which class this would best fit. We were also approached by SBAND's Tony Weiler requesting that WDALA present again and asked us to put together a virtual CLE! As for the UTTC's Advisory Committee for their Paralegal and Criminal Justice Degree programs, the committee met virtually in April. This committee was just recently brought back, and I was presently surprised by the list of members they have acquired. We discussed the growing use of AI, by students and faculty; Online classes vs in-person classes; and Class creation and removal. The committee meets twice per school year, with one meeting being face-to-face to help build networking and camaraderie. If you are interested in being a part of any of the outreach events, please let me know, and keep an eye out in each Summons to see how the Outreach program is continuing to evolve!



Please help me in acknowledging the current Board and committees that keep everything running smoothly behind the scenes. Over the past year they have reviewed, discussed, and focused on our goals and they continue to build WDALA into something great!

I look forward to seeing all of your faces at the Fall Seminar in Bismarck on September 16th and 17th and I would be honored to continue to lead this organization through the next year!

Anna Heinen



Save **THE DATE**

SEPTEMBER 16-17, 2025

WDALA'S FALL SEMINAR

ND Heritage Center
Bismarck, ND

Welcome



I'm from Bismarck, North Dakota, and work as a legal assistant in the legal division at the Office of State Tax Commissioner. I've been in the legal field for a few years now, following in my mother's footsteps. I'm married to Romeo Norris, and together we have two wonderful boys—Apollo (6) and Enzo (4)—along with our tuxedo kitty, Kevin, who keeps us on our toes. In my free time, I enjoy being with my family, reading and working out. Before becoming a mom, I also loved painting and exploring anything creative or artsy.

Erica Norris

National Paralegal Day

AUGUST 6TH

-EST. 2024-

Member Spotlight



Shannon Barth

How long have you been a member of WDALA?

About 10.5 years.

What do you like most about being a member of WDALA?

I like being part of a group where I can reach out when I encounter challenging situations at work. It's reassuring to know that among the members, someone has likely faced a similar challenge and is willing to share their insights and experience.

What company do you work for?

Schweigert Klemin & McBride

What career advice do you live by?

You can never make a mistake that cannot be fixed. James Hagen gave that advice to me when I started at SKM.

Why did you choose to pursue a career in the legal field?

I didn't initially set out to pursue a career in the legal field – it's more accurate to say the legal field found me. I spent 12+ years as a medical transcriptionist but as electronic medical records became the standard I was faced with the need to transition into a new career. A close friend of mine encouraged me to apply at SKM and the focus on personal injury law immediately sparked my interest. I began summarizing medical records and over time, grew into my current role. It's been a rewarding journey of growth and discovery.

What career advice would you give to your younger self?

You are more capable than you may realize when it comes to facing and overcoming challenges.

What do you love most about your job?

There are many aspects of my job I genuinely love. Its incredibly rewarding to help individuals who have been injured, allowing them to focus on healing while we handle the complexities they should not have to be dealing with. I'm also grateful for the team I work with. It is rare to be a part of a group where you truly enjoy working with everyone and I feel fortunate to be in that position.

What's a cause that you are passionate about?

Cancer is a cause that is deeply personal to me, having lost both family members and friends to the disease. My mother is a two-time breast cancer survivor. I volunteer with Sanford Health's Cowgirls for a Cure, an event dedicated to raising funds and awareness for breast cancer research and support.

What is the last TV show you binged watched?

Waterfront on Netflix

What is on your bucket list?

One of the experiences on my bucket list is to go fly fishing in a mountain stream in Montana with my husband and our two boys.

What is the best concert you ever attended?

I'm a big fan of country music and have attended many incredible concerts over the years, making it difficult to pick a favorite. However, one that stands out the most is seeing Morgan Wallen in Rapid City with a close friend and her daughter. That experience holds special meaning for me, as my friend has since passed away, making that concert one of my most cherished memories.

Describe what a perfect day outside of work would look like for you?

A perfect day outside of work would be spending time with my family at our land by the river—eating, drinking, sitting around the campfire, and sharing laughs together.



Member Spotlight



Dehan Schwan

How long have you been a member of WDALA?

This is my second year with WDALA. I became a member in September 2023.

What do you like most about being a member of WDALA?

Networking with other paralegals and the opportunity for continued learning. I took the CP Skills Exam in July and am anxiously waiting for results (pray for me!) I'm thankful WDALA opened my eyes to this opportunity.

What company do you work for?

I work at the Ramsey County State's Attorney's Office in Devils Lake.

When did you first know that you wanted to pursue a career in the legal field?

I initially went to college for business management. It was during my business law class that I realized I enjoyed learning about the law better than business. The next year I switched to the legal assistant program and never looked back.

What do you love most about your job?

I enjoy voir dire. The majority of my job during voir dire is reading people which I find really interesting. We usually station a team member in the back of the courtroom and another sits at counsel table so we have a good view of the jury pool. We let the State's Attorney focus on asking questions while we watch to see if potential jurors are nodding off, checking their phones (disengaged), or have adverse reactions to questions. Trials are won or lost with the jurors you choose so voir dire is very important!

What do you think is the most important skill that a successful professional needs to have?

Being able to 'turn off' at the end of the day and leave everything at work. No matter what type of law office you work in, being a paralegal is stressful and client emotions run high. It's important to find a healthy outlet at the end of the work day: garden, work-out, listen to a podcast – whatever helps you turn off the work noise and relax.

What experiences and past roles have led you to where you are today?

I worked for a private attorney in Fargo for two years before moving to the public sector in 2008. After moving to Devils Lake I worked for over ten years as a legal assistant at the Devils Lake Regional Child Support Unit, then accepted my current position as paralegal at the State's Attorney's Office. My work bestie Kim Perkuhn and I worked together at the Child Support Office, and now work together at the State's Attorney's Office (she encouraged me to apply.) We've been co-workers through life milestones such as marriage, children, and grandchildren. Now we are both testing for our CP credential. It's a blessing to have a good work buddy. Kim keeps me sane and I honestly don't think I would have made it this far without her!

What is the last TV show you binged watched?

Ginny & Georgia on Netflix.

Do you have any creative outlets or interests?

I enjoy running and try to do 5k a day during the week. I'm not fast and I don't always hit that goal, but it's definitely easier in the summer when I can run outside!

If you could pick up a new skill in an instant what would it be?

Learn a new language! There have been many times in my career where speaking Spanish or Hmong would have been helpful.



Motorcycle ride
through Colorado

What's the best vacation you've ever been on and why?

Last month Jay and I went on a motorcycle trip with friends through Colorado, Idaho, and Wyoming. It was a fantastic experience riding through the switch-backs, hiking in the mountains, and seeing Yellowstone National Park. I usually prefer my vacations in the winter on the beach with a good book, so this was out of my comfort zone. Definitely worth the change of scenery!

What's the weirdest food you've ever eaten?

I tried conch while vacationing in the Bahamas. It's like you chew, and chew, and chew, and it never breaks down. 0/10 do not recommend.

If you had a month off to travel anywhere you desire, where would you go?

I would travel to Italy. I love food and wine so I think I will fit right in!

A photograph of a child's play area. In the foreground, there are several colorful plastic chairs (green, blue, yellow) with silver metal legs. A wooden table is partially visible. In the background, there is a wooden shelf with various toys and a green wall with a butterfly decoration.

NAVIGATING INSURANCE IN CHILD CARE INJURY CASES

By Attorney Lindsay Wilz

Child care related injuries occupy a unique niche in a personal injury practice. Although the harm ranges from tragic and truly unpreventable incidents, like sudden infant death syndrome, to deliberate abuse, most injuries lie somewhere in the middle. Injuries, and even deaths, result most often from negligent conditions: lack of supervision and unsafe conditions topping the list. Proving negligence is rarely the most difficult task, however. Pinpointing a viable source of recovery, most often insurance, is almost always the uphill battle.

The Licensure Landscape

North Dakota distinguishes child care providers by size, setting, and structure across six categories. “Self-declared” providers are home providers permitted to care for up to five children (no more than three under the age of two). Self-declared providers file an initial affidavit with the North Dakota Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS) and have little to no oversight thereafter. Next, in-home child care providers: family and group. Lastly, facility child care providers: child care center, preschool, or school-age program. Licensing requirements and regulations increase with the number of children and formality of the setting.

Why does the regulatory framework matter in a negligence case? Because it dictates whether the State requires the provider to maintain liability insurance. North Dakota (through administrative code) requires facility-based child care providers, child care centers, preschools, and school-age programs, to carry liability insurance for bodily injuries and property damage. This is monitored and enforced through yearly licensing renewals. Self-declared and all in-home providers, even those that are licensed, are not required to maintain liability insurance for injuries that occur at the daycare despite caring for thousands of children across the state.

The Insurance Gap and Legislative Input

In 2023, House Bill 1298 was introduced attempting to impose liability insurance requirements for all licensed providers, regardless of size. However, such changes were met with heated opposition from providers, citing that such a requirement would be cost prohibitive to continue operating or would increase the costs to families in such a manner that child care would be cost prohibitive. Similar changes have been attempted through administrative code, but met the same fate. This has left DHHS in a position to recommend but not mandate liability insurance coverage. This policy gap leaves a large percentage of providers at risk to be personally responsible for negligent conduct. In reality, the lack of liability insurance leaves families who have had a child injured without financial recourse.

Navigating Coverage

First, determine the type of provider. If it is a facility, it must be licensed and carry the appropriate liability insurance to be operational. You can verify licensing status at <https://search.ec.hhs.nd.gov/> (this also applies to home providers). Verifying licensure should provide relative assurance that the facility is appropriately insured. If it is a home provider, a deeper dive will be necessary. The only way to ensure coverage in that setting is to request documentation of liability insurance. It is not enough for the homeowner to provide documentation that he/she has homeowner's coverage. Most homeowner's policies exclude injuries arising out of a "business activity." To ensure appropriate coverage for any injuries resulting from the child care services, a child care endorsement to the homeowner's policy is generally necessary. You can request a copy of the endorsement, declaration's page, or a letter from the insurance company confirming coverage. Do not rely on a verbal assurance from the provider or the insurance agent.





DAYCARE

Evaluating Personal Exposure When Coverage Does Not Exist

When coverage does not exist, the only avenue to turn to is pursuing a claim against the provider for personal assets. The uncomfortable reality is that most individuals do not have enough personal assets to satisfy any or all of the claim. A civil claim can be pursued and a judgment obtained, but that does not always translate to collectible funds. It is difficult to levy real property, personal property, or bank accounts. And most of those funds are either protected from seizure or are insufficient to satisfy a civil judgment. This leaves families with no financial recourse to help with medical expenses or lost wages that are a result of the child care provider's negligence.

For legal professionals and parents, understanding and navigating the licensure-insurance matrix of child care facilities is overwhelming. It is important to always confirm the provider's classification. Never assume appropriate liability coverage is in place. Leverage DHHS filings where they exist. Prepare for the possibility that despite a strong negligence claim, there may be little recourse. By asking the appropriate, albeit uncomfortable, questions upfront with the provider, a parent gives their child the best chance at a meaningful recovery if the worst should happen while with a child care provider.



Lindsay (Harris) Wilz, a shareholder at Maring Williams Law Office, has built her career on being a relentless advocate for injury victims. Licensed in both North Dakota and Montana, she concentrates on the complex, high-stakes cases such as oil-field explosions, medical negligence, as well as motor vehicle crashes. Her track record of success has earned her "Rising Star" and "Super Lawyer" honors every year since 2016.

In 2024, the American Association for Justice Women Trial Lawyers Caucus presented her with its inaugural Trailblazer Award for "taking on the hard cases and prevailing." This was in recognition of Lindsay's victorious efforts representing a teenage sexual assault victim in a first-of-its-kind case in North Dakota. The North Dakota Association for Justice named her its 2025 Rising Star, underscoring her reputation for fierce, effective advocacy on behalf of injured clients.

When not in the courtroom, Lindsay enjoys spending time with her husband and two kids doing anything outdoors from hunting and fishing to golfing.

WHAT DO WE OWN AND WHERE DO WE OWN IT? A QUICK GUIDE FOR UNDERSTANDING MINERAL INTERESTS

By Attorney Steven Nelson

Owning mineral rights comes with great opportunities – but also significant complexities. In North Dakota, oil production taxes have exceeded \$32 billion since 2008, representing over 50 percent of local tax collections annually. Since individuals often own a portion of these mineral interests, oil and gas royalties can offer enduring support to families for generations.

Nonetheless, clients often omit mineral rights from their testamentary strategies, leaving heirs uninformed. Legal practitioners are often the ones that wind up trying to unravel these mysteries, hoping to provide certainty and security for their clients.

This four-part guide provides introductory steps for clients that are not aware of what mineral interests they own. The goal is to help organize these unique assets in a way that will be manageable both for clients today and for future generations.



1. Identification

When starting from nothing, the first step in understanding mineral interests is identifying what the client owns. The quickest way to get a general understanding of ownership is through an online search through the county recorder website.

To initiate a search, obtain the client's name (as grantor or grantee) and the county of interest. This allows access to relevant deeds, leases, and other recorded documents via the appropriate county recorder's website.

In North Dakota, there are three different recorder websites to search for recorded documents:

- McKenzie County: www.mcvvault.com
- Mountrail & Williams Counties: www.idocmarket.com
- All other North Dakota counties: www.ndrin.com

While searching, make sure to note precisely how the owner's name is as it appears on the recorded document along with township, range, and section. A single middle initial may be the only difference between your client and their grandparent. The recorded documents should be able to provide a legal description of the client's interests to use for a more robust title search.

2. Verification

Once you and your client have determined the legal descriptions of potentially held mineral interests, an important but frequently overlooked next step is confirming that ownership. Title verification can bring peace of mind to clients and prevent unexpected conflicts in the future.

Some attorneys and law firms opt to conduct title searches internally to retain direct control over the process and obtain real-time insights into potential encumbrances, ownership discrepancies, or jurisdictional nuances. This approach not only streamlines communication and decision-making but also fosters deeper engagement with property law, providing legal professionals with practical, direct experience. However, in-house title examination can be labor-intensive and may inadvertently miss key elements, especially when evaluating mineral interests—an area known for its technical complexity and unique legal attributes. These interests often involve split estates, non-surface rights, historical conveyances, and varying lease provisions that require specialized knowledge to interpret accurately. Without thorough expertise, critical issues such as severed rights, dormant interests, or improperly indexed instruments may escape detection, potentially jeopardizing the integrity of the estate plan.

Hiring a professional landman to conduct title work is a practical alternative that can enhance efficiency for attorneys and staff while delivering specialized expertise to clients. This approach is often more cost-effective for the client and enables quicker service delivery. The primary challenge lies in identifying a landman who is both dependable and proficient. Building and sustaining strong industry relationships is essential to securing the right professional for the task.

Thorough title verification is essential to safeguarding a client's mineral interests. Whether conducted in-house or by a qualified landman, the process ensures legal clarity, prevents costly disputes, and supports informed decision-making. Given the complexity of mineral ownership and its potential impact on asset value, confirming title is not just best practice—it is a fundamental step in providing sound legal counsel and strategic guidance.

3. Valuation

Once a client's mineral assets have been verified, the next essential step is obtaining a professional mineral appraisal. Petroleum engineers play a key role in this process, utilizing key data points to produce an informed and comprehensive valuation. Unlike surface property, mineral interests are inherently complex and require specialized expertise to assess accurately. Their value is often opaque to non-experts, making professional appraisal indispensable.

Assigning a monetary value to mineral assets unlocks numerous practical advantages. It facilitates smoother transfers of ownership in estate planning, enables accurate tax reporting, and provides critical context when evaluating offers to lease or sell. A well-supported valuation also enhances the client's ability to make informed decisions and negotiate with confidence in today's energy market.



Mineral appraisals are a cornerstone of responsible asset management. By leveraging the expertise of qualified petroleum engineers, attorneys and their clients can gain meaningful insights into the true worth of mineral holdings. This not only safeguards the client's interests but also empowers more strategic and transparent transactions.

4. Estate Planning

Once identified, verified, and appraised, mineral interests can be treated similarly to other assets that make up a client's estate plan. Mineral interests can hold substantial and enduring value due to ongoing royalties, lease agreements, and potential future extraction rights. If not carefully accounted for, they may be subjected to inefficient distribution, unexpected taxation, or even legal challenges. Strategically incorporating mineral rights into an estate plan can ensure they are properly valued, managed, and seamlessly transferred, preserving generational wealth and maximizing long-term financial outcomes.

Every legal professional understands the inherent value of taking proactive steps when planning for generational transfers of property. Mineral interests can be just as valuable in a client's estate as their home, farm, or bank account. Without clear directives, mineral rights can become sources of tension among heirs—particularly if their income potential is misunderstood or contested. Proper documentation within the estate plan clarifies ownership, outlines succession preferences, and designates appropriate fiduciaries to manage the interests. Thoughtful estate planning, including attention to mineral assets, reflects a commitment to stability, transparency, and stewardship across generations.



Steve Nelson earned a Bachelor of Science in Biological Sciences from North Dakota State University and a law degree from University of Wisconsin – Madison. Steve served as a law clerk for the North Central Judicial District, working on cases for Mountrail, Ward, and Burke Counties. Steve then took a position as an assistant attorney general in the North Dakota Office of Attorney General, where Steve was primarily involved with oil & gas regulatory cases. Steve currently advises clients with oil and gas interests at First International Bank & Trust with their Mineral and Land Services team. Steve also serves on the board of the Big Muddy Bar Association as Officer at Large.



Congratulations

NALA Award Winners

WDALA's Education Committee
Affiliate Award



Melissa J. Hamilton, ACP
President's Award



Candy (Pederson) Reilly
Unsung Heroes Hall of Fame Award

President's Award

Melissa J. Hamilton, ACP



Award Presentation Speech: The recognition of Melissa Hamilton, ACP with the prestigious NALA President's Award is a cause for celebration and I am truly honored to present this award. This distinction highlights her dedication, talent, and ambition, not only in the legal field, but in her community.

The NALA President's Award is more than just a plaque or trophy. This award not only honors the past, but also ignites the path forward for future leaders in the field. It is presented to those who have made outstanding accomplishments, contributions, and leadership to NALA and NALA Affiliated Associations. Receiving this award acknowledges years of hard work, perseverance, and passion. I have known Melissa for a very long time and can attest first-hand that she has worked tirelessly, persevered where many of us would have faltered, specifically being NALA President during the COVID-19 Pandemic, and I know no other whose passion exceeds Melissa's for the paralegal profession and for NALA.

Melissa served as NALA's President from 2020 to 2022, leading NALA through one of its most challenging periods – the COVID-19 pandemic. Melissa's term as NALA President began in the midst of the pandemic. NALA's Annual Conference in 2020 was held in a virtual format which meant Melissa's first installation as NALA President was conducted through a virtual ceremony. This may not seem like a big deal, BUT the road to a NALA Presidency takes years of arduous work, time management and dedication, all while working a full time job and juggling family responsibilities. And when you finally reach that goal and plan and look forward to your first ceremonious induction, only to watch that dream be snatched from you, it is extremely heartbreaking. But Melissa being the warrior she is, took it all in stride. Like her grandmother told her, no matter what life throws at you, you put one foot in front of the other and keep on going. She did this with grace and humility - IN SPADES!

NALA also made the difficult decision to conduct the 2021 Annual Conference in a virtual format. Melissa was instrumental in ensuring that paralegals could still access valuable content, have networking opportunities and professional development despite the restrictions imposed by the pandemic. Under her leadership, NALA's Annual Conference in 2021 had a record breaking attendance of over 1,450 attendees and remains the best-attended annual conference to date.

Melissa also helped improve the professional development of members through the LEAD program which was developed during her presidency.

Beyond professional achievements, Melissa's character has always been extraordinary. Her kindness, generosity, motivation, and inspiring spirit have positively influenced those around her. However, I would be remiss if I didn't forewarn you NOT to travel with her, as the travel gremlins just love to test her character. Let's just say that whenever any of us have travel issues, we always say we have been "Hamiltoned".

Melissa's dedication to excellence, growth, and the ability to overcome challenges has been evident. This award validates her commitment to NALA, our profession and the pursuit of excellence.



Melissa Hamilton's giving her acceptance speech for her President's Award



Ungung Heroes Hall of Fame Award

Candy (Pederson) Reilly

Editor's Note: *Candy is a former member of WDALA. She served as WDALA's President from 1992-1994.*

Quote from Vicki Kunz: Have you ever been in a meeting and ideas or suggestions are flying and before you know it, there is that one person who is already working on it and brings the finished project to the table without being asked?! That is Candy! Whether she was at work, at a local or national meeting, Candy Reilly was engaged. She just naturally stepped up and got things done without asking her. She was not one to be in the limelight herself but made sure those around her got the credit they may have had due for their work! She served in so many capacities at work, WDALA, and NALA, her leadership came naturally, quietly and most times in the background. She has always been that person you could count on!



I started my paralegal career in 1985 with Nevin Van de Streek, Eaton, Van De Streek & Ward. Nevin was the city attorney so my job entailed municipal law, creditor bankruptcies, real estate, estate planning and trusts as well as general litigation. We used typewriters, erasers and carbon paper, the copiers did not sort and/or staple. When our office got its first computer, I was the one who learned and used it first. I also got to prepare for the first trial of many to come.

During this time, I met Dot Jorde and other legal assistants in the Minot law firms. Through these contacts, I learned about WDALA and met Vicki Kunz. Vicki and I had so much in common and, of course, she encouraged me to join WDALA. I jumped in with both feet. My first annual meeting, Vicki had me running for VP. She was president at the time.

Through WDALA, I learned about the CLA program. They did not have study guides during that time. We were told to know the Federal Rules of Evidence, Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, Legal Terms and definitions (including all Latin terms used) and cited other legal sources. We also had to pick topic subcategories ... such as litigation, contracts, real estate, etc. We formed study groups in Minot and quizzed each other. When it was time to take the exam, there were over 30 of us from WDALA at the exam! There were no computer exams, we had to write motions, briefs, essays, etc.

I became a CLA in 1991. This certification opened more doors for employment and education. In the fall of 1992, I took the Civil Litigation Specialty exam. It usually took a few months to grade exams and in January, 1993 I received my CLAS (Litigation).

As First Vice President of WDALA, I planned the quarterly seminars along with the annual meeting. At that time, they were in Minot, Bismarck and Dickinson. This was one of my favorite jobs.

During my time with WDALA, I held the following offices: First Vice President (Seminar Chair) 1991-1992; President 1993 and 1994; NALA Liaison (two years); and Historian (one year). I was also a member of the N.D. Supreme Court Professional Standards Committee that worked with the State Bar Association to develop professional standards for the work of legal assistants under the supervision of attorneys. I worked with Vicki Kunz and Brad Beehler along with three representatives from RRVLA. Those standards were adopted in 1997.

I moved to Fargo in 1996 and became a member of RRVLA for 6 years. I served as Vice-President (Legal Education) and NALA Liaison.

In 1998, NALA honored me with the Affiliated Association's Award in Colorado Springs, Colorado for my time on the WDALA Board. I attended my first NALA Convention when it was held in Bismarck, ND. I was in awe of all experienced paralegals there. I attended many more conventions after Bismarck.

My first four-year appointment with NALA was the Professional Development Committee (Chair for two years). I was the Editor of the Career Chronicle as Chair. I held this position at the same time that numerous states were working on state professional standards for the utilization of legal assistants under the direct supervision of attorneys. Many states were working on guidelines as well and we tracked their progress. The PDC also undertook a substantial revision of the NALA Code of Ethics and Professional Responsibility. I spent the fourth year on the PDC as the Ethics Chair.

I was elected Regional Director for two terms followed by Continuing Education Committee (Chair) and Editor of Facts & Findings; Chair of Mock Trial in San Diego (2006) and Tampa (2009); Proctor of CLA exam in Minnesota; NALA Budget Committee 2000; collaborated on outlines for Criminal Law and Personal Injury specialty exams for NALA; presented Trial Preparation in Federal Courts – NALA Live 2010; and a Trial Notebook video class for NALA.

The last 16+ years of my career, I worked as a Paralegal Specialist/Certified Fraud Examiner with the U.S. Attorney's Office. As with WDALA and NALA, I was active with many groups within the government for continuing education and attained my Certified Fraud Examiner (CFE) certification.

Thank you to Melissa Hamilton, ACP, for nominating me for the Unsung Hero Hall of Fame and to NALA for honoring me with this award at their 50th Anniversary Celebration. It was an honor to serve on WDALA and NALA's Boards and committees for so many years. The education, networking and support of paralegals in both these organizations is a testament to why they are still going strong after all these years.

Everything I learned and experienced with WDALA and NALA was extremely helpful in my long career. WDALA and its members will always be near and dear to me.

Candy Reilly

WDALA's Education Committee



NALA's Milestone
Membership Anniversary:
20 years
Melissa J. Hamilton, ACP



NALACON 2025



By Ashley Miller, ACP

NALA Conference 2025 was held July 10 – 12, 2025 in Atlantic City, NJ. This was the third in-person conference I attended. It was a slow start getting there with my first flight being delayed and my connecting flight being cancelled. Only fifteen hours later, I arrived at the hotel. It was great visiting with paralegals from all over the states and learning about the different jobs they held. I saw some familiar faces and met even more new ones.

Normally we start the conference with a Keynote speaker. However, this year, the NALA board took us on a journey through the decades. We reminisced on clothing, music, movies, office environments and much more from 1970 through the present. Boy was this entertaining. I can't believe the 90's were thirty years ago!

The seminars NALA offered at this conference were amazing as always. My absolute favorite was: Get it Right and Keep it Tight: Legal Research and Writing. The presenter, Olivia Renfroe, ACP shared her wealth of knowledge regarding sentence structuring, comas, and common grammar pitfalls. Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg held to the mantra "get it right and keep it tight." She was an advocate for keeping wording simple and avoiding lengthy legalese.

A couple other CLE's I enjoyed were "Post-Conviction Relief for Criminal Records" presented by Corrin Swintosky, and "Contracts in Concert: Music Industry Contracts" presented by Amber Simmon, JD, LLM. Corrin Swintosky was very interesting as she is a freelance paralegal. For the last two years she has been traveling around the country working on various criminal cases for different law firms. Amber Simmon is very passionate about music and protecting your art in the business. Being a former freelance musician myself, I found this very interesting and informative.

The Annual meeting and the Affiliated Associations meetings were some of my favorite events. Our association shined on the stage... as usual. During the Annual meeting, Melissa Hamilton, ACP received the "President's Award" for her continuing contributions to paralegals nationwide and navigating the new COVID induced era of everything virtual. I am also excited to announce Melisssa Klimpel, ACP was elected to be the Affiliated Associations Director for 2025 - 2026. Finally, WDALA's Education Committee received the "Affiliates Award" for their dedication over the past 40 years in providing WDALA with incredible CLE's each and every year both in person and virtually.

Attending the expo and the Affiliate Showcase was a ton of fun. I even won a fully stocked beach bag in a drawing! The booths were clever with many participants wearing costumes to match the theme. I got fun swag to share with the kids and use in the office.

This year was NALA's 50th anniversary. We celebrated in style at the Gala where we dined, danced and made new friends. All of the WDALA ladies in attendance looked so lovely in their sequenced dresses and bright smiles. Prior to the Gala, Melissa Hamilton, ACP spoke at the installation of the new NALA officers and was also recognized for her work as a past NALA president.

The charity NALA sponsored this year was AVANZAR. AVANZAR also celebrated their 50th anniversary this year. They provide comprehensive services to Atlantic County victims of domestic violence and sexual assault and statewide services for human trafficking victims under the age of 21. Their work is inspiring. The ladies who shared about their organization were passionate and had a clear message of hope for those in need of their services.

I left the conference feeling invigorated and ready to get back to work. Unfortunately, the journey home took away some of my steam. During my travels, I encountered an overheated bus, several cancelled flights, countless delays, a seedy hotel in Philly, hotel shuttles that never came, etc. It only took forty-seven hours of travel to get home. Atlantic City is a difficult location for a seminar, and not somewhere you want to be out after dark. However, the NALA Conference itself was definitely worth the trip!

I hope you all get a chance to attend a NALA Conference or our WDALA Fall Conference in-person someday. It is worth the trip if you take the time to visit other paralegals and learn about how versatile and integral we are to the legal profession. I am so proud of our organization and am grateful I had the opportunity to represent WDALA at the NALA Conference this year.



The banner features the NALA logo in large white letters on a dark blue background with a network of white dots and lines. Below the logo, the text 'THE PARALEGAL ASSOCIATION' is written in smaller white capital letters. At the bottom, 'CONFERENCE & EXPO' is written in large white capital letters. There are white rectangular bars on the left and right sides of the banner.

NALA

THE PARALEGAL ASSOCIATION

CONFERENCE & EXPO

NALA Conference 2025

By Holly A. Radke, ACP

I had the distinct honor of attending the 2025 NALA Conference & Expo in Atlantic City, New Jersey—an unforgettable experience that brought together legal professionals from across the country to celebrate a landmark occasion.

Although I've attended two NALA Conferences virtually in the past, this was my first time experiencing it in person—and wow, what a treat it was! If you ever get the opportunity to attend in person, take it—you won't be disappointed. I was truly blown away by the entire experience, from the sessions to the connections made. I'm incredibly grateful to WDALA for giving me the opportunity to be part of such an inspiring event, and I sincerely hope to attend in person again in the years to come.

The Conference was held at Harrah's Resort Atlantic City from July 10–12, 2025. This year's conference marked NALA's full return to in-person programming and commemorated its impressive 50th anniversary. With the inspiring theme, "Golden Legacy, Radiant Future," the event honored five decades of advancing the paralegal profession while looking ahead to its evolving role in the legal landscape.

Set in Atlantic City's lively Marina District, Harrah's provided a fittingly elegant venue for a packed agenda of professional development and celebration. Attendees could earn up to 12.5 CLE credits, with a wide range of sessions, practical workshops, and certification support designed to meet the needs of today's legal professionals. The workshops I attended included the following:

“Contracts in Concert: Music Industry Contracts” Presented by: Amber Simon, JD, LLM

Opinion: A significant portion of our legal practice involves Contract Law, so I found it especially valuable to explore how this new area of contract. While I may not directly apply this knowledge in my day-to-day work, the session offered fascinating insights into the various types of music contracts. The speaker used several Taylor Swift examples to illustrate the do’s and don’ts of contractual agreements—highlighting lessons learned from her own challenging legal battles. These real-world analogies made the concepts both engaging and easy to relate to.

“CP Review – Criminal Law” Presented by: Mekka Crawford-Franklin, Esq.

Opinion: Although I’ve already completed the CP exam, I chose to attend this CLE session because our office recently took on the city prosecution contract, and I wanted to deepen my understanding of Criminal Law. I appreciated that the session was clearly tailored to paralegals, which made it especially practical and relevant. While the content leaned a bit more toward the defense perspective than prosecution, I still gained valuable insights. The segments on the Criminal Case Timeline and Trial Preparation were particularly helpful. My favorite part, though, was the discussion on “red flags” in client statements—so relatable! Let’s just say... we’ve definitely heard it all! Haha!

“Feeding the Loan Shark: The Fair Debt Collection Practices Act” Presented by: Olivia Renfro, ACP

Opinion: I picked up some valuable insights on the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and best practices for handling interactions with debt collectors.

“The Digital Trial” Presented by: Terry Hale, ACP

Opinion: I truly hope we’ll be able to go fully digital in the near future! This session was incredibly informative—I learned a lot about presenting exhibits electronically and moving away from traditional trial binders.

“Establishing Parentage in Assisted Reproduction Cases” Presented by: Thomas James, Esq.

Opinion: Adoption law is my favorite area of practice, and I’ve even earned my Advanced Certified Paralegal (ACP) credential in Adoption and Assisted Reproduction. While I hadn’t encountered this specific type of adoption before, the session was incredibly helpful in expanding my knowledge. If a case involving assisted reproduction adoption ever comes through our office, I now feel much more confident and prepared to handle it.

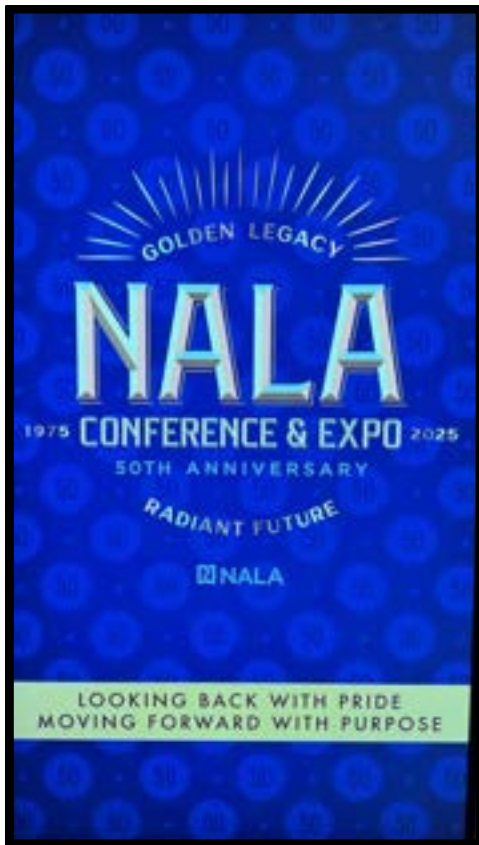
“Verbal and Written Communication Skills” Presented by: Terry Hale, ACP

Opinion: She was by far my favorite speaker of the conference! I attended three of her sessions and would absolutely take more in the future. Her teaching style was engaging, easy to follow, and packed with practical insights. I’m already starting to apply several things I learned in my daily work!

“How to Excel Your Spreadsheet Expertise” Presented by: Terry Hale, ACP

Opinion: I’ve taken several Excel CLEs before, and each time I walk away with even more knowledge! I couldn’t wait to get back to the office and start applying the new skills I picked up during this session.

SEMINAR



**“Guide to Legal Ops and Compliance”
Presented by: Dipo Akin-Deko**

Opinion: This session was quite interesting, even though it may not directly apply to our firm, as we’re a smaller practice and don’t represent large corporations facing these specific issues. That said, I still walked away with valuable compliance insights that can absolutely be applied within our own operations.

**“Get it Right and Keep it Tight: Legal Research and Writing” Presented by:
Olivia Renfroe, ACP**

Opinion: As a dog lover, I’ll admit I was a little distracted by the speaker’s dog during this session, but that didn’t stop me from learning some great tips on the do’s and don’ts of legal writing. She works as a paralegal for her attorney husband, and I really enjoyed the personal stories she shared as they added a fun and relatable touch to the session!

The Expo Hall was amazing!!! It was a hub of innovation and networking, featuring over 40 exhibitors and eight major sponsors showcasing cutting-edge legal tools and services. I got so much swag! Next time I will remember to pack another suitcase. Lol. The Affiliate Showcase, spotlighting NALA-affiliated associations, added a fun and interactive element, fostering deeper engagement and collaboration across regions.

A standout moment came on the evening of Friday, July 11, with a semi-formal Gala honoring NALA’s 50-year legacy. Nearly half of the attendees dressed for the occasion, enjoying an evening of dinner, dancing, and heartfelt reflection that captured the spirit of the organization and the vibrant community it supports.

Overall, this was an amazing and unforgettable experience, and I truly can’t wait to attend again in the future. I’m incredibly grateful to WDALA for giving me the opportunity to be part of it. Being a member of both WDALA and NALA has played such a meaningful role in my professional growth—I’ve come a long way in my career, and I’m excited for what’s ahead! Thank you WDALA!!!



NALA's 50th Anniversary
GALA



NALA's Conference & Expo



Ashley Miller, Holly Radke, Melissa Klimpel, and Melissa Hamilton



NALA's Past Presidents Debra L. Overstreet and Melissa J. Hamilton
Installing NALA's Board of Directors



NALA's Past Presidents: Debra L. Overstreet (2022-2024); Cassandra Oliver-Divens (2016-2018); Amy Hill (1996-1997); Jill I. Francisco (2018-2020); Kelly A. LaGrave (2014-2016); and Melissa J. Hamilton (2020-2022)



NALA's Past Presidents Debra L. Overstreet and Melissa J. Hamilton Installing Cheryl J. Nodarse as President, Peonca S. Grier as Vice President, Debby J. Sawyer as Secretary, and Vicki L. Kasper as Treasurer

Paralegal / Legal Assistants Day in ND

By Ashley Miller, ACP



We are proud to report that Governor Kelly Armstrong declared June 26, 2025, Paralegal / Legal Assistants Day in our great state of North Dakota. WDALA members worked with the Governor's administration to draft and request the proclamation to be signed by Governor Armstrong. On June 26, 2025, WDALA members met and had their photos taken with Governor Armstrong. We also had the pleasure of meeting Hank, Governor Armstrong's German Shorthair puppy. WDALA members also had photos taken with Attorney General Drew Wrigley. It was an honor to converse with these brilliant leaders of our state. Prior to our photos, WDALA members had a luncheon at Stonehome Brewery to celebrate our contributions to the community and the legal profession.



Madie McPherson, Megan Klym, Trisha Kinnischtzke, Melissa Hamilton, Governor Kelly Armstrong, Anna Heinen, Melissa Klimpel, Nicki Behm, and Ashley Miller

Paralegal/Legal Assistants Day



Madie McPherson, Melissa Hamilton, Anna Heinen, ND Attorney General Drew Wrigley, Ashley Miller, Melissa Klimpel, Nicki Behm, and Megan Klym

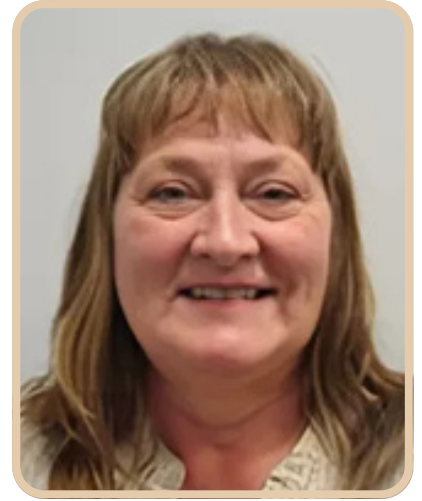
WDALA'S OFFICERS/EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS



President
Anna Heinen



1st Vice President
Melissa Hamilton, ACP



2nd Vice President
Kathy Johnson, CP



Secretary
ReBecka Wohl, ACP



Treasurer
Cassy Clark, CP



NALA Liaison
Ashley Miller, ACP



Region I Director &
Parliamentarian
Holly Radke, ACP



Region II Director
Andrea Johnson



Region III Director
Trisha Kinnischtzke

Annual Meeting

NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING

The annual meeting of WDALA will be held at the ND Heritage Center, 612 East Boulevard Avenue, Bismarck, North Dakota, on Wednesday, September 17, 2025 at 12:00 p.m. The purpose of the meeting is to elect officers, hear reports of officers and committee chairs, adopt a budget for the ensuing year, and hear other business which may come before the membership.

SLATE OF OFFICERS

Pursuant to Article XII of the Bylaws of WDALA, a slate of officers shall be presented to the membership thirty days prior to election. The following individuals have consented to have their names placed on the ballot for election of officers at the Annual Meeting of WDALA on September 17, 2025, at Bismarck, ND.

President	Anna Heinen
1 st Vice President	Melissa Hamilton, ACP
2 nd Vice President	Trisha Kinnischtzke
Secretary	
Treasurer	Cassy Clark, CP
NALA Liaison	Ashley Miller, ACP

Nominations from the floor shall be accepted and election shall be by majority vote of the members present, either in person or by individual proxy. The term of service shall be one year or until their successors have been elected or appointed and qualified.



1st Vice President's Report

Our dedicated WDALA Education Committee – Melissa Klimpel, ACP, Megan Klym, Dehan Schwan, Kimberly Perkuhn, Anna Heinen, and I have been hard at work planning for the WDALA Fall Seminar and Annual Meeting. We are finalizing an outstanding lineup of speakers and topics that will cover essential updates, ethics, legislative insights and investigative techniques. We are thrilled to share a sneak peek at some of our exciting lineup of speakers and topics:

- **Keynote: Updates to the North Dakota Court System:** *Chief Justice Jon J. Jensen*
- **ND Supreme Court Law Library and Self-Help Center:** *Catie Palsgraaf, J.D.*
- **Ethics:** *Kara Erickson, North Dakota Office of Disciplinary Counsel*
- **Updates from the 2025 Legislative Session:** *Dustin Richard, Liz Fordahl, Casey Orvedal, ND Legislative Council*
- **Drug/Arson Investigation:** *Special Agent Luke Kapella and Lee, North Dakota Bureau of Criminal Investigation*

Information on the remaining speakers and topics will be included in the seminar brochure.

We are excited to introduce Lee – he will be in attendance at the presentation!



Lee

Stay tuned to your inbox for the seminar brochure and get your registration in! We encourage you to share the brochure with other legal professionals in your area. The seminar will be submitted to NALA and SBAND for approval of CLE – be sure to remind your attorneys that they can attend the seminar in person or virtually to get those CLE credits completed by the next reporting period.

Melissa Hamilton, ACP



Treasurer's Report

As of July 14, 2025, I'm happy to report that the Western Dakota Association of Legal Assistants account balance stands at \$9,778.14. I hope everyone is enjoying their summer and is looking forward to our Fall Seminar!

Cassy Clark, CP

Reminders:

- Renew your WDALA Membership by 9/1/25
- Apply for WDALA's Scholarship Award by 9/1/25
- Register for WDALA's Fall Seminar by 9/1/25 (early bird rate)



NALA LIAISON'S REPORT

The NALA Conference and Expo 2025 was held July 10-12, 2025, in Atlantic City, New Jersey. Congratulations to Melissa Hamilton, ACP for receiving the President's Award for her continuing contributions to paralegal professionals around the nation. Congratulations to Melissa Klimpel, ACP for being elected the NALA Affiliated Associations Director for 2025-2026. And congratulations to the WDALA Education Committees over the past 40 years for their commitment to providing the best educational opportunities to our association, and other legal professionals both in-person and virtually. WDALA is doing great things locally and nationwide!

NALA Members, don't forget your \$80 education voucher can be used towards these CLE opportunities. The conference has a recording bundle each year of all of the CLE's offered if you're unable to attend in person. You can attend the courses you find interesting at your own pace. If you attend the conference in person, you get this benefit 100% FREE!

For those of you who are studying for the CP exam, NALA has a webinar to help you prepare for the skills portion of the CP exam. It is the IRAC method by Leanne the Lawyer. If you are studying for the exam, please watch this presentation on YouTube. I watched this several times prior to sitting for the exam and I believe it was the key to my success in the Skills Exam. If you have any questions about the CP exam or the ACP courses, please reach out to me. There are a lot of resources available to those who are studying for the exam.

Thank you, WDALA, for electing me to be your NALA liaison for this past year. It has been an honor serving you all in this position and representing our association at the conference as our liaison. I truly love encouraging others to gain their certification as it can be life changing. I'm looking forward to attending the next conference July 16-18, 2026 in my old hometown of Denver, Colorado.

Ashley Miller, ACP



Region III Report



WDALA's 14th annual Drug Court Picnic was held on Tuesday, June 17th at Sertoma Park in Bismarck. There were approximately 80 people in attendance which included the Drug Court participants and their families, the Drug Court team, the Supreme Court Justices, Judges, and Region III WDALA members.

A special thank you to the following Region III members and local businesses who donated food, money, time, etc.:

- Nicki Behm
- Cassy Clark
- Dickson Law Office
- Laurie Guenther
- Anna Heinen
- Melissa Hamilton
- Judge Carol Ronning Kapsner
- Melissa Klimpel
- Megan Klym
- Vicki Kunz
- Ashley Miller
- Candy Schafer
- Super Slide Amusement Park





Governor Kelly Armstrong declared Thursday, June 26, 2025, Legal Assistant/Paralegal Day. Following pictures, several Region III members were able to celebrate over lunch at Stonehome Brewing Company.

<https://www.ndcourts.gov/news/north-dakota/district-courts/general-news/june-26-2025-legal-assistant-paralegal-day>



Region III Members at Stonehome Brewing

Save the date! The 2025 WDALA Fall Seminar will be held September 16 and 17, 2025, at the North Dakota Heritage Center in Bismarck.

Region III will resume monthly lunch meetings in September after taking a break over the summer. Meetings are held over the noon hour at A&B Pizza South. We would love to have you join us!

If you have not, please consider volunteering for WDALA. We are always in need of committee volunteers – there is something for everyone!

Trisha Kinnischtzke

We Asked... You Answered

What is your LEAST favorite task to complete as a paralegal?

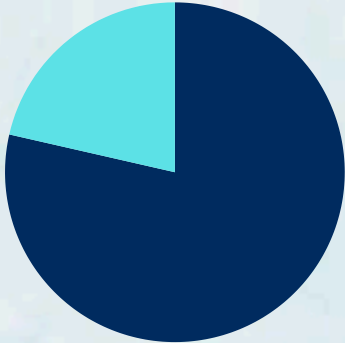
- Honestly, I hate making calls, especially to financial institutions.
- Saving all the pleadings and formal discovery served through the Court to client files.
- Deadlines! They are time consuming and I don't think our Attorneys look at them anyways.
- My least favorite task was putting together trial boxes.
- Billing. I really hate keeping track of my time. hahaha
- Proofing advance sheets before opinions get published in the North Western Reporter.
- My least favorite task as a Paralegal is attending several meetings in one day
- Medical record summaries (when it's over 50 entries of the same progress)
- Follow up calls requesting client medical records.
- Fingerprint cards
- Entering time.
- Interviews.

TASK



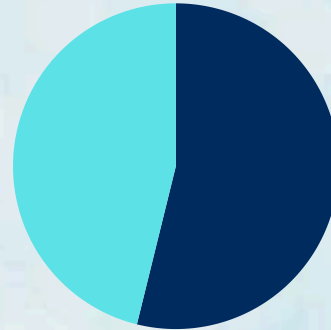
This or that ?

Relaxation
21.4%



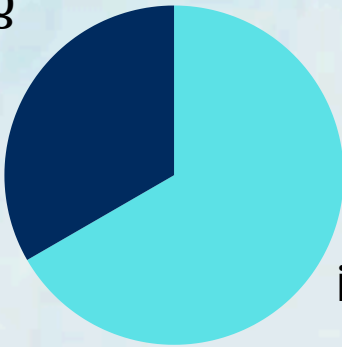
Adventure
78.6%

Social Time
46.2%



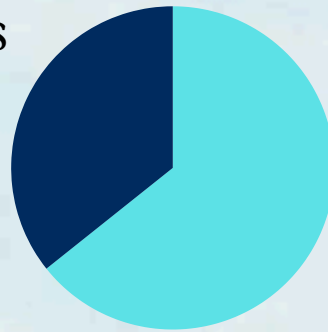
Alone Time
53.8%

Samsung
33.3%



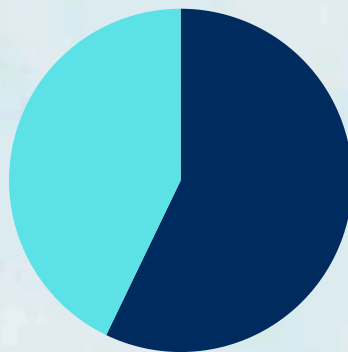
iPhone
66.7%

Movies
35.7%



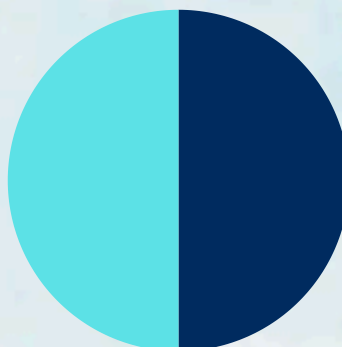
TV Shows
64.3%

Shopping In-Store
42.9%



Shopping Online
57.1%

Summer Olympics
50%



Winter Olympics
50%

WHAT IS SOMETHING YOU'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO DO BUT HAVEN'T DONE YET?



- Gone whitewater rafting.
- Go to Ireland.
- Take a trip along the East Coast.
- Travel to Norway and to Italy
- I would like to see the pyramids in Egypt.
- Retire...LOL!
- Fly an airplane.
- Traveled internationally
- Get a tattoo (my mom still does not agree with this dream ha ha)
- Live on lake property
- Travel to Ireland
- Travel to Alaska, Hawaii, and Europe
- Go deep sea fishing!

WE ASKED . . . YOU ANSWERED

Thank you to everyone who
submitted their answers.

Giveaway Winners!



Laurie Guenther



Candy Schafer



Anna Heinen (soon to be Jellesed)

WDALA SPONSORS

WDALA gratefully acknowledges the following sponsors for their generous support throughout 2025.

Olympic Level

Smith Porsborg Schweigert
Armstrong Moldenhauer & Smith

Gold Level

Revive Law Group

Silver Level

Knoll Leibel, LLP
Wheeler Wolf, LLP

Bronze Level

Yunker Law P.C.

WDALA's Committees

Auditing

Holly Radke, ACP and Becky Kocourek, CLA

CLA Chairman

Ashley Miller, ACP

Education

Melissa Hamilton, ACP (Chair);
Melissa Klimpel, ACP; Ashley Miller,
ACP; Megan Klym; Dehan Schwan;
Kimberly Perkuhn; and Anna Heinen

Ethics/Professional Development

Melissa Hamilton, ACP

Finance/Budget

Cassy Clark, CP (Chair)

Historian

Laurie Guenther, ACP

Legal Assistant Day

Ashley Miller, ACP and Shannon Barth

Membership

Kathy Johnson, CP (Chair); Anna Heinen; and ReBecka Wohl, ACP

Nominations/Elections

Andrea Johnson and Dehan Schwan

Public Relations

Melissa Klimpel, ACP (Summons Editor); Anna Heinen (Facebook & Website); Andrea Johnson; Melissa Hamilton, ACP; Stephanie Howe; and Candace Schafer

Sponsorship

Trisha Kinnischitzke and Cassy Clark, CP

State Bar/NDTLA Liaison

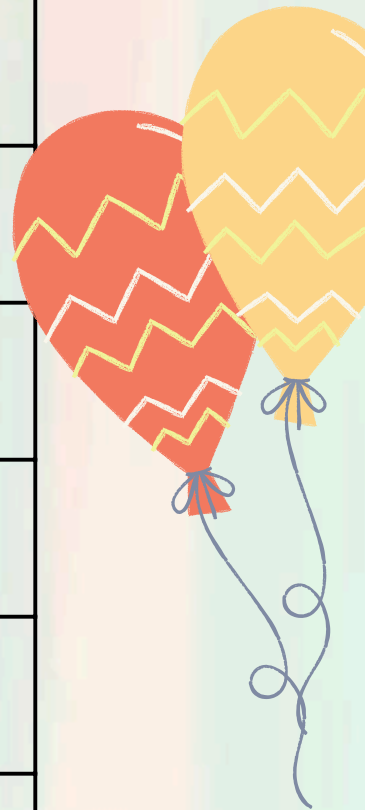
Ashley Miller, ACP

Student Liaison

Ashley Miller, ACP and ReBecka Wohl, ACP

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

August 9	Dianne Taix
August 11	Nathaniel Henjum
August 18	Tera Skaar
August 27	Tami Hulm
September 4	Candy Schafer
October 9	Dehan Schwan
October 15	Lindsey Lewis
October 22	Madison McPherson



A white rectangular sticky note is placed diagonally over a silver laptop keyboard. The note features the text "BE THE BEST VERSION OF YOU!" in a bold, purple, hand-drawn style font. The keyboard keys are visible in the background, including letters like 'W', 'E', 'S', 'A', 'Z', and function keys like 'F1', 'F2', 'F3', 'F4', 'F5', 'F6', 'F7', 'F8', 'F9', 'F10', 'F11', 'F12'. The overall image conveys a message of self-improvement and personal growth.

IF YOU CHANGE
NOTHING
NOTHING WILL
CHANGE