Judge Engages Class With Trip to District Court
By: Alicia Erlich, Fall 2008 Alumna

For nine months as an evening student I studied night after night trying to cram as much legal knowledge as I could, but one question lingered: how does a paralegal student gain hands-on experience before completing the program? The answer: A class field trip!

On Saturday April 18, 2009, Criminal Law instructor Judge Francis Ricigliano arranged for my class to visit the District Court in Hempstead to observe morning arraignments in lieu of our lecture. We were given a tour of the building, including the Judge’s chambers and courtroom, and brief overviews of the day-to-day routine (jury selection, clerks’ notes, calendar, etc.).

Following our behind-the-scenes tour, we entered the courtroom where arraignments were being held for those arrested the night before. We quietly took our seats in the first two rows as the Judge whispered a quick rundown of the court process and the bio of the Nassau County District Court judge presiding over it. We observed the appointment of the legal aid attorneys; how the judge asked the defendant questions to determine bail; where the defendants are held; and the date, time, and location of the next scheduled court appearance. Some family members openly addressed the court and, although some outbursts occurred, they were promptly resolved.

The important purpose of these academic field trips is to gain insight into the application of what is learned in the classroom. Witnessing the interactions between the judge, defendant’s counsel, the Nassau County Assistant District Attorneys and all the other personnel involved is an experience my classmates and I will never forget. As a graduate of Hofstra’s Paralegal program, I strongly feel that trips like these will give future students a better understanding of what they will encounter in their careers.

Judge Francis Ricigliano, Judge of the Nassau County District Court and Criminal Law paralegal instructor, with the Summer Evening 2009 class outside the courthouse.
Hofstra ‘09 Paralegal Certificate graduates are an enthusiastic group of individuals who are committed to making successful careers in the legal field, despite the current economic challenges facing job seekers. Stuart Atias is a Spring ‘09 graduate who is making the most of his former experience in the mortgage business. After 20 years he had done it all: going from entry level to Vice President, handling underwriting, operations and secondary marketing. Combining these credentials with his recently acquired paralegal skills, he has made a successful leap into a new and promising career with the prestigious firm, Rosicki, Rosicki and Associates.

It all began with a little soul searching. Twenty years of mortgage banking seemed like enough and when his last employer closed up shop in late 2007, Stuart hoped to transition into a new career utilizing his recently acquired Master of Arts in theology from the Seminary of the Immaculate Conception. Several intriguing opportunities presented themselves; however the Church was not immune to the economic challenges that had devastated the rest of the job market in 2008. With a wife and young son, securing a position in a new career was paramount, and he realized that combining his vast experience in the mortgage industry with Hofstra’s Paralegal program was the ideal direction to take.

Stuart explained that his choice of Hofstra was based on the free information session. The session not only described the paralegal profession, career path, and studies, but also displayed a personal interest in each individual student’s success. The class instructors are all practicing attorneys and sitting judges, who would be able and willing to mentor and guide the new students.

Stuart didn’t know what good fortune was just around the corner for him. The instructors are truly accessible for consultation or just general conversation before and after class, as well as during the midpoint break. A casual conversation with Nassau County Supreme Court Justice Stephen A. Bucaria, who teaches Contract Law, became the link to his current position as a Litigation Paralegal at Rosicki and Rosicki. Justice Bucaria learned about Stuart’s background and contacted a colleague of an acquaintance at Rosicki and Rosicki.

Upon final reflection, Stuart notes that the comprehensive paralegal studies curriculum that the Hofstra program teaches comes into play at various times on the job. He remarked that no adage about change being the only constant in life is extremely applicable in the field of foreclosure law. Not only are laws and judicial philosophies constantly evolving, but each county – and in many cases, each individual judge – has a set of rules and procedures that must be met.

Stuart described so many positive attributes of his position, I felt there must be some challenges that he faces. Keeping up with ever-changing legislative and judicial requirements in the foreclosure realm seems to be his biggest challenge. The old adage about change being the only constant in life is extremely applicable in the field of foreclosure law. Not only are laws and judicial philosophies constantly evolving, but each county – and in many cases, each individual judge – has a set of rules and procedures that must be met.

Stuart’s success in his new job is the amalgam of the right opening, at the right time for his particular skills and experience supported by his Hofstra paralegal education. As an individual, Stuart brings his cooperative nature and his service-oriented spirit to his position. He clearly presents himself as a team player, willing to listen, learn and apply himself to the needs of his colleagues, superiors and to the firm’s mission.

Upon final reflection, Stuart notes that the comprehensive paralegal studies curriculum that the Hofstra program teaches comes into play at various times on the job. He remarked that no part of the law exists in a void; it all builds upon itself. What he learned in Contracts directly impacts what was taught in Civil Litigation, while the sections on Bankruptcy as well as Wills, Trusts and Estates are frequently overlaid into a litigated foreclosure action. Stuart has combined the best of what Hofstra offers to each and every student with his own innate talent, fortitude and dedication to become a successfully employed paralegal in this new economic era.
The Networking and Schmoozing workshop given by the Hofstra Career Center provided valuable information for Hofstra University students. The two presenters, Fred Burke, Executive Director of the Hofstra Career Center, and Stefano Fasulo, Assistant Dean for University Advisement, provided an engaging PowerPoint presentation that explained in depth answers to the two pressing questions we all ask ourselves. “What is Networking?” and “What is Schmoozing?”

Networking is a process of developing and maintaining contacts and personal connections with a variety of people to benefit you and your career. It is an important aspect of career management that is consistently cited as the number one way to obtain a new job. When searching for a job, networking provides a way to keep track of career opportunities in your own firm and in other firms as well as provide insider knowledge of pending developments that may affect your firm and possibly you and your colleagues. Plus, knowledge shared with colleagues regarding industry trends can become valuable expertise that in the future you can tap into when you need extra support.

The benefits of networking with people who can be helpful to you should be backed up with current updated contact information, frequent friendly communication, and the all important note of gratitude for assistance and service with the offer to extend reciprocal support when requested.

Schmoozing is a more informal and pleasurable way of connecting with people. Connecting with people builds relationships that need to be maintained in order to reap the most benefit from them. This type of resource provides a web of people whom you know, whom you can call, and who can, in turn, call you for mutual benefit and shared enjoyment. Schmoozing is a way of life and is a fundamental skill to learn.

This presentation emphasized the importance of networking and schmoozing as critical for both securing an internship and conducting job search.

Being comfortable in social settings and the willingness to interact with people are vital to building and sustaining positive relationships that will support you now and throughout your career. This is the time to get involved with clubs, community activities, sports, church activities, and professional groups to develop those essential relationships. Be Active!

The presentation also discussed the informational interview as an opportunity to pose career questions to a qualified individual who might help you learn more about a position/job or career. In conclusion, the most important step is to always follow up with individuals that can help you. Keeping in touch after your initial contact is critical to building a strong, lasting, professional relationship.

Networking and schmoozing are about building alliances in one’s career search. They involve strong inter-and intra-personal skills that not only enhance the job search but provide essential tools that can help build and strengthen a career. Whether you use electronic resources or attend functions with a variety of individuals, it is important, especially in this economic climate, to establish a strong network that you can rely on in your job search.

Service to the Community
Your opinion counts ...

Hofstra Paralegals want to contribute to the local community in a relevant and significant manner. Suggestions for our support included working for Habitat for Humanity or Schneider’s Children’s Hospital but other options are open for consideration.

Do you have a favorite local organization or community outreach that you would like us to band together and support with our time and effort? Contact us or better yet, come to the next meeting and tell us about it. We are ready and willing to serve.

SPEAK UP, WE ARE LISTENING...

The Hofstra Paralegal program values your comments and suggestions for additional studies that will make it the premier paralegal educational resource on Long Island.

Hofstra supports you in the beginning of your professional studies, but we want to continue to be there for your future needs. Please suggest topics about which you would like to learn more. We are listening.

To contact us with your suggestions please email Seth.Liebstein@hofstra.edu or call (516) 463 7800
This Continuing Paralegal Education (CPE) course provides an in-depth study of criminal proceedings involving Driving While Intoxicated (DWI) charges and the collateral issues and ramifications stemming from a DWI arrest and conviction. This three (3) Saturday morning, 12 hour seminar is open to paralegals, paralegal students, and members of the general public who desire a better understanding of how New York law deals with the nationwide epidemic of drunk and impaired driving.

Instructor: Honorable Francis Ricigliano, a St. John’s University School of Law graduate, has served as a Judge of the Nassau County District Court for eight years, and as an Acting County Court Judge. Judge Ricigliano has presided over numerous hearings and trials in the District Court’s “DWI” Part 7. The Judge is a frequent lecturer on DWI issues and other criminal matters.

I. An explanation of the various changes applicable to Driving While Intoxicated or Impaired by Drugs (“DWI”), including Driving While Impaired, Driving While Intoxicated per se, Driving While Intoxicated (common law), Aggravated Driving While Intoxicated, Driving While Impaired by Drugs, Driving While Under the Combined Influence of Alcohol and Drugs, Reckless Endangerment, Vehicular Manslaughter, etc.

II. An analysis of the issues pertaining to a DWI stop and arrest, including officer observations, standardized field sobriety tests, the breathalyzer test, blood draws and refusals.

III. Arraignment and license suspension procedures including mandatory license suspension, discretionary license suspensions, hardship hearings, conditional licenses and DMV hearings.

IV. Pre-Trial proceedings with an emphasis on preparation of discovery demands, omnibus motions and related motions for discovery and preparation of lay and expert witness.

V. The DWI trial and the paralegal’s role in preparation of trial books, jury selection and trial procedure.

VI. Collateral consequences of DWI convictions, child endangerment issues, immigration matters, civil ramifications of a DWI conviction, etc.

TOTAL COST INCLUDING MATERIALS: $299

To register, please call (516) 463 7800 or visit ce.hofstra.edu/paralegal

Class Schedule:

- Saturday, March 6: 9 a.m.–1 p.m.
- Saturday, March 20: 9 a.m.–1 p.m.
- Saturday, March 27: 9 a.m.–1 p.m.