



Laura Ahtes: Paralegal, Potter Anderson & Corroon, LLP, Wilmington, DE

[By Judith Earley]

For Laura Ahtes, education was the lucky charm that launched her career. After obtaining her degree from Goldey-Beacom College and graduating with honors from the ABA-approved Paralegal Certificate Program through the Legal Education Institute (LEI) at Widener University, she has never looked back. Widener University has a long-standing reputation for providing quality legal education to paralegals and legal nurse consultants.

Ahtes has been a paralegal in the bankruptcy field for 17 years and is currently a bankruptcy paralegal for Potter Anderson & Corroon, LLP, in Wilmington, DE. The primary focus of its bankruptcy practice is representation in “mega” Chapter 11 cases of creditors’ committees, individual creditors (including banks and other financial institutions, landlords, equipment lessors, and trade creditors), debtor-in-possession financiers, acquirers, and shareholders, with occasional work for debtors and/or trustees and plan administrators.

As she provides support services to the bankruptcy attorneys on an assigned-case basis, Ahtes’ responsibilities are considerable. Said Ahtes, “My duties include the daily review and drafting of legal pleadings and correspondence, reviewing case docket sheets, assisting in preference/adversary action litigation, organizing discovery documents, updating the firm bankruptcy database system, retrieving case law as directed by attorney, and assisting with briefs and memoranda.”

This is but the tip of the iceberg. The group also counsels clients in out-of-court restructuring/workouts, foreclosures on mortgages, and other liens; state law receiverships; and secured transactions. “There is never the same thing every day. The deadlines are challenging and exciting. The bankruptcy field is fast-paced, diverse, and complex. I recommend the bankruptcy field to any paralegal looking to switch into a different specialty area! This field is most rewarding,” added Ahtes.

According to Ahtes, one of those challenges is keeping abreast of national and local rules

(including the recently amended federal rules), procedures, and forms in all jurisdictions. A bankruptcy paralegal must be knowledgeable regarding all recent changes in order to thoroughly assist attorneys on a daily basis.

In 1999, Ahtes passed the Paralegal Advanced Competency Exam (PACE) and received her Registered Paralegal (RP) designation. She was approved as a Delaware Certified Paralegal (DCP) by the Delaware Paralegal Association in 2005 and was approved as an American Alliance Certified Paralegal (AACP) in May 2006.

But Ahtes has never been content with merely excelling within the four walls of her office. A few of her numerous outside accomplishments include active membership in the Delaware Paralegal Association for the past 17 years, a seat on the Board of Directors as the Education Director for the American Alliance of Paralegals, Chair of the Delaware State Bar Association’s Paralegal Committee, and membership on the Widener University’s LEI Paralegal Program Advisory Board.

According to Ahtes, an important issue for both paralegals and their employers is embracing the concept of continuing legal education. “It is extremely beneficial for paralegals to keep expanding their knowledge and professionalism. This only guarantees success for the employer, as well as the paralegal,” said Ahtes. This concept is not unrelated to a few other issues for Ahtes. These are the certification and regulation of paralegals, the continuing expansion of the profession, and their recognition as professionals.

Ahtes encourages all paralegals to join local and national paralegal associations. “By volunteering time toward a committee or an event, or just by being a member, you are contributing to the paralegal profession as a whole by supporting your career and profession—not to mention the networking and informational pool available to you as a paralegal,” said Ahtes. As a matter of example, she learned of the position she holds now through networking with peers from the Delaware Paralegal Association.

In her 17 years as a paralegal, Ahtes has been witness to the evolution of the field, including the title change from legal assistant to paralegal; and she says she that if she had it all to do over, she would change absolutely nothing. “I am pleased with my career as a paralegal and wouldn’t change a thing!” said Ahtes. “As for all those bumps and potholes in the road, well, I needed to learn from mistakes and criticism to become who I am and have the opportunity for success. So, I wouldn’t trade those times in for anything.”

Ahtes lives in the suburban community of Bear, DE, with her husband, Steven, and six-year-old daughter, Peyton Jayne. She unwinds in the evenings by reading historical and regency novels, but says what she really lives for are extended family dinners on Sundays with her mother and sister, where “the food is great and the laughter brings tears!”

And her advice for students who are preparing to become paralegals?

“We are all unique. Each one of us has special talents and abilities we add to the tapestry



of the legal community," said Ahtes. "Never accept the limits of labels that would rob the world of your abilities. If your success is not on your own terms—if it looks good to the world but does not feel good in your heart—it is not success."

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Potter Anderson & Corroon, LLP
www.pacdelaware.com

Delaware Paralegal Association
www.deparalegals.org

American Alliance of Paralegals
www.aapipara.org