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WINTER 2026

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## President's Message

### A Resolution For 2026

Earlier this year, I had the privilege to welcome ILCRA's new board members to service. I sent an email of welcome to the board with a brief outline of their duties in their respective roles, and I encouraged them to share their activities with the board promoting ILCRA so they could be highlighted. I told them, "If you won't toot your own horn, we'll do it for you." As I was putting my thoughts together for this article, it's that sentiment that came back to mind.

I hereby summon the trumpets to all of you, the court reporters and captioners in Illinois. Each and every one of you needs to be acknowledged and recognized. You've tackled the technical expert depositions with skill and grace. You've maintained composure with gut-wrenching testimony. You've refereed proceedings with absolute professionalism. You've worked all night to deliver a quality product in the morning and then did it all again the next day. You've acted as the ears for the deaf, and your transcripts have been the voices of the parties at the appellate court and beyond. You've helped other reporters. You've mentored students. You've given of your time, skill, and



money to the industry in whatever way you could. You've pulled through exhaustion to meet the standards of being a Certified Shorthand Reporter. You have documented history, and you've made it look easy.

We are trained to be the quiet ones in the room, but this skill and dedication to the license is ripe for the world to know. It's not vanity. It's visibility. It's not ego. It's professional evidence of the value a skilled reporter provides.

Certifications earned, real-time skills, high-profile or technical cases handled, years of experience, mentoring efforts, or volunteer roles all demonstrate competence and commitment. Be proud of yourself.

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It's visibility.  
It's not ego.  
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- **Works** to maintain your right to be certified.
- **Monitors, promotes, and lobbies** to pass legislation favorable to the interest of court reporters, captioners and CART providers.
- **Monitors** legislation affecting our professions on a statewide and national basis through both our Legislative Committee and our lobbyist.
- **Sponsors** an annual conference and one-day seminars including continuing education and the latest in reporting technology.
- **Publishes** *Ad Infinitum*, a quarterly online newsletter containing the newest up-to-the-minute reporting developments throughout the state, highlights of board meetings, advertisements of vendors and agency owners, and names and telephone numbers of ILCRA officers.
- **Serves** as an affiliated state unit of the [National Court Reporters Association](#).
- **Offers** members significantly reduced rates for the conventions and seminars.
- **Awards** Student Scholarships, a Distinguished Service Award, an Award of Excellence for an Outstanding Educator, and conducts [speed contests](#) each year.
- **Provides** resources on the ILCRA website, including the CSR Act, Court Reporters' Act, Rules and Regulations of the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation, Transcript Act, and ILCRA Bylaws. It also includes officers' names and contact information as well as Committees and Committee Members. ILCRA Member Information is included on the website under "Find a Reporter."
- **Offers** an Online Student Mentor Program.
- **Promotes** student recruitment.
- **Organizes** letter-writing campaigns on issues affecting our professions.
- **Sends** representative members to legislative boot camps, leadership conferences, and the national convention for training and education.
- **Provides** reporters for demonstrations on request and attends career days throughout the state.
- **Provides** free CART brochures to its members.
- **Provides** a court reporters network through Constant Contact which allows ILCRA to immediately be in touch with members via email.
- **Serves** the membership with the phone number 703-729-4861 and a [website](#).
- **Provides** an association management company to assist members.

### ILCRA MISSION STATEMENT

***To maintain standards of excellence in verbatim shorthand reporting, to provide continuing educational opportunities and advocate technological advancements, and to promote a spirit of mutual assistance between the profession of verbatim shorthand reporting and its consumers.***



## President's Message

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Now, let's talk about it – no, let's shout it. You've done what being a court reporter has required, but current times are demanding more.

For a 2026 professional resolution, I challenge you to get the word out about court reporting, your skill,

your abilities, your achievements. Bring awareness about yourself, the professional services you offer, court reporting in general, promote the A to Z program, a new certification you've earned, maybe even just your availability. A little blurb on your email signature stating your years of experience,

experience, a quick social medial post about your new writer, printing information on the back of your business cards are all ways you can show your investment in the field, increase public awareness about court reporting, its longevity, its advancements. Progress begins with small, deliberate actions, and I look forward to hearing and seeing that progress from this resolution. This awareness campaign will tell the world court reporters haven't gone anywhere. We have advanced our skills, tools, and knowledge to meet current demands. We have maintained our ethical standards. We are the cutting-edge technology as we have been all along to make the record.

**The Dalai Lama said, "If you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito."**

Illinois Court Reporters Association

# WE RISE BY LIFTING OTHERS

## BE A MENTOR

### JOIN ILCRA'S LIST OF MENTORS FOR OUR ONLINE MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

- Many mentors report high levels of job satisfaction and a sense of purpose from "paying it forward."
- Mentors often learn about new technologies and fresh perspectives from their mentees.
- Mentoring ensures that critical knowledge is passed on, allowing senior reporters to leave a lasting impact on the field.
- Send a quick note to the address below about your interest in participating as a mentor, include your contact info, whether you are a freelancer, official, or CART captioner, and we'll be in touch soon.

CONTACT@ILCRA.ORG



Every voice counts, so don't think you don't. Even the Dalai Lama said, "If you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito," an experience we can probably all relate to. Let's endeavor to lift court reporting to new professional heights, lifting the field another step to keep any competition further behind. Illinois reporters can do this; I'm confident of that. ILCRA also has exciting new things on the horizon to help, so watch for our future announcements, too.

I wish you all health, happiness, and prosperity in 2026, and I look forward to seeing you all soon.

*Lorie*

# A Different Approach to New Year's Resolutions



**Georgia Northway,  
RPR, CCR-MO, CSR-IL  
Executive Director  
(In Training)**

Whether you set out every January to bring change into your life, or you've given up completely on New Year's resolutions, I want to offer a different approach to implementing change for the next 12 months, the timing, and harmonizing our desire to change and evolve with the natural world around us.

Stating the obvious, January is about dead-center of the winter season. We are deep into a time of hibernation, staying indoors – every living thing is right in the middle of a metabolic slowdown. The trees have shed their leaves to focus on their roots underground, and certain types of animals take shelter for extended periods of time in dens or caves, entering into long periods of rest with little to no physical activity.

So if you've resolved to change something in your life starting on January 1, and by January 30 you are long over trying to make good on any resolution you promised yourself, it's not because you lack determination or because you are destined to live with what no longer serves you; you might just be working against the current of your own biology and the natural timing of the earth and its seasons, and that is a strong current to fight against.

We are in the season of rest, recuperation, and allowing for slowness and stillness when possible, daydreaming without pressure, and clarifying for ourselves what we're ready to let go of in order to bring in something new.

This period of January through March is the time for planting the seeds of change you would like to see take root and blossom into your life. What if you used these next couple months to get really clear on what it is you want for yourself, for your family, your career, and how you want to be able to reflect on 2026 by next December. What do you desire to accomplish this year? When you look back 12 months from now, what would you like to say you've achieved for this year? Remember, too, it doesn't have to be grand or outwardly visible. It just has to matter to you.

For myself, 2026 is the year I obtain my CRR certification. Part of me really wants to jump on signing up to test in February, but I'm going to heed my own advice here and wait until spring.

Like I mentioned, the winter season is the period where the human body is directly affected by the colder weather and less exposure to natural sunlight, which can also increase our exposure to fluorescent and LED lighting (but we won't talk about that here).

Using a sleep cycle as a metaphor for the four seasons, January might be akin to the middle of the night. I know I am setting myself up for failure if I were to test right around the deepest part of my sleep cycle! But in May, maybe that feels more like midmorning in this analogy. Plus, it gives me time to prepare.

Because the next few months won't be spent simply wishing for that certification. Having a clear goal in mind, I can take small steps every day to prepare for what I want to accomplish for myself professionally. Maybe you've created to-do lists for yourself in the past, but something even more beneficial to your subconscious is an "I am doing" list.

So the goal is set – pass the CRR this year. What do I need to do to get there? And how can I encourage my brain and my body to get on board with this goal?

Here is my "I am doing" list for passing the CRR this year. The things I need to do for myself on a regular basis are short and concise, and written

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**THINGS I am doing**

- I engage in 15 minutes of quality practice a day for the CRR
- I make good choices for my health so I can reatire at work with ease
- I am giving my best every day to meet my goals
- I forgive myself easily when I fall short, and I allow myself to start again each morning
- I am celebrating daily wins
- I am learning valuable lessons from imperfection

# Court Reporters Vent Uncensored: Holiday Edition



**By Brad Benjamin,  
RPR, CSR,  
President-Elect**

Today, if I'm really motivated, I will take my machine out and practice writing 2026 in one stroke. If I'm feeling slightly more ambitious, I will practice writing 2027 in one stroke as well. Might as well

start now. If I'm still feeling ambitious after that, I will practice writing every other word I know because my last job was December 17th, and I am starting to freak out.

The holidays are frustrating for me. In the years that I was reporting leading up to 2020, I had come to accept the fact that I might be a little rusty at the beginning of each new year. The onset of Zoom brought an opportunity to take jobs here and there over the holidays and maintain my skills.

This leads us to the subject of practice. I've discussed how working for a Hollywood screenwriter played a big part in how I got started in this profession. I was working for him in December of 2003 when he offered me a sizable bonus to cut my holiday short and fly back to Los Angeles from Florida where I was visiting family. He had just finalized a deal with a studio to rewrite an action/thriller and needed my help to type up the screenplay as he dictated, a task that could easily be accomplished by Zoom today.

My first day back I found myself working on random projects and handling other office-related tasks instead of addressing the urgent project I had traveled all the way back to do. When I questioned my boss

about why we were not focused on the rewrite, he looked up and said "Oh. The money hasn't come in for that yet." I suggested perhaps we get started so that, when the money comes in, we'll be ahead of the game. He stopped what he was doing, turned to face me, smiled, and said something I would never forget: "No payee, no writee."

I've held on to this mantra and made it my own in the field of court reporting. If I'm not getting paid, the machine stays in the bag. It certainly isn't that I have the type of ego to say "I don't get out of bed for less than" – you pick the amount. It seems to be that while I still have passion to build speed, maintain accuracy, and generally improve my skills, apparently little of this passion exists when I'm not getting paid.

But court reporting for me has never been like riding a bike. After four days off the machine I feel my skills slowly start to degrade, and now, as you can imagine, the holiday stress is really kicking in. I've been through this before and will go through it again. After one or two – or perhaps seven jobs, I will be back up to speed – literally. I just wish that one year there was a way to really take a break and truly not think about work for at least a week, because now that the holidays are coming to an end, I need a vacation ■

## A Different Approach

*Continued from page 4*

in present tense so when I read this to myself, I hear it as though it's happening right now. That sends a strong message to my subconscious that this isn't something intangible that might happen in the future. It is stated as though it's already a part of my life.

This would be the type of list I would create for myself and place it somewhere I would see it every day. This one is going on the refrigerator at home to maximize my contact with my roadmap to my goals. Even if I don't actually read it, my subconscious will pick up on its presence every time I walk by or open the fridge door, and that is an incredibly powerful reminder to keep myself on the right track.

Whether I'm actively reading this list or I'm just glancing at it as I pass by, I have created a visual tool that prompts me to make good choices, to prioritize quality practice sessions, and forgive myself when I fall short.

Whatever you hope for your 2026, I am certainly wishing you the best of it. May your fingers be ever faster than your speaker! ■

# Building Lasting Connections at ILCRA Conferences — A Look Back at the ILCRA 2025 Convention

**By Heather Perkins-Reiva,  
BSRR, RDR, CRR  
ILCRA Region 1 Official Representative**

Each year, the Illinois Court Reporters Association (ILCRA) brings together professionals from across the state to learn, grow, and advocate for the court reporting, CART, and captioning professions. But beyond the seminars, certification updates, and skill-building sessions, ILCRA conferences offer something equally transformative: the opportunity to build long-lasting professional connections and friendships.

## **A Community Rooted in Shared Purpose**

Whether you're a student just entering the field or a seasoned reporter with decades of experience, there's something powerful about walking into a room full of people who truly understand your world. The shorthand jokes, the battle stories from the courtroom or deposition suite, the shared commitment to accuracy and integrity—it's a bond that goes deeper than job titles.

At an ILCRA conference, that bond becomes the starting point for relationships that often extend far beyond the weekend. You're not just collecting business cards—you're connecting with people who speak your professional language and care deeply about the same issues you do.

## **More Than Networking—It's Relationship Building**

Some of the most meaningful professional relationships start with a simple introduction at an ILCRA event. A conversation at a lunch table or between sessions can spark collaborations, mentorships, and even career-changing opportunities.

Veteran reporters offer valuable wisdom, while newer members bring fresh energy and ideas—creating a cycle of mutual support that strengthens the profession as a whole. These relationships may lead to job referrals, professional partnerships, or even the kind of phone-a-friend support that gets you through a tough day.

## **A Safe Space to Learn and Grow**

One of the most powerful aspects of ILCRA's conferences is the supportive, inclusive atmosphere. These events create a safe space to ask questions, share challenges, and celebrate successes. Whether you're navigating a difficult transcript, considering a move into CART or captioning, or exploring new tech tools, there's always someone willing to share their experience or lend an encouraging word.

The friendships forged at ILCRA events are more than professional—they're personal. They remind us that while court reporting can be a solitary job, we're never alone in the journey.

## **The ILCRA Difference**

ILCRA's mission is to promote excellence and integrity in court reporting, CART, and captioning throughout Illinois—and that mission is embodied in every handshake, every shared laugh, and every new connection made at its conferences. These gatherings are not just events on a calendar—they're catalysts for personal growth, professional advancement, and community building.

So the next time you pack your steno machine and head to an ILCRA conference, remember: you're not just showing up for CEUs—you're showing up for your future, your colleagues, and yourself. And who knows? The person sitting next to you might just become your next great professional ally—or even a lifelong friend. ■

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# Steno: A Journey Worth Taking at Any Age

**By Sara Sapp,  
RPR, CSR-IL, CCR-MO, CCR-WA  
ILCRA Region 2 Official Representative**

I don't know all of you very well yet, and I'm assuming some of you may not know much about me. I'm a fairly recent newcomer to the court reporting profession. I just got certified in early 2025. I've been a member of ILCRA since I was a student, and I'm really excited to jump right in and contribute by serving on the board as an official rep now that I have my CSR.

Another thing you may not know about me yet: I'm old. Okay, not like, mega-old or anything. But kinda old. I'm old enough to remember watching Alf on TV. I'm old enough to remember life without a computer at home, let alone social media or cell phones. I am also old enough to not care to listen to anyone who thinks you can't change directions a bit later in life if you want to.

As a young adult, I was never completely certain what I really wanted to do. I think that's because I wanted to experience EVERYTHING. I had major FOMO. I wanted to do all the jobs and learn all the stuff about all the things. And to an extent, that's what I did. I don't regret it one bit. I've done some really cool things. But no one was mentioning court reporting when I was in high school and college. I never heard a single thing about it. When I stumbled into the legal field, I finally was in a position to notice this profession. And, when I learned what steno was, I knew I had discovered my way to learn all the things about all the stuff. Or at least a lot of stuff and things.

So I went back to school. I kept working my full-time job. I was a homeowner and fully adulting while I was in CR school. A lot of students in my classes were younger than me, but I didn't care. In the end, I'm one of two from my beginning theory class of 18 that made it. Today, we have social media so I was able to see that I wasn't the only older weirdo learning steno. There weren't a ton of us, but there were some. And I was able to see that we all kind of ended up there for similar reasons. We saw something special in this career that was worth switching gears and working super hard for.

Our life and responsibilities were different than a lot of other students. We didn't all start in our late teens or early 20s with no job and no kids. I am absolutely not implying there's anything wrong with that. But I'm saying that now we have students coming from everywhere and every walk of life. When, previously, a struggling student may have quietly just decided to call it quits and try something else, we now can support and encourage each other from all over the country a lot more easily. And that's exactly what we did.

Now I'm going to tell you why being a new reporter while simultaneously being an older human is both awesome and slightly terrifying. When you walk in a courtroom (or a depo, etc.), people seem to trust you a bit more simply because you look more like an adult. Granted, people always think I'm younger than I actually am, but I think I've finally moved past the phase of being literally mistaken for a child (I'm serious, you guys, like, more than once). I still laugh to myself when the judge calls me Madam Court Reporter. Like..... LOLOLOL MADAM. What even is that? But, no matter how much imposter syndrome I feel that day, if I dress the part and act like I'm a seasoned pro, they believe it. They don't know that I'm going through all the same things internally as a new court reporter. They don't know that I've never heard these legal terms and cites and acronyms they're throwing around. They don't know that it takes me longer to edit their transcript than someone who started reporting 20 years before I did.

I also feel like I'm a bit better at going with the flow than some of my younger colleagues. That's not their fault, and they're not doing anything wrong. I just mean I have more of a foundation in the professional world. I already know how to dress in a courtroom. I already know how to make my own spreadsheets and invoices and keep track of my workload and organize to make things easier on myself. I already know a lot of medical and legal terminology from my prior working life. I have more experience interacting with people from all different walks of life, problem solving, making and owning and learning from my mistakes, etc. I definitely do not know all the things about all the stuff. But I feel like I'm approaching this career from a more stable place than I would have in my early 20s. Successfully or not, I am adulting.

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# SPOTLIGHT



**By Greg Weiland,  
CSR-IL, RDR, CRR  
ILCRA Immediate Past  
President**

This is the first installment in a new series for Ad Infinitum to honor and highlight ILCRA's amazing members. Many thanks to the incredible Tammi Sefranek for agreeing to participate and share her story. If you would like to be featured in the Member Spotlight or if you know someone who should be featured, please email me at [gweilandcrr@gmail.com](mailto:gweilandcrr@gmail.com).

## MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: Tamara "Tammi" Sefranek

*Court Reporter – United States House of Representatives  
Resides in Alexandria, Virginia  
ILCRA Member for 35 years – Board treasurer from 2021 – 2023*

**GREG: Why did you choose to become a court reporter? Tell us about your career leading to your current assignment at the House of Representatives.**

**TAMMI:** Why did I choose court reporting? I feel like it really chose me! I loved doing shorthand, which I learned in high school. My first job out of high school was for a local law firm, and I used my shorthand daily to take letters from my boss. We would hire court reporters to come in for depositions, and I sat down with one of them and asked questions and thought, this would be awesome! I did not start court reporting school until many years later, in 1987, and I went to Triton College in River Grove, IL. I've been a court reporter for about 35 years now! I've held many different positions over those years. First I was a freelancer in Chicago, then I went to DuPage County Courthouse for six years or so, then I decided to do closed captioning and

CART, which I did for over 20 years! Then I decided to make a leap and interviewed for a Federal Officialship in Washington, DC. I interviewed virtually, and they hired me! I moved my entire life from Illinois to DC and then got the call to interview at the House of Representatives and, amazingly, was offered the job! Obviously, I took it!

**GREG: What certifications do you hold, and how have they helped you in this specific environment?**

**TAMMI:** I hold an Illinois CSR currently, and I also have my RPR, RMR, CRR, and CRC. Having the certs does help you gain certain employment, such as at courts and where I am currently. It was also very helpful with acquiring captioning and CART work.

**GREG: What skills do you think are most critical for success in this job?**

**TAMMI:** Well, of course, speed and accuracy, but having a dictionary that's built up is critical. Brief forms help, too! Being a great team player is also a must where I am. Thankfully, I work with some of the best in the business, and we are all there to help each other out when needed or asked.

**GREG: What specific technology or software programs (e.g., CaseCAT, Eclipse) do you use in your work?**

**TAMMI:** We use CaseCAT. The software and writers and anything we need to do our jobs is supplied to us.

**GREG: How does the use of CAT software or other tools enhance accuracy and efficiency in a congressional setting?**

**TAMMI:** We all have our own dictionaries, so the more entries you have, the faster you can transcribe and get the job done! We add more entries



every day, just like everyone in our profession.

**GREG: When did you start working at the House of Representatives?**

**TAMMI:** February 2024.

**GREG: What did the interview process to be a House reporter involve?**

**TAMMI:** It's an all-day process that consists of multiple tests, including reporting in a hearing, a literary test, and a written knowledge test, and an interview with the chief and deputy chief of the office.

**GREG: What unique challenges are involved in reporting for the U.S. House of Representatives compared to traditional courtroom, freelance, or CART reporting?**

**TAMMI:** Reporting for the House is a very rewarding experience, to say the least. Reporting a committee hearing or working on the floor are really two different things. One similarity is that you cannot interrupt proceedings to ask for clarifications or repeating, even when they are talking over each other. The committee reporters also cover transcribed interviews, which are similar to a deposition. You are allowed to interrupt during transcribed interviews.

**GREG: How many reporters are employed at the House of Representatives? Do you office together with the other reporters?**

**TAMMI:** The official reporters office consists of 45 staffers that include reporters, editors, clerks, and front office staff.

**GREG: Do you do committee reporting, or do you report from the House floor? Or both? If you're doing**

**committee work, do you report the entire hearing, or is the reporting shared via a tag-team approach? What are the reporting intervals for the House floor reporters?**

**TAMMI:** Currently I am working as a committee reporter. I have worked on the floor and will fill in when needed or asked. For committee hearings, we work as a team, and we do an hour at a time. We trade off every hour until the hearing adjourns. The floor reporters switch out every 15 minutes.

**GREG: Can you describe a typical day or week at the House of Representatives? How are you assigned to certain proceedings? Is there a schedule of assignments?**

**TAMMI:** As far as a typical day/week, there hasn't been one! LOL! Seriously, though, we get our schedule on Fridays for the next week, so for the most part we know what we are assigned to and who we are working with, but things change by the day and by the hour, as you can imagine. We just stay ready to help out wherever we can.

**GREG: How much time is spent in proceedings versus scoping or editing transcripts?**

**TAMMI:** As far as creating the transcripts, they are done pretty much on a daily basis. We take an hour of a committee hearing and then go back to our office and translate it and begin transcribing as much as we can until we have to go back to take over if the hearing is still ongoing. On the floor, things work a little differently. Everything is completed before you leave, no matter what time of day it is.

**GREG: How early do you typically try to arrive at your assignments?**

**TAMMI:** We need to be at work at least

an hour before the start of our hearing, and we try to get to the hearing room approximately 45 minutes before the hearing is set to begin. We need to create our seating chart and get all the names of any witnesses who will be presenting testimony.

**GREG: How do you handle speaker identification when you have a large number of speakers?**

**TAMMI:** Speaker ID – I have used some tricks I used during captioning and CART, which is to use the question symbol and maybe the J on the right side for someone named Jones, for instance. That's what I'd use for a witness or panel member. But mostly, I double-stroke the first syllable of the last name for the Congresspeople, or even use a single stroke and throw the asterisk in if things are going at a fast clip (which that happens a lot).

**GREG: We have all seen those chaotic hearings where everyone is talking at the same time. Are you allowed to ask them to speak one at a time? How do you manage the pressure and stress of keeping up with fast-paced discussions or managing crosstalk during a hearing?**

**TAMMI:** I'm not sure how to answer this other than to say you do the best you can. I know, we all hate that answer, but it is the truth. It definitely is a challenge at times, but we all do the best we can as professionals.

**GREG: Have you ever gotten lost in the labyrinth of tunnels and walkways under the Capitol?**

**TAMMI:** Oh, YES!! I have gotten lost and made wrong turns. I just retrace my steps and find my way, or one time I was turned around in the garage

coming back from a hearing and I “phoned a friend”! LOL

**GREG: Are you required to work irregular hours, such as evenings or weekends, when sessions run long?**

**TAMMI:** Yes, you are required to work whenever needed. Thankfully, weekends are few and far between, but I never say never.

**GREG: How do you ensure accuracy when capturing non-verbal actions or gestures, for example, if a witness is nodding or pointing, for the official record?**

**TAMMI:** We do not record gestures or nodding

**GREG: Do you provide real-time reporting services?**

**TAMMI:** There is no real-time offered.

**GREG: Is any voice-to-text software used in any congressional proceedings?**

**TAMMI:** At this time there are no voice writers employed at the House.

**GREG: What is the typical turnaround time for rough drafts and certified final transcripts?**

**TAMMI:** There are no rough drafts prepared. The turnaround time is usually immediate/daily, but sometimes we can have until the following day to complete the transcript. It just depends on the workload at that particular time.

**GREG: How do you handle the process of verifying terminology, acronyms, or proper names relevant to the legislative topics?**

**TAMMI:** We use our old friend Google! We also have wordlists, and we have a repository where we can usually get

statements of witnesses for hearings that will include certain terms or acronyms that may come up during a hearing.

**GREG: How did you keep yourself busy during the lapse in appropriations this past fall?**

**TAMMI:** During the lapse in appropriations, our office was still required to support the House floor and committee activities. It wasn't like we could just take a vacation.

**GREG: Specifically, what attracted you to seek a role with the U.S. House of Representatives?**

**TAMMI:** I am at what I like to call the pinnacle of my career, and my kids are grown now, and I felt like it was finally my time to do what I've always dreamed of doing. So I went for it!

**GREG: What do you like most and least about your position?**

**TAMMI:** What I like most about working at the House? I would say I love working in the environment. It's exciting and different every day. I drive into DC every day and think to myself, I can't believe I work here!

The people I work with are phenomenal, and not just as court reporters/writers, but on a personal level as well. They have become some of my best friends, as well as colleagues.

**GREG: What are some of your favorite briefs that are helpful in your daily writing?**

**TAMMI:** I'll be honest, when I became a captioner/CART writer, I started writing a LOT out, became more of a writer-outer. But let me think about this. I

know some of these may or may not make sense, so use what works for you.

HAOFP - House of Representatives

PLARP – parliamentary procedure

AIFR – artificial intelligence

A\*I – AI

A\*I/A\*I – artificial intelligence

KREG – Congress

KREM – Congressman

KROIM - Congresswoman

MAOFP – Madam Chair

MRFP – Mr. Chair

FRUR or FRUF – infrastructure

KMAOE – committee

SNAT – Senate

SNOR – Senator

**GREG: What is your most memorable or significant reporting job from your time with the House?**

**TAMMI:** I have to say that I have had a lot of memorable moments during my time here so far. I have reported for some of the major select committees of the Congress and task forces of the Congress. While I was working on the floor, that was exciting with all the Congresspeople going in and out and knowing that you are helping to put together the record that is a part of history.

**GREG: What advice would you give to someone interested in pursuing a career in official congressional court reporting?**

**TAMMI:** I would tell someone if they really wanted to come work here, go for it! Don't wait so long, like I did. I truly wish I would have done this a long time ago. But better late than never. ■

# CSR Examination Test Date

**By Laurie Kornmuller, CRI  
Education Liaison**

The next Illinois Certified Shorthand Reporter (CSR) examination will be held at **College of DuPage** on **April 4, 2026**. The deadline to submit application to take the test is March 6, 2026. The cost is \$107.00.

The exam includes one-voice literary at 200 wpm, two-voice testimony at 225 words per minute, and a written exam with 65 questions. For more information and how to sign up, please visit:

[www.continentaltesting.net/Profession/Index/21](http://www.continentaltesting.net/Profession/Index/21)

Want to share an introduction to a prospective student for a rewarding career in steno? Look no further than Project Steno! A not-for-profit opportunity for potential students to check it out before committing. Please send this information to a potential student or post it on your own social media page. ■



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Be sure to select the session run by  
Michelle Stello, CSR!

Instructor:  
Michelle Stello, CSR!

## Tuition-Free Officialship Training Program Expanding Statewide

**By Cheryl Barone, CSR**

It was early Spring 2023, and the Official Court Reporter shortage was looming on the near horizon. Melissa Clagg, CSR, RPR, CRR, retired Supervisor of the 6th Judicial Circuit, hatched a brilliant plan to help provide Official Court Reporters for the Illinois courts. She had already taught several students a "back to basics" theory in her living room, and she suggested to Dustie Spradlin, Executive Director of Court Reporting Services, that perhaps the State could fund a tuition-free program for court reporting students in Illinois in order to help alleviate the shortage.

As is Dustie Spradlin's MO, she jumped

on the idea and presented it to the Chief Judges at the Conference of Chief Judges in June of 2023. The Chief Judges loved the idea, and the Tuition-Free Officialship Training Program was born!

There was a lot of scrambling in the early days to put together a program in a short period of time. Melissa had a basic theory book that she was going to revamp, but we needed to publicize the program, find a location, receive applications, set up a workshop to interview potential candidates, and do it all before a January 2024 start date!

With lots of effort, plenty of mistakes, and seven students, the OTP began. Melissa Clagg enlisted the help of a very generous attorney, Steve Beckett,

who graciously gave the program a location for free in Urbana to conduct the classes, and we were off running. Melissa knew that the only way to be successful was to have in-person classes at least three days a week. The program would consist of a very basic theory, which would allow the students to build speed without worrying about being a realtime reporter.

Now, some people may disagree with this approach, including myself at the beginning, but I have personally seen the success of these students, and how they have thrived in a short period of time.

Of the original class of seven that started in January 2024 – remember, this was our first attempt – three



Photos above and below: OTP Students from Wheaton, morning and afternoon sessions

students have already been placed in courthouses! One student has passed her Officialship Part A; one is working on his 200 wpm; and one is working on her 180 wpm. Also, two out of three of those students received the Project Steno Scholarship for achieving a speed of 140 wpm in 12 months.

For the Urbana second class of students, five out of 12 students who started in September 2024 have received the

Project Steno Scholarship for achieving 140 wpm in less than a year, and two of the students who started in September of 2024 will soon be starting paid internships in local courthouses because they have attained a speed of 160 wpm. There are also three students who have attained a speed of 140 wpm, all within 14 months!

By all accounts, the Officialship Training Program is a huge success! It is such

a success that other states are now reaching out to Dustie Spradlin to find out how they can initiate a program like ours!

In January of 2025, with the generosity of Judge Bonnie Wheaton in the 18th Judicial Circuit, a new location for additional classes in the northern part of the state was found. Peggy Cuda, CSR, RDR, CRR, was chosen to teach the classes in Wheaton; and with over 90 applicants to choose from, another class was formed, which started in September of 2025.

We conducted a rigorous round of interviews; and because of the enormous amount of qualified applicants, Peggy began teaching both morning and afternoon classes in Wheaton, consisting of 26 total students.





OTP Students from Urbana

The location in Urbana has changed to a beautifully-renovated location near the Champaign courthouse, with eight new students starting in September of 2025. Melissa Clagg has rewritten and edited the theory book, which has impressively gone from one volume to two!

Any one of you could pick up these students' notes and read them. It is a theory that allows them to thrive and build speed in a short amount of time.

Classes are Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, in person for three hours, and Zoom classes are one hour each day on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Grammar, punctuation, legal and medical terminology, transcript preparation, courtroom procedures, and CaseCATalyst training are all included in the program, thanks to the outstanding dedication of Melissa Clagg.

This program could not have happened without the enormous amount of effort given by Dustie Spradlin, and the support of the Chief Judges of Illinois. With their continued support, the program will be expanding to three locations in

the fall of 2026, with applications being posted on the ILCRS.com website on January 19th, 2026. The three locations will be in Urbana (Melissa Clagg), Wheaton (Peggy Cuda), and Marion (Robin Travelstead, CSR, RPR).

I am proud to say that I am a part of this wonderful program; and as a team, we will continue doing our part to alleviate the court reporter shortage in Illinois! For more information, visit <https://www.ilcrs.com/training> ■

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# 3-2-1 – Back Up!

**By Saralyn Hicks Britt  
CSR-IL, CCR-AL  
ILCRA Treasurer**

The end of the year is an ideal time to wrap up any loose ends on your business side of things. Reach out to overdue invoice holders. Compile your expense reports to deliver to your CPA. Back up and verify all of your years' files. Buy a new deposition/court outfit!

After a nearly-catastrophic hard drive failure in my home office this past month, I took the opportunity to re-implement the IT practice of data backup, commonly known as the 3-2-1 Backup Rule. As it's fresh on my mind, I'd like to take a moment to share this principle with you.

## What is the 3-2-1 Backup Rule?

The 3-2-1 backup rule is a simple yet powerful guideline for ensuring your data is securely backed up and protected. It states:

- 3 copies of your data: Always keep three copies of your important data: your original files and at least two backups.
- 2 different storage media: Store your backups on at least two different types of storage devices or platforms (ex: external hard drives, cloud services, USB drives).
- 1 offsite copy: At least one of your backups should be stored offsite -- ideally in a different physical location or in the cloud -- so it remains safe from local disasters like fires, floods, or theft.

A lot of the software that we use as court reporters has a built-in (or paid supplemental) cloud backup for our user and CAT files. While this is a great resource to ensure the backing up of our actual transcript files, what about everything else we use on a daily basis? What about that job worksheet and its respective, filled-in version associated with each job or case? What about your expense ledger or accounting software? What about the PDF versions of your distributed invoices? What about a "printed" copy of an e-mail exchange with that attorney who DEFINITELY ordered a rough, in writing, but seemed to have forgotten that once they received the bill?

All of these items are just as important to our daily operations as our notes and CAT files, but they aren't automatically included in our software's cloud backup options.

I've heard some interesting methods that various reporters have taken to accomplish this backup method. It could be

something as simple as doing a manual copy of their top-level pertinent files to an external hard drive, then storing said drive in a safe deposit box with their nearest bank and refreshing it every month. It could be using common cloud storage apps such as Dropbox or Google Drive for cross-device access. It could be as complex as setting up a home network double-parity NAS system with integrated double-encrypted cloud backup and an off-site depository. All of these are valid methods that accomplish the same thing -- keeping our work products safe!

As we all know, time is money. If you have to spend an inordinate amount of time hunting down something, that's less time on your dashboard and less money in your pocket. So if you haven't already, here is your reminder to BACK UP ALL YOUR DATA! If you haven't set up a 3-2-1 approved system, please consider doing so as we move into 2026. Your future you will thank you! ■

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# Celebrating A Bond 50 Years Strong

By Kathy Bono, CSR

Fifty-plus years and still going! It's not very often that you hear of someone having the same career for that long and still enjoying it. We have seen many changes from typing our transcripts with carbon paper to paperless writers. Anyone remember your ribbon splitting on a job and you either kept going and struggled through when preparing the transcript, trying to make sense out of partial letters, or took a few minutes to change it on the job and have ink fingers the rest of the day!?

In March of 1975, I passed my CSR test after completing the 18-month course at MacCormac Junior College in Chicago. I think everyone can relate to the bonds that are formed with fellow

students going through the same stress of passing our tests and graduating. It also seems that if you meet a court reporter that you don't know, it doesn't take very long until you realize that you know someone in common. We are not that big of a world.

Many of us have stayed in contact over the years; and in September 2025, I planned a luncheon for us to celebrate our 50 years as court reporters! Some of us are still working, some have retired, and some have changed careers over the years. And, sadly, some have passed away. We had 13 former classmates attend.

Many of our fellow graduates became supervisors/administrators in the court system. In fact, we had seven and are very proud of their accomplishments. Marilyn Filishio, Cook County; Nancy

Naleway, Skokie; Chris Weber, Rolling Meadows; Pat Anos, Maybrook; Cheryl Barone, DuPage; Marge Ledvora, Kane; and Helen Hackney, 26th & California. Bernie Kramer (Radavich), who became a speed contest winner for many years, and who was known nationwide, was also in our class.

And the fun thing about this picture is that my daughter, Kristi Landolina, took the picture. She grew up knowing most of the women in the picture and is also a court reporter. My daughter-in-law, Jori Gardner, is an official court reporter in DuPage County but was unable to attend. My niece, Angela Trayes, was also a court reporter for many years but changed careers during COVID.

The people who were unable to attend are hoping for another reunion at 55 years! I will try to make that happen. ■



# My Trip (Not Literal) Down The Red Carpet



**By JoAnn Losoya,  
CSR, RPR, CRR  
ILCRA Region 1 Freelance  
Representative**

As some of you might know, my daughter, Marissa Losoya, is trying to make her mark in the film industry. About a year and a half ago, when she was putting together a concept of a short film comedy to be entered into festivals across the country, she asked if I wanted to be part of it and do a scene with her. I said why not, maybe I will be discovered. I could be the next Melissa McCarthy, or as I'm often compared to, "Roseanne."

She put together her outline and a very rough script for my part. I was going to "play" her mom. A stretch, I know. I didn't know what her film was about at the time, just that I had to give her motherly advice in my own unique

fashion. She gave me talking points and a rough script but then she let me riff, as they say in the biz. (See, I've already got the lingo down!)

We had to do a couple of takes because, well, we were laughing at the situation too much, breaking "character" and going into our regular mom/daughter roles. You can see the outtakes of our scenes on her YouTube Channel, Beyond Failure BTS: filming a scene with my mom. YouTube.com/@marissalosoya

The fruits of our labor – well, mostly Marissa's labor – was a short film titled Beyond Failure. I've posted about it on my own Facebook page numerous times. The description blurb reads: "After falling down a YouTube hole, a woman thinks she can hip thrust her way out of dealing with her potentially harmful internal monologue." Basically, it makes fun of the ways we think if this one thing is perfect, then my whole life will be perfect. It is 8 minutes of hilarity, in my humble opinion, especially the Mom cameo.

When it was time to submit, Marissa first presented it to a small film fest in Philadelphia, where she is currently living. It received rave reviews. Next up was Nitehawk Film Fest in NYC. Again, great reviews, and she was immediately contacted by Vimeo. They wanted to feature her film on their platform.

So emboldened by those initial positive reviews, Marissa set about applying to different film fests across the country. I became her No. 1 cheerleader and promoter. If you're around me for any length of time, I'm mentioning the

movie and my cameo, urging everyone and anyone to watch, you know, for the algorithm. More views, more exposure. (Remember, we are trying to get on the red carpet!)

Her acceptance at film fests snowballed. Here is a list of some of the different film fests where Beyond Failure was screened:

**Nitehawk Shorts Festival**

**Lino Kino x Fringe Arts Screening, 2023**

**NoBudge Live 39**

**Mammoth Lakes Film Festival**

**Indie Memphis Film Festival - Audience Award: National Narrative**

**Sydney Underground Film Festival (International)**

**Greenpoint Film Festival**

**The Massachusetts Independent Film Festival**

**Short Com Film Festival**

**Indie Memphis Film Festival**

**New Orleans Film Festival**

**New/Next Film Fest**

**London Short Film Festival (International)**

**Athens International Film + Video Festival - 1st Prize Narrative Short (Academy Award Qualifying)**

As you can see, we are now INTERNATIONAL FILM STARS! The film fests in Sydney, Australia; Edinburgh, Scotland; and London, England actually contacted Marissa to ask permission to screen her film. How in the world did someone in Australia hear about it?

Beyond Failure was making major inroads in the film world and word was



spreading quickly. We made the trek across the pond to London, England, to participate in the film festival there. What an awesome experience to say the least!

I also traveled with her to see it play on the big screen at the Mammoth Lakes Film Festival in California. After the showing, a man came up to me and exclaimed that my part stole the show, asking where we were from, and just general chitchat. Afterwards, Marissa came running up to me and asked excitedly "Mom, what did that guy say?" "Nothing, just that he liked the movie and that his wife is actually from Chicago also." Come to find out, he was a producer who had produced Natalie Portman's latest venture. Who knew? Certainly not me. Subsequently, his assistant approached and requested Marissa's contact details in order to discuss potential collaboration on future projects. MIND BLOWN!

Wow, can this really be happening? Here comes the red carpet part. The Athens Film & Video Festival in Athens, Ohio, was actually an Academy Award qualifying film festival, and Beyond

Failure took 1st place. Yes, THAT ACADEMY AWARD. AN OSCAR!!!

Beyond Failure and Marissa Losoya as director, actor, writer, has been qualified to be recognized by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences for artistic excellence in the film industry, becoming part of a select group of films vying for the most prestigious award in entertainment. Winning at an Academy qualifying film festival cleared the first hurdle to reaching the red carpet. Of course, she'd bring her mom as her date (like

Bradley Cooper), right?? Right??? And the accolades just kept coming. Vimeo picked it as a staff pick on their website. Somehow, the CEO of Vimeo saw it and gave it a glowing review. That immediately put Beyond Failure in a new, more elite category of short films to watch on Vimeo with access to industry contacts.

Is this what happens when lightning strikes?

Next, YouTube picked Beyond Failure as Short of the Week. Anyone can now watch it on YouTube TV from their television, laptop, or iPad without needing a subscription or sharing a link. Viewing for the masses.

As we are getting closer to Oscar nomination time, Vimeo put a "For your Consideration" ad out that featured Beyond Failure, Marissa Losoya, as a film to be considered for nominations. (As of this writing, the nominations have not been posted. Fingers crossed!)



There are 207 films that have qualified to be nominated for an Oscar – films directed or promoted by the likes of Idris Elba, Michael Keaton, Mindy Kaling, AND... Marissa Losoya. We are P-U-M-P-E-D!!!!

While it is extremely rare for a comedy to win an award, just being in the same company as these established filmmakers is unbelievable. Dreams do come true. But we are not at the finish line just yet. Momma still has to walk that red carpet!

Marissa is currently working on another script, and thanks to the exposure she received from *Beyond Failure*, she now has industry support with offers of collaboration from players big and small. She has written in a part for a "MOM," which I think I am definitely best suited for. Hollywood, here we come!

If you want to laugh – and don't we all need to laugh – **BEYOND FAILURE** by MARISSA LOSOYA is available to watch on Vimeo and YouTube, [vimeo.com](https://vimeo.com), and [YouTube.com](https://www.youtube.com). It also can be found at [marissalosoya.com](http://marissalosoya.com)

As they say, **LIKE AND SUBSCRIBE!**

**Beyond Failure**

Written by: Marissa Losoya

Starring: Marissa Losoya, JoAnn Losoya

Visit: [Marissalosoya.com](http://marissalosoya.com) ■

## **Steno: A Journey Worth Taking**

*continued from page 7*

I suppose my target audience for this article is a bit narrow. But, if you're out there, other older-newer reporters, I see you. We are coming from a really unique position. We have that excitement that comes from being new, and hopefully a tiny bit of that wisdom that comes with age. This profession still needs us. We still have many good years to give and a lot to learn, no matter our age. Don't let anyone tell you that you can't or you shouldn't.

Making the decision to pursue steno was one of the best I've ever made, regardless of when I started. Looking back now, I'm so happy I did it and didn't count myself out due to age, fear of starting from the beginning, or anything else.

And, for those of you who are young, new reporters, and those of you who are seasoned pros, I hope you at least got some entertainment out of this. Now you know a little bit more about me as well. If you see me at steno stuff, please feel free to say hello. I'm always happy to meet other reporters (of any age and experience) and students. Thanks for making my ILCRA experience wonderful and welcoming me into the profession so openly. ■



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ad infinitum

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