

**IL****CRA****FALL****2026**www.ilcra.org**ad infinitum****ILLINOIS
COURT
REPORTERS
ASSOCIATION****In this issue**

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President's Message

Steno in the Spotlight Was a Triumph

That's a wrap. And just like that, Steno in the Spotlight is officially in the books.

First and foremost, I want to extend a massive thank you and a heartfelt congratulations to each and every person who attended this year's convention. By taking time out of your busy schedules, you didn't just show up for a weekend event, you showed up for yourselves, for ILCRA, and for the future of the court reporting and captioning profession. What we experienced together was absolutely unforgettable. This wasn't merely a routine professional gathering; it was a vibrant, high-energy celebration of learning, personal growth, and professional renewal.

From the very first opening session to the final closing remarks, the entire room was charged with an electric, shared passion for mastering our skills and embracing cutting-edge ideas. It felt as though the stars truly aligned for Steno in the Spotlight, resulting in a magnificent showcase of what makes ILCRA and its members so incredibly special.



The momentum throughout the weekend never dipped for a second. Our speakers were deeply engaging, highly knowledgeable, and wonderfully personable. They filled every educational session with invaluable insights, plenty of laughter, and thought-provoking discussions that left everyone feeling re-inspired. Outside the presentation rooms, the camaraderie was just as powerful. The expo hall was buzzing with interactive demonstrations as members connected with our incredible vendors. Our vendors and sponsors really went above and beyond for ILCRA this year, and

"This ILCRA convention was perfection, everything from the speaker lineup, Friday night's president's gala, and even the food!"

Ann Marie Hollo, RDR, CRR, IL-CSR, MO-CCR

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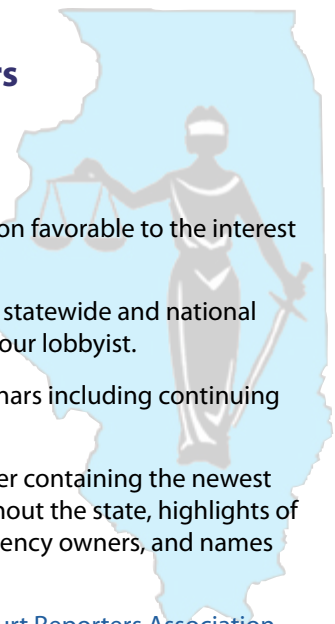
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What ILCRA Does for Illinois Reporters

- 
- **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

continued from front page

we owe them a massive debt of gratitude; their generous financial support and unwavering dedication are what allow us to thrive.

Nearby, the silent auction tables saw some friendly competitive bidding wars, and for those looking for a breath of fresh air, the peaceful nature walks on the surrounding trails offered the perfect moment to clear our minds before diving back into the fun. And, of course, there was no shortage of endless conversation, storytelling, and catching up over plates of delicious food.

When evening fell, our premier red-carpet event, the Golden Keys Gala, served as the ultimate icing on the cake. And wow, what a spectacular night it was! The DJ filled the air with an incredible mix of lively music that kept the dance

"It was inspiring to be surrounded by so many talented court reporters and students who are passionate about our profession. A heartfelt thank-you to ILCRA for bringing us together and investing in the future of court reporting!"

Adrienne Conzemius, RPR, CRI, CSR-IL/MI, CCR-WA/MO/LA

floor packed and shaking from start to finish. The absolute highlight for me, however, was watching our Goldie award winners strut down the red carpet with pride and flare. Seeing everyone shine made me realize one thing: I firmly believe every courtroom and deposition suite needs a permanent red carpet installed, leading straight to the reporter's chair. You all looked absolutely fantastic, glamorous, and professional.

Looking back, the only downside to such a packed weekend is that time flew by far too quickly. I know I only got a fleeting minute to touch base with a few of the new-to-me faces in attendance, but please know how thrilled we were to have you. I want to personally invite you back next year so we can talk again. Your unique perspective and input truly matter to me. To those who couldn't manage to join us this time around, we promise we won't rub it in or tease you about missing such an amazing convention. But I will say that our circle wasn't quite complete without you. We deeply missed having you there.

As we all settle back into our daily routines, know that the work doesn't stop here. The creative wheels are churning already for next year, mine certainly are, brainstorming how to top this experience, and we will release dates, locations, and details just as soon as we have them. Keep your machines clean, your spirits high, and stay tuned to your email inbox.

See you all very soon,

Lorie

Upcoming CERTIFICATION TEST in Illinois

IMPORTANT DATES ILLINOIS CSR:

Signup Deadline:
November 13, 2026

In-Person Testing:
December 12, 2026

Find more
information about
the Illinois CSR at:

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



Real Cases, Real People, Judge Judy('s Court Reporter)

By Brad Benjamin,
CSR, RPR. President-Elect, ILCRA

Before Dave Wenhold stepped down as ILCRA'S executive director, he offered some simple words of wisdom for recruiting conference speakers, "Don't put all your eggs in one basket." You can expend tons of resources chasing after a high-profile speaker and then find attendees have forgotten about them by the conclusion of the conference. This reminds me I need to call Tony Robbins and tell him it's off for now.

ILCRA Legislative Rep. Kirstie Anderson and ILCRA President Lorie Kennedy spent a combined two years recruiting Whitney Kumar to speak at this year's conference. It was a lengthy process as Ms. Kumar, like many of us, is very busy and very much in demand.

Whitney Kumar is a court reporter from Orange County, California. She has worked as both a freelance and official reporter and is real-time capable. She's a former agency owner and holds multiple NCRA certifications. Clearly, Whitney has built an impressive career, but she has another unique accomplishment, which is her true claim to fame – Whitney was Judge Judy's court reporter! She's appeared on four seasons of "Judy Justice!" on Amazon's Freevee network.

I have always been a fan of the courtroom reality genre.



Currently, I'm enjoying Judge Mablean. Justice with Judge Mablean is just the show to catch during a quick lunch or while decompressing at the end of the day. I highly recommend it. And, as most of you have already heard, I have even played a court reporter on TV. Needless to say, I was excited about meeting Whitney.

Many speakers show up to a conference right before their allotted time and are out the door a few minutes after. Whitney arrived at the beginning of the convention, spent time getting to know everyone, and even attended ILCRA's inaugural Golden Keys Gala that evening. From the moment she arrived, she was personable, engaging, and incredibly fun to talk to.

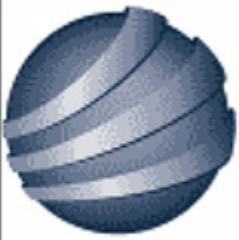
Her presentation relating her journey from reporting school to becoming a successful professional and then landing the job as Judge Judy's court reporter was fascinating and genuinely inspiring. What struck me most was the audience reaction. I'm not sure I've ever seen a room full of seasoned veterans geek out like they did after Whitney's presentation.

As the session moderator, I had barely opened the floor for questions when hands started shooting up all over the room. Everyone wanted to talk to Whitney. Everyone had a question. Everyone wanted just a little more time with her. Eventually, I had to inform the crowd that it was time to wrap things up.

Putting all your eggs in one basket to chase the white whale of a speaker may consume incredible time and resources, and there is no guarantee the payoff will be worth it. However, there is also something to be said for keeping the lines of communication open because sometimes, if you stay persistent, you don't just land a speaker, you land a Whitney Kumar.

Editor's Note: The writer of this article did not actually see any other speakers present besides Whitney Kumar during ILCRA's 2026 Conference but was told they were all pretty good as well! ■

ILCRA
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FOR SPONSORING

WHITNEY KUMAR

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With extensive experience in all litigation practice areas, including construction defect, commercial, employment, intellectual property, class actions and torts, product liability, securities, and finance.

Esquire's stenographic court reporters use a steno machine to capture the record of the legal proceeding. The steno machine has evolved into a high-powered computer that, when paired with a skilled stenographic court reporter, has the capability to deliver text instantaneously with a high degree of accuracy. The stenographic court reporter uses highly customized CAT (computer-aided transcription) software to format, edit, and deliver the final transcript.

Steno in the Spotlight Shines Bright on Reporters



By Georgia Northway, RPR, CSR-IL, CCR-MO

Every single one of you who attended ILCRA's convention in Rosemont this year was shining bright in the spotlight! The turnout was absolutely inspiring, from retirees to brand-new students. Our sponsorships were some of the most generous we have received in recent history. Our vendors were excited to talk with you and offer their services. You, as part of our collective, made this one of my most favorite conventions to date, even if I subsisted on nothing but caffeine and two bites of food a day.

While so many of us were spotlighting our professional development and our careers, there was one person who was stepping away from center stage and out of that warm glow. I would be remiss and ungrateful if I didn't start by paying respect to my mentor, my "association guru," and my good friend, Dave Wenhold.

We actually joined the ILCRA board around the same time in the early 2010s, and I have had the opportunity to watch and learn under his direction for nearly 15 years.



Steno was founded on a simple idea — deposition services shouldn't be an obstacle when you're trying to win a case. We believe something so essential shouldn't be so difficult to navigate. Now with Steno, it's not. We are committed to serving the legal community by enhancing services, technology, and innovation that support legal professionals.

Steno offers unrivaled court reporting services, but it doesn't stop there. We combine court reporting with purpose-built litigation technology, videography, focus groups, and concierge support every step of the way.

The things that I have come to admire the most about Dave are the things I hope to carry forward with me in the future – a default setting on diplomacy, being a good, active listener, and having an almost “enlightened” approach to every conflict – in fact, I think the only time I have ever seen Dave truly frustrated was when a water leak caused a ceiling tile to come crashing down in the middle of our first Friday seminar a couple years ago, and that seemed pretty justified. Dave always seemed to have the right things to say at just the right time to move us all forward as one unit, one united front; and I hope to be even half the leader Dave and Nancy have been for ILCRA.



ILCRA sends heartfelt gratitude to Dave for his years of dedication and tireless service to the association

It feels like a real legacy to uphold, especially stepping into these shoes after Dave stepped into Nancy's. There is still this lingering Negative Nellie who will ask me occasionally, “Who do you think you are?!” But my answer lately has been, “I am someone who will do something for ILCRA every

single day.” And sometimes, that's all it takes – something. I still get caught in fearing that my efforts aren't going to be perfect or even great at times, but if I have learned anything over the last year, simply showing up and doing one or two things in furtherance of this association is always better than doing nothing.

Fortunately, I am working with some of the most talented, intelligent, and motivated individuals who currently make up this ILCRA board. Everyone consistently brings their strengths and skills to the table, utilizing them in a way that makes ILCRA one of the strongest associations in the country. This is absolutely a team effort, and none of us could accomplish what we have over the last year alone. It truly takes all of us; and when we are as united as we have been, we get to experience conferences like Rosemont.

I made my way north on Labor Day to ensure I had enough time alone to sort through all of the details that needed attention, because I had never been

so hands-on at a conference before. It was a long week that challenged my endurance and my ability to take care of myself, but I was so grateful for the couple hours I had outside on an incredibly beautiful gravel trail that was a bridge-walk away from the hotel.

Hiking/trail walking is as much a hobby as it is a necessity, and I was overjoyed to have access to something like this in the middle of a bustling city, right next to an airport. It was so unexpected and sparked so much excitement I had a hard time not skipping on the trail – in fact, I did! I'm also now prepared to lead a group of morning walkers on a Prancercize outing in the future! Let me know if you're interested!

Thursday came fast, and the ball started rolling. For the first time ever, I stepped into the Realtime and Speed Contest rooms. What struck me first was observing my friends and fellow reporters on their machines. Just taking in the different writing styles, from the mechanics of their hands and fingers to the positioning of their





machines – every single person had a setup that was just a little different from everybody else. It was incredible to witness the many paths to the same goal – writing with speed, accuracy, and doing it in a way that was tailored to the physical needs of each individual. They were like snowflakes that amassed into a beautiful heap of talent, demonstrating the power and purity of stenographic court reporting.

The entirety of Friday went by in a blink, and I got a good sense of what it would mean to be the executive director. The first realization was I cannot do this alone, and thankfully that was never an option. This ILCRA Board dazzles when it comes to volunteering to lend a hand, stepping in, stepping up; and equally as important, asking for help when it's necessary. For some of us, this was the first time we were working together,

but that wasn't something that was felt. We operated like a finely tuned machine, even when some conceptual gunk threatened our progress.

Friday night hardly needed extra glitz and glam after the amazing showing of our reporters. Whether you arrived decked out in your glamorous best, or brought your sparkling personality to the scene, it was one of the best Friday night parties ILCRA has had the pleasure of hosting.

First, there was the food. An incredible assortment of heavy hors d'oeuvres, snacks and sweets, coupled with plenty of cocktail and mocktail offerings from the Sidebar, as we themed it.

Next was the **Goldies Awards!** The ILCRA Board came up with some humorous categories to give awards for, and Brad and I shared some emcee duties to announce the winners of each category. They are as follows!



1. Most likely to wear two different shoes to court or to a deposition – Brad Benjamin!

While Brad contends this has never happened, he shared a delightful story of a different fashion mishap!

2. Most likely to attend every ILCRA event – Kathryn Thomas!

Kathryn is most likely to be in attendance because they tirelessly volunteer their time and talent.





4. Most likely to wear “steno swag” on a regular basis – Amy Doman!

And if you saw Amy on Saturday, you understood why she won, hands-down. Amy, the steno earrings and matching jacket were fabulous! I hope you display your Goldie with pride!

Little did they know that they would take home the DSA the next day, in recognition of all of their service!

3. Most like to show up 30 seconds “early” (a/k/a on time) to court or to a deposition – Lorie Kennedy!



Having known Judy Lehman my entire life, I tapped her to accept the award on behalf of Lorie when we couldn’t find her. Once Lorie reappeared, she gave the best acceptance speech of the night! (Side note: it’s been said people who are chronically late are perpetual optimists – they always believe they can accomplish “one more thing” before it’s time to go!)



5. Most likely to have the best on-the-job story – Jo Gayle!

Our steno community might be hard pressed to beat a story that involves “wowing” Tom Hanks at a live event!

6. And finally, most likely to own the most steno machines – Todd Schludt!



While Todd aptly pointed out he didn’t actually “own” the machines, Andrea jokingly reminded him he would still feel the loss if one of his machines were to go missing!

The night continued with dancing and an opportunity to walk the red carpet. And with a little help from AI changing up the background, everyone who took a walk is pictured below in the spotlight.



Saturday kept rolling out the hits with our amazing speaker lineup, our luncheon awards, our vendors and exhibitors, as well as all of our attendees making connections. Saturday afternoon, Andrea and I hosted our second Student Seminar Track; an afternoon of seminars for students, attended by students. We had a great conversational-style afternoon with court reporting students from all over the state to address their questions and concerns. We are especially grateful to Peggy Cuda for bringing her Officialship Training Program students this year!

We wrapped the convention up together as a board with a dinner out together. It was a tradition we got away from for a couple of years, but bringing back our Saturday night gathering has done so much for our team building

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and our camaraderie. As if running the convention wasn't enough, this board voluntarily spends its Saturday night together to debrief, decompress, and take a couple hours to better know their fellow board members as whole people. I learned Laurie Kornmuller and I had a lot more in common than I ever imagined!

As our own Distinguished Service Award winner, Kathryn Thomas, has been known to say, "ILCRA has my heart." That is absolutely true for me too, and I look forward to offering dedicated service to this board and all we serve in the coming years! ■



The Nancy Davis Luncheon Awards – Recap

By Laurie Kornmuller

One of the highlights of being the Educational Liaison for ILCRA is students. It is rewarding to meet so many different students on their path to certification, get to know what speed they are attempting, and encourage them as they move through the highs/lows of stenography. Another highlight is attending the ILCRA convention and presenting scholarship awards to our Illinois students.

This year, we shared the scholarship opportunity with schools all around the nation since many have our Illinois students. This year we received seven ILCRA scholarship applications; we award three. We also received 18 Seymour Wolfe applications; we award one.

Thank you to our scholarship readers: Judy Lehman, Teresa Ozuna and Kathy Dittmeier.

Reading through all of their applications, we saw a trend that many students would touch on and that was: perseverance, tenacity, pushing through obstacles AND having the support of their instructors and peers.

The other trend throughout the applications was that they cannot wait to become court reporters and apply everything they have learned. We all know how it was to be a student, and the struggles of getting through school. This is where you can help - be a mentor to a student. Just by creating a schedule of checking in every few months or so would mean so much to an aspiring stenographer.

In addition to our scholarship winners, we want to thank all of our court reporters who donated for our students which provided them to attend the ILCRA convention at a discount.

PLUS, a thank you to Peggy Cuda, lead instructor at Court Reporting Services in Wheaton, Illinois, for encouraging all of her students to apply and did! Many of her students thanked her in their essay as well. We had three scholarship winners for ILCRA:

In third place was Jenna Kirkpatrick. Jenna expressed in her essay that it is not enough to just want it, you have to be obsessed and I quote: The ability to clear my head-space and give each practice session my best, even on my worst days, has remained crucial throughout my training.

In second place was Katie Montini. Katie expressed in her essay that she works full-time and goes to school and I quote: The difference between me and them is that I am willing to persevere and I refuse to stop.

In first place was Michelle Polkowski. In Michelle's essay, she expressed that



this profession aligns with some of her "life-long interests that seem to fuse together: law, piano, video games, reading, writing, and language."

Congratulations to all ILCRA Scholarship winners!

A prestigious scholarship was also presented by the daughter of Seymour Wolfe, Lise Wolfe-Adam. The Seymour Wolfe Scholarship was created through generous donations from Melinda Wolfe and Fred Rosenberg. They established the Seymour Wolfe Scholarship in honor of Seymour, who



was a lifetime ILCRA member and an industry leader in our profession. Seymour's passion was giving back, and he was always involved with ILCRA in many different facets of his career.

The winner of the Seymour Wolfe Scholarship was Morgan Green.

We are so proud of all the students who applied. We look forward to seeing them continue on their journey and become court reporters.

The Speed and Realtime Contest Winners

We thank our fearless stenographers for stepping up and challenging their speed and skills – just for the fun of it!

Congratulations to Stephanie Battaglia, overall winner of the Realtime Contest

and the Bonni Shuttleworth traveling trophy; and Donna Urlaub, winner of the Gary L. Sonntag Memorial Speed Contest and the Sally Cochran traveling trophy. ■



ILCRA DSA

By Georgia Northway, RPR,
CCR-MO, CSR-IL

Kathryn “Captain” Thomas (as coined by the 100-day Practice Club), was the recipient of this year’s Distinguished Service Award. Kathryn was born and raised in Effingham and currently resides on the Illinois side of the greater St. Louis Metro area. Kathryn was recognized this year for their dedication and selfless commitment to the association, as well as to the court reporting profession as a whole, statewide and nationally.

What made this year’s DSA presentation particularly interesting was that Kathryn was also the live captioner for the Nancy Davis Awards Luncheon. This created a particularly unique set of circumstances to ensure a few things: Kathryn was kept unaware that they were this year’s recipient, which also meant providing a bogus script ahead of time to throw them off; and also having a volunteer backup stenographer who could continue taking the record of our luncheon while Kathryn received their award and spent some time talking with their supporters via Zoom.

While I did feel guilty for wasting my dear friend’s time on a fake DSA script, we managed to keep the surprise until it became clear we were speaking about Kathryn. Special thanks to Lorie Kennedy, ILCRA President, for volunteering to step in while Kathryn was celebrated and recognized for going above and beyond!



Below is the complete acknowledgment of Kathryn’s dedication and service to court reporting and to ILCRA as read at the luncheon.

* * *

I’m going to start with an apology to our captioner, because I sent them a draft for this presentation, and it wasn’t everything that I needed to say. So Kathryn, I have to go off script, but I will buy you dinner later.

Next, I want to thank this year’s Nominating Committee, Melissa Clagg and Becky Todd, our past DSA recipients, for making this year’s work seem effortless.

Becky has granted me the privilege of speaking today for a few reasons, but

namely public speaking is not her jam. I do want to take a moment to recognize Becky and give her one more round of applause for her incredible service to our profession and our students over her career. She continues to be an excellent representative of the court reporting profession as a whole.

Now, on to this year’s DSA recipient.

This year’s recipient is one of those individuals who finds a way to make every place they go a little better. They don’t just show up, they show up with a presence of calm confidence and intelligent, decisive action. They are one of the first to volunteer to contribute while encouraging others to get involved. They have quietly and steadily become a person with state

and national name recognition because of these characteristics. In tandem with their strong abilities to approach life rationally, this stenographer also has a huge heart and a genuine desire to help. They are the person who says “yes” when someone is in need.

Since the beginning of their career, they have not hesitated to put themselves out there for the world to see. Through their example, they have shown us that you don’t have to strive to just fit in. You can stand out, you can be yourself. They lead by example and demonstrate through their interactions that you can shine your light and just be yourself, no matter your environment. You don’t have to take it all so seriously. In my mind, it might be the most courageous way to live life.

Professionally, this stenographer has shown their unique light through mediums like steno blogging, career fairs, presenting seminars at many state associations, and providing live captioning services. We all know that realtime captioning can feel like writing naked in front of a live audience! And this stenographer rises to the challenge time after time to keep challenging themselves past their own comfort zone.

This year’s DSA started out as a deposition reporter, and not long after transitioned to CART/Captioning, showcasing their skills for audiences as small as one student in need to tens and tens of thousands who could watch their scoreboard captions from inside Major League Baseball stadiums.

As a member of the 100-Day Challenge group since 2017, they have repeatedly succeeded in practicing 15-minutes a day, checking in with fellow reporters from across the country, reaching practice streaks of 730 days in a row.

They also work enthusiastically to continue to challenge themselves, within and outside of court reporting; and through this work, with unapologetic authenticity, they inspire others to just be themselves. This individual has spoken to the hearts of many in this room and on this Zoom, giving us all the courage to put our masks down and let our true selves shine.



The moment Kathryn realized they were ILCRA’s 2026 DSA

Whether they are behind the steno machine, volunteering for ILCRA, participating in student outreach, presenting a seminar, taking part in state and national speed and realtime contests, or uniting their love of steno with their newfound love of pole dancing, they have the courage to walk through life with authentic enthusiasm that is unquestionably motivated by their love of steno and their love for their fellow stenographers.

They have been an especially dedicated member of ILCRA, giving their time and talents to the association for almost 20 years. They

are a past board member and past president of ILCRA. They have served on the Audit Committee. They have given many presentations over those years, sometimes with very little notice, and provided live captioning for ILCRA board meetings and annual luncheons, just like they’re doing today. As this year’s recipient has said, “ILCRA has my heart,” and it shows.

As described by Patti White, they are a dedicated professional. A generous volunteer. A mentor. A lifelong learner. A trusted colleague. A technical expert. A dedicated advocate for people with hearing loss. An enthusiastic member of ILCRA. And, most importantly, a friend who makes the profession better — and the people in it — simply by being part of it.

It is my greatest honor to officially announce this year’s Distinguished Service Award recipient is Kathryn “Captain” Thomas. ■

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ILCRA Convention: A First-Time Board Member Perspective



**By Sara Sapp,
RPR, CSR-IL, CCR-MO**

For the past couple years, I've written up a little something about our annual conference. I've been attending since 2021, when I was still a student, and I liked it so much I just keep showing up. And they keep letting me in for some reason. I always learn a ton, meet others in the profession that I wouldn't otherwise, and see colleagues I don't get to see often.

This year was my first time attending the conference as a board member. I joined the board as Official Rep for Region 2 late last year for a partial term, and this year I was officially sworn in. Being fairly new to court reporting, new to my job, new to a whole lot of

things, I was a little apprehensive about it. But, let me tell you, the folks on this board are fantastic, welcoming, smart, and seriously capable of anything. The best thing I could have done was learn from them. And learn, I did.

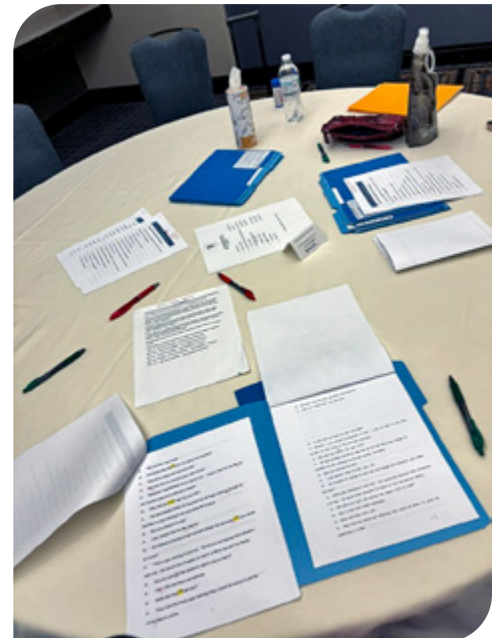
I attended my first in-person board meeting as well as the business meeting, neither of which I had done before. I knew I would be very busy during the conference but wasn't sure exactly what to expect. I decided to throw myself in wherever I might be needed and take in as much as I could. That ended up involving ribbon crafting, assembling swag bags, decorating and later undecorating for our Friday night gala, and grading speed and realtime tests, among other things.

I have never graded a test in my life, other than my own practice tests I took in school. Thankfully, there was such a wonderful group of ladies on the grading crew that handed me colored pens, a master script, and answered all my many questions. I've got to tell you, I absolutely loved it. I love grading tests. Why? No idea. But I'll keep doing it. You hear that, Laurie? I'll keep grading for you, lady. Grading is now my jam.

The board threw one of the best galas I have ever attended. I think others present would agree. I will only take credit for building a five-foot tall golden cardboard man. I had the honor of putting together a joint costume

with my friend AND NOW DSA WINNER Kathryn Thomas. We went a little crazy, a little Met Gala, a little Lady Gaga meat dress with the vibe. Everyone accepted our insanity, embraced it even. I really appreciated that.

I guess my takeaway is this: Give board service a try sometime. There's such a great group of people here that help each other out, and I look forward to contributing more in my first full term. A lot of work was done to put this conference together, but a lot of fun was had as well. My wider-view takeaway is TAKE A RISK. All this was new to me. All of these things I've written about were a step outside my comfort zone in some way. I recommend it. I'm really glad I did. ■



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The Rewards of Service Beyond a Full Calendar



**By Jodee Whitley,
IL-CSR, MO-CCR, RPR, RMR,
RDR**

ILCRA members, it is my honor to join the ILCRA Board as the Region II Freelance Representative. During my more than 34 years as a licensed court reporter, this profession has been a tremendous blessing. It has provided stability, flexibility, lifelong friendships, and opportunities that allowed me to raise four wonderful children and nurture a 31-year marriage. I could not have accomplished all of that without this profession and the many incredible people I have met along the way. As grateful as I am for those blessings, I am equally grateful for the individuals who have invested their time and talents to strengthen our profession through service.

While accepting this position was an easy decision, I did wrestle with how it would fit into days already filled with long hours and competing demands.

Like many of you, my calendar is full. Between work, family, and life's many responsibilities, there never seems to be extra time. Yet as I reflected on those who have served before me and those who continue to serve today, I found myself inspired to become part of something larger. We should all be grateful for the remarkable work this Board has done and continues to do on behalf of our profession. Action is the catalyst for progress, and without it, we stand still. It is easy to assume someone else will step forward to solve a problem or move an initiative forward, but meaningful change begins when someone says yes. How fortunate we are as a reporting community that so many dedicated individuals have accepted that challenge.

Action is the catalyst for progress, and without it, we stand still.

I encourage each of you to consider how you might become more involved and to motivate your friends and colleagues to join our great association. Attend the annual conference, support a student if you are able, and make those commitments a priority on your calendar, not an afterthought. Schedule them the same way you would a wedding, family celebration, or any event you would never consider missing. There is something uniquely renewing about gathering with peers, learning from outstanding speakers, and being surrounded by the extraordinary

talent within our profession. One of my favorite experiences is meeting new stenography students who, despite hearing guesses that our profession will disappear, recognize that court reporters remain the gold standard for preserving the record and are eager to build a rewarding career.

I continue to leave every conference inspired, whether at the state or national level. I believe in continual growth, and I strive to set goals that challenge me while holding myself accountable. I encourage you to do the same, pursue a certification, mentor a student, expand your career path, advocate for our profession, or contribute through service. This profession has been good to all of us, and each of us can find ways to give back, whether through volunteering, financial support, mentorship, or simply encouraging the next generation. When I look back on the most rewarding experiences of my career, they are rarely tied to a transcript, a deadline, or a particularly busy week. They are tied to people, relationships, learning, growth, and service.

As you look ahead, I encourage you to ask yourself a simple question: What will I do to leave our profession stronger than I found it? Our calendars will always be full, deadlines will always demand our attention, and life will always provide reasons to postpone getting involved. Yet the greatest rewards often come from the things we do in service to others. This profession has given many of us stable careers, lifelong friendships, flexibility, purpose, and countless opportunities. One of the best ways to honor those blessings



is to give back. Whether through mentorship, volunteerism, advocacy, or simply encouraging the next generation, each of us has something valuable to contribute. Together, we can ensure that the profession we love remains strong for those who follow in our footsteps. After all, the rewards of service extend far beyond a full calendar, they become part of the legacy we leave behind.

Jodee also serves as Vice President of Client Experience at Paszkiewicz Litigation Services, Glen Carbon, Illinois. ILCRA thanks SP Reporting for their continuous and generous support of ILCRA Conventions, including being a vendor for our events. Thank you, Jodee and SP! ■

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Introducing Angie Montini, Region 1 Freelance Representative



By Angie Montini, CSR

I grew up in small town in Colorado and had a great uncle who apparently thought he knew what I should do with my life when I was 12 years old. He came to visit us and told me about a good friend of his who was a judge and suggested that I should become a court reporter. I had no idea what a court reporter was. He gave me a brief description, and I promptly filed it away where you file things in the back of your brain when your great uncle is planning out your life for you at age 12. Fast-forward a few years to high school. I was sitting in my business class when someone from Mile High College came to talk to us about its court reporting program. They brought along a steno machine and let us tap on it. I was

fascinated by that little machine. How on earth could someone take down an entire conversation on it? Once again, I filed it away.

I eventually moved to Wichita, Kansas, where I was working full-time and taking classes at night at Wichita State University. But that little machine was still somewhere in the back of my mind. I finally found a court reporting school and decided to give it a shot. Two years later, I was flying to Chicago to take the CSR. And I passed! Why Chicago, you ask? I followed the boyfriend, who is now my husband.

I started my career as a freelance reporter in downtown Chicago. For a small-town girl, living and working in the big city was pretty exciting. I learned so much and made memories I still treasure. And I'm not sure I would have survived those early days without that little orange-and-blue Chicago street names book! If you know, you know!

Eventually, we started a family and had two beautiful daughters, who are now 25 and 23. In 2007, I made the transition to official reporting and joined the 18th Judicial Circuit in Wheaton. I truly enjoy working in court with wonderful people, and I'm incredibly fortunate to work alongside some of the best reporters in the profession. They aren't just coworkers; they are great friends, and we have built a team that supports one another and works together.

And just like that, 34 years have gone

by. Perhaps the most meaningful part of this journey is that the story has now come full circle. My 25-year-old daughter is currently in the Officialship Training Program in Wheaton, working on her 160s. When I was approached about serving as the official representative on the board, I found myself reflecting about what an incredible career this profession has given me. It has shaped me in so many ways, supported my family, and given me a career I am truly proud of.

Now, I want to help make sure that opportunity continues, for my daughter and for the generations of court reporters who will follow us. I hope to do my part to protect and strengthen this fabulous profession and to keep court reporters as the gold standard for preserving the record.

It's funny how life works. A great uncle made a suggestion to a 12-year-old girl, a high school business class introduced her to a mysterious little machine, and somehow that little machine became a 34-year career. It always comes back to that little machine. ■

Board Service: The Ultimate Fitness Journey



Strong reporters. Strong leaders. Strong association. Apparently, planning a convention counts as arm day!

By Andrea M. James, CSR

Serving on the ILCRA Board is a lot like beginning a fitness journey. At first, you are enthusiastic, optimistic, and completely unaware of which muscles, or how much patience, you are about to test. You show up to your first meeting with a fresh notebook, several good ideas, and the innocent belief that everyone will stay on topic. It is essentially the organizational equivalent of buying new workout clothes in January.

Then convention planning begins, and suddenly you are in endurance training. Choosing a venue is cardio. Reviewing contracts is strength training. Creating a budget is a balance exercise performed on one foot while people throw unexpected expenses at you. Every time you think the schedule is finalized, a speaker cancels, a room changes, or someone asks whether lunch is included. Congratulations! You have just added another mile to your workout.

Board meetings are interval workouts. There are brief bursts of productivity followed by long stretches of

discussing one sentence in the bylaws. You may spend 20 minutes debating the placement of a comma, but court reporters understand that punctuation matters. Somewhere around hour two, everyone begins checking the snack supply and wondering whether mentally rewriting the agenda counts as active recovery.

Planning the convention also involves plenty of heavy lifting, although very little of it happens in a gym. There are boxes, decorations, registration materials, sponsor signs, silent auction donations, and enough extension cords to power a small city.



Your fitness tracker may congratulate you for reaching your step goal, but it does not know that most of those steps were spent searching the hotel for the breakout room someone swore was “just around the corner.”

Then convention weekend arrives: the championship event. Board members operate on caffeine, adrenaline, and the fear that someone’s microphone will stop working. We smile, solve problems, answer the same question 14 times, and somehow appear calm while silently calculating whether the next session

will start on time. By Saturday night, we have completed the equivalent of a triathlon without the benefit of a finish-line massage.

Like any worthwhile fitness journey, however, serving on the ILCRA Board makes us stronger. We build leadership muscles, improve our flexibility, and develop remarkable endurance. And just as no one begins a fitness journey by lifting the heaviest weight in the gym, you do not have to start by taking on a major board position. Volunteer for a committee, help with

one convention task, offer an idea, or simply ask where an extra set of hands is needed. Every strong team needs trainers, workout buddies, and people willing to step onto the floor. You may finish convention weekend tired and promising yourself you will “never do that again,” but once you see what your efforts helped accomplish, you may discover that joining the ILCRA team is one workout worth repeating. While flexing for the camera is optional, bringing your talents, ideas, and willingness to help is always encouraged. ■

Generations College: Report

By Laurie Kornmuller

Generations was a well-known school in Chicago that offered a complete stenography curriculum. Students who attended Generations could receive an associate’s degree after completion of their studies.

After 2020, Generations offered an asynchronous program so that students around the nation could attend their school. In their stenography curriculum, they included a digital course and a generative AI course. Generations expressed that students completing the digital coursework would be allowed to earn credentials and begin working while they continued building speed.

Recently, NCRA (National Court Reporters Association) was informed that Generations included a digital program with a digital class being required for stenography students. NCRA requested Generations not to include a digital class in their stenography curriculum.

Generations described stenography as the gold standard, but they wanted to recognize both digital and stenography. NCRA declined Generations’ position, and Generations Board of Trustees and senior leadership declined also, with the college ending its stenographic program approval as an NCRA-accredited school, effective August 31, 2026.

Generations’ program approval is now held through CAPTUR (Council for the Advancement of Professionals, Technology, and Unbiased Reporting),

a merger of AAERT and STAR.

As many know, Generations is the former MacCormac College. MacCormac College was the first stenography school in the nation.

ILCRA will continue to stay informed as these events may continue to unfold. We will also be updating our website to reflect stenography schools available within our state, as well as online schools available for students interested in pursuing stenography. ■

Realtime Hacks Continued

By **Greg S. Weiland,**
CSR, RDR, CRR

JoAnn Losoya and I presented at the ILCRA convention in September in Rosemont. Our topic was conducting research before a job and trying to be rough-ready at the end of the day on every single job we go on. We had an hour to present but at least two hours' worth of material. We ran out of time just as we were getting to what I consider the fun stuff: short writing and some useful briefs that work for us on almost every job we take. Since we ran out of time, I wanted to share some of these with you all.

This grouping of shortcuts relates to objections. I have shared them before, but I thought it was worthwhile to share again since it's something we hear in every job.

A useful bit of advice. Don't overwhelm your brain. Pick one brief, maybe "objection, form," [JORM], and try to add that to your repertoire. And don't forget to global that comma into the phrase. If you adopt that one brief, you save yourself a couple of strokes on a very common phrase. Every time you eliminate a stroke, you also reduce the chance of making an error. Fewer strokes and less chance for errors translate into less editing and allow you to get more pages done per hour, which translates into more money per hour for you.



OBJECTIONS
TAKE 1

Objection, form	JORM
Objection, vague	JAIG
Objection, form of the question	JORMZ
Objection, foundation	JAIGS
Objection, relevance	JAILZ
Objection, incomplete hypothetical	JIPT
Objection overruled	JOERLD
Objection sustained	JAIND
No objection	NO*EB



OBJECTIONS
TAKE 2

Object to form	BORM
Object to the form	BORMT
Object to the form of the question	BORMTS
Objection to form	BOERM
Objection to the form	BOERMT
Objection to the form of the question	BOERMTS



OBJECTIONS
TAKE 3

Calls for speculation	KFGS
Lacks foundation	LAIGS
Lack of foundation	L*F
Hypothetical	HAOIPT
Incomplete hypothetical	NIPT
Document speaks for itself	DAOEPS
Legal conclusion	L*E

If you would like to see more of our hacks, please let us know. We want you all to be capable of generating that extra income from providing rough drafts, and eventually, if you're not already doing so, providing realtime and enjoying those extra dollars too.

You can email us at gweilandcrr@gmail.com or jlosoyacsr@gmail.com if you have any questions or suggestions. ■

My First Time at the Podium: Notes from a Rookie Presenter By An Illinois Court Reporters Association Conference Presenter Who Lived to Tell the Tale

By JoAnn Losoya,
CSR, RPR, CRR

When Greg Weiland first approached me to collaborate with him in making a presentation at the annual ILCRA conference on Realtime Tips and Tricks, I admit it was a flattering invitation. In practice, it causes an immediate mental inventory of every awkward thing you have ever said in public, every use of profanity – EGADS!!! I'd have to smile more and be congenial, and most of all, I'd have to impart the knowledge of the tricks and tips I have been using in a rote fashion throughout my career in a coherent and cohesive manner that everyone could understand and want to implement themselves.

But how could I say no to Greg? "It'll be fun," he said. "You'll be great," he said. Once again, he became my cheerleader — just as he had when he convinced me to enter the Realtime and Speed contests (and, by the way, I qualified in Realtime Q&A and Speed Literary — yahoo!) and to join the Board. Is anyone else noticing a pattern?

At first, we just wanted to talk about hooking up to the videographer's audio and audiosyncing it to your transcript. In discussions with other court reporters, we were shocked that a lot of you did not take advantage of this valuable resource. As Greg said, it is an addictive drug that I can't live without. As I get older, I don't want to strain to hear the guy at the end of the table or even across from me

who mumbles "objection, form" barely above whisper voice. No, no, no. I'm not playing any of those games anymore.

Good. Item 1 out of the way.

But then I started noticing on different CR Facebook posts how many reporters do not do real time, if even just for themselves, and how many reporters get freaked out on doing a rough, losing out on the opportunity to earn more money. We decided that those two things go hand-in-hand, and it would be great if we could share our tips and time-saving tricks to produce an immediate rough. Even on non-RT jobs, I plop out my laptop and treat the job as if it was RT. It cuts down on the editing time on the backend, and as I said in the seminar, I don't want any more homework. We figured since we are boots-on-the-ground reporters, it would make more sense hearing what we do every day to accomplish getting out a rough. Listen, I'm not a court reporter phenom. It has been a work-in-progress ever since I passed the CSR in 1980. I know that the STRUGGLE IS REAL.

Yay! Point No. 2 solidified!

BUT WAIT, THERE'S MORE. There is the whole thing about HOW we can get out a rough most times immediately at the conclusion of a job. How? How? How? I started to jot down things that I do on autopilot for EVERY SINGLE JOB to share. Every day, a new idea came into my head based on something I did on a job that I wanted to share, just a couple of little things that you can do to save a stroke or two, to ease your exhaustion, to help write cleaner and faster.

Greg and I both agree that preparation is the key. It is very hard to go into something cold without knowing the terminology and be able to produce a rough at the end of the day. So we added how we prepare to the list of things.

After a few texts back and forth, Facetimeing, and dinners, we figured out that even though our software is different and our theories are radically different, we do things very similar. We use some of the same brief tricks and we also had our own individual secrets to share. He learned from me and I learned from him along the way. So we weren't KNOW-IT-ALLS after all. LOL

So Point 3 was born!

We met, conferred, met and conferred again until we had a base PowerPoint put together. Hats off to Greg on that one! I had no idea how to put one of those together, and he took the lead on that part of our little group project. Isn't that the way with a group project? One always has to be the leader and does the lion's share of the work. But Greg had an ulterior motive – I was going to be the Vanna White of our little duo and be the actual live demonstrator. Well, it stands to reason since I was the one that was playing with AI for making word lists, captions, and in some instances getting actual brief forms,

next thing you know we have 41 slides full of tips, tricks, tutorials, slides of briefs, suggestions on short writing, and then we planned to riff our way through it.

Conference Day: The Moment of Truth

Then conference day arrived. The room suddenly seemed larger, the microphone crackled and buzzed, and the audience contained many people whose work and experience I genuinely respect. No pressure—just a roomful of professionals trained to capture every syllable accurately here eagerly waiting to hear my words of wisdom.

I was humbled and excited all at the same time.

I took a breath, began speaking and explaining the rationale for doing the things I do to get roughs out, a daily copy out, to do a RT job, and discovered something wonderful, to coin a phrase: YOU LIKED IT. YOU REALLY LIKED IT. You guys nodded in agreement, laughed in the places I hoped you would laugh, and asked thoughtful questions. Most importantly, nobody stood up and announced an objection to our suggestions, which is what we feared

the most. The dreaded “I can’t do that.”

Once I settled in, the nerves gave way to the reason I had agreed to present in the first place: the chance to share something useful with colleagues who understand the unique challenges, responsibilities, and occasional absurdities of our profession.

The session became less about “performing” and more about having a conversation with people who speak the same language — even when that language is something the rest of the world thinks is MAGIC. (Well, it really is magic, isn’t it?!)

The hour flew by! We didn’t even get a chance to complete our presentation – there was so much more we wanted to cover. Greg and I are contemplating putting together a Part 2. Membership feedback is so important. Please fill out those surveys!!

What I Learned:

- Preparation does not eliminate nerves, but it gives them

something productive to do.

- A supportive audience can turn a presentation into a conversation.
- Saying “yes” before you feel completely ready is sometimes how you discover that you are ready enough.

Would I Do It Again?

Absolutely — although I reserve the right to panic briefly when asked. Presenting for the Illinois Court Reporters Association gave me a new appreciation for everyone who steps forward to teach, share, and contribute to our professional community. It also reminded me that expertise is not diminished by nerves; sometimes nerves are simply proof that we care about doing the job well.

To anyone considering presenting at a future conference, my advice is simple: say yes, prepare well, and remember that the people in the room want you to succeed. ■



ILCRA Convention: More Than Continuing Education

**By Georgia Northway,
RPR, CCR-MO, CSR-IL**

Thursday afternoon, I received a text with a phone number to call. It was a student asking to attend Friday's seminars and inquiring about the cost. It sounded pretty textbook initially, until I made the phone call.

When I made contact with Twilaa Carter, the first thing I noticed in speaking with her was her excitement and enthusiasm. Twilaa is a huge fan of Marlene Kerr and was ecstatic about seeing Marlene and Tammy Sefranek present their seminar on what it was like to be a court reporter in the U.S. House of Representatives. I remember her words so clearly: "She is living my dream life."

Through the generous support of our members and vendors, ILCRA was able to cover the cost of Twilaa's attendance on Friday, not only to make her aspiring court reporting dreams come true, but to grant the one and only wish she had for her birthday this year – attend this very seminar.

When Twilaa arrived on Friday, she was initially mistaken for a firm owner, a seasoned professional reporter – anything but a student – because she was impressive. We all know not to judge a book by its cover, but when a student shows up in a tailored suit, polished and poised, it is incredibly difficult not to take note of the time and effort she put into her outward presentation.



With the support of Twilaa's family, she was able to make it to Rosemont, attend the seminar, and meet and speak with Marlene and Tammy. I sincerely hope Twilaa is still riding the high of meeting her hero and is well on her way to accomplishing her goal for this year – get out of school and start working! Twilaa was just about to reach 225wpm at convention, and on behalf of ILCRA, we hope you are inching closer to that goal every day!

Twilaa's story reminds us all that ILCRA conventions are so much more than meeting mandatory continuing education requirements. It is a chance to see friends, make new connections, create a place to make dreams (and birthday wishes) come true, and to support each other as well as the next generation, who will ensure the future of our profession. ■



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