

## Joni Boucher Retires from SRJC Paralegal Program

By Susan Littlefield



In case you have not heard, Joni Boucher (right) retired as coordinator of the Santa Rosa Junior College Paralegal Studies Program on December 21, 2016. She has been working a long time and is ready to do other things, including spending more time with her retired husband, Roger.

I first met Joni in the fall of 1999 after I was admitted to the Attorney Assistant Program at Sonoma State University (SSU). I don't recall the class she was teaching—maybe career building or computer skills—but I remember immediately being drawn to her strong presence and straight forward manner. The more I got to know Joni, the more inspired I became by how she encouraged students to achieve excellence in the skills needed to progress in the legal profession.

One thing I know about Joni is that she is no stranger to hard work. When she was 14, she started working in a business her family owned, earning enough money to save for her first car. It's not a wonder that the story about her career journey is so compelling, including the fact that becoming a paralegal never meant settling into a conventional nine-to-five job. In fact, Joni characterizes being a paralegal as her second career, following co-ownership in a business where she worked with business owners and professionals, and developed training and motivational skills along the way.

While still working at her co-owned business, Joni received a Sonoma State University catalog in the mail. As she browsed the pages, she came across the description for the Attorney Assistant Program and thought it sounded interesting, like something she would like to do. After completing the pre-program guidelines, Joni interviewed with the coordinator, Diane Petropoulos, and the two

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found they had a lot in common, including their love for horses.

Joni was accepted into the program and, with the encouragement of Diane, Frank Drago and other instructors in the program, graduated from the Attorney Assistant Program in 1996 and put her skills to work. Joni taught her first paralegal class in the program in 1997, and then became coordinator of the Attorney Assistant Program at Sonoma State University when Diane Petropoulos retired 1999.

Joni was still coordinator when the university discontinued the program in about 2008. However, she didn't let this stop her from finding a way to continue education for future paralegals. She planted seeds that the Santa Rosa Junior College might be a good venue for the program, and the talks and planning grew into a full-fledged project. The Paralegal Studies Program was finally established at Santa Rosa Junior College in 2010, and Joni served as lead instructor and coordinator. The only difference between the two paralegal programs was venue, because Joni adopted the same courses and educational standards as those that had been used at SSU.

Besides being the coordinator of paralegal programs at two different colleges, Joni has also worked at the Sonoma County Law Library and as a contract paralegal in traditional law office settings. Most of her work has been in civil litigation, even though she has dipped her toes into some criminal cases. At one time, she had five different paralegal jobs, including one with Santa Rosa attorney Martin McOmber. She has also written for *Legal Assistant Today* (now *Paralegal Today*) and currently writes, edits and cite-checks for the Sonoma County Bar Association's *Bar Journal*.

As she moves closer to retirement, Joni's advice to students in the Paralegal Studies Program is, in a nutshell, to keep your standards high and understand the value in your work, so you can communicate it effectively to your employers.