

# Looking back

# & moving forward

by Hilary Daninhirsch

**S**eventy-five years ago, a group of secretaries in Topeka, Kansas, decided it would be beneficial to create a way to bring together secretaries from a variety of backgrounds to collaborate and further develop the discipline. What started as an informal gathering of a few women rapidly gained international momentum and the National Secretaries Association was formed.

Now referred to as IAAP (International Association of Administrative Professionals), the diamond anniversary of the vision of these women is being celebrated. Milestones like this one offer an opportunity to look back and appreciate the dedication it took to get to where we are and highlight some of the noteworthy changes within the organization and in the profession itself.

## **Nomenclature**

The National Secretaries Association (NSA) was formed in 1942 and began the long journey to become today's IAAP. Along the way, members officially changed the name of the organization several times to better represent how it was evolving. In 1981, the group became

known as Professional Secretaries International as the popularity of the organization continued to grow outside the U.S. A name-change occurred again in 1998 as a response to changing expectations; IAAP became the official name.

"We did that in an attempt to keep the association current," board chairperson Wendy Melby says. "As job titles were changing, we had administrative roles other than being a secretary or an assistant to an executive."

The name change reflects the broader roles and changing job descriptions of office support staff in recent decades. Judy Wilson, current director of the Topeka LAN and association member since 1979, says "I think the name change was necessary because the work force has

changed so much." Until the change to LANs, Wilson belonged to the original founding chapter, Kaw, in Topeka, Kansas.

Job title changes in the past 75 years are reflected in the association's name changes. In an attempt to be more representative of jobs, such positions as administrative assistant, office manager and executive assistant began to emerge. The long established day of observance, Secretaries Day, was replaced with Administrative Professional's Day. However, it is still celebrated the last Wednesday in April, in the established tradition.

## **Technology**

A manual typewriter, some carbon paper, a mimeograph machine, pens, and a shorthand notebook were the

**T**HE NATIONAL SECRETARY is issued ten times each year, once a month for ten months. July and December are the months excepted. This means that you will not receive another copy until August. In the meantime, let's not permit the normal inactivity of clubs in summer to dull the keen edge of our war effort. Let's continue meeting, planning, doing—for the boys "over there", who recognize neither summer's heat nor winter's cold in fighting Democracy's battle for us "back here"!



*At Last! We Secretaries  
Have an Organization All Our Own*

### Clippings from NSA (IAAP) publications

essential supplies for secretaries in the association's early days. Today, these items that may seem antiquated or like something you'd find in a museum, but they can offer some insight in tracing the impact of evolving technology on the daily routine of admins.

More recently, advances in technology, such as computers, email, and apps, have made life more efficient for office staff, triggering an increase in productivity and capability. It has also enabled people to work virtually or offsite, if necessary, making it easier to coordinate meetings and events. Melby says, "To me, technology has tremendously helped this role and has allowed us to expand and grow."

Longtime member and veteran administrative assistant, Char Wilkinson of Hopkins, Minnesota, says, "I think now a person needs

to know all the software that is out there; that is very crucial." Microsoft office products are a must as are industry-specific and scheduling software. More recently, a large number of apps have emerged that, if utilized correctly, could help most offices run more efficiently and effectively. To that end, many seminars offered by IAAP are focused on advances in technology and how to benefit from them.

There can be a downside to all this technology. As H. Diane Thornton, association member since 1983 and assistant to the Office of VP and Alumni Affairs at Duke University, points out, "Technology has made us more productive; however, it has made us less socially interactive—we lack people skills. We don't know how to talk anymore because we do everything by email, Twitter, Facebook, etc." Especially if

you are in an industry where personal interaction is vital, be careful not to dehumanize your interactions.

### Social Media

Similar to advances in technology, the millennial generation has made another large contribution to the digital world: Social media. The term was coined in the late 1990s to refer to websites like Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn that provide a virtual space to bring people together. Social media facilitates the development of relationships and creates a community feel without a physical space. In addition, for career purposes, the use of social media sites can be used to network and connect with others that can influence your growth.

But there's a downside to this as well. Impersonal, online communication can never replace in-person,



# ADMIN'S IN POP CULTURE

Over the years, fictional administrative professionals in pop culture often have been portrayed as savvy, sassy, smart, vivacious, resourceful, and, at times, murderous.

Jane Hathaway - "Beverly Hillbillies"

Waylon Smithers - "The Simpsons"

Judy Bernly, Violet Newstead,  
Doralee Rhodes - "9 to 5"

Jennifer Marlowe - "WKRP in Cincinnati"

Carol Kester - "The Bob Newhart Show"

Karen Walker - "Will & Grace"

Pam Beesley - "The Office"

Jane Money Penny - "James Bond"

Tess McGill - "Working Girl"

Mrs. Wiggins - "The Carol Burnett Show"

Gary Walsh - "Veep"

Jonathan - "30 Rock"

Peggy Olson and Joan Holloway - "Mad Men"

became industry standard for competency evaluation. Many of today's administrative professionals, no matter what the level, opt to sit for the CAP exam and attain the credential. Having the certification shows employers and potential employers that you have the dedication to

improve yourself as well as the knowledge base to be successful.

"Our CAP exam is our crown jewel," Melby says. It is a widely accepted form of evaluation offered exclusively by the IAAP. Its popularity and positive image helps grow and develop the association while celebrating its members. But beware. The CAP exam is not a piece of cake. It incorporates organizational communications, human resources, financial tasks, office management, current technology, project management, and many other topics into real-life scenarios to gauge proper responses. The evolving nature of the role means recertification is required every five years.

Melby, who is certified, says, "We did it, obviously, to give some credibility to those of us who wanted more merit to what we did. It bumps you up in the picking range, and it shows you're serious about yourself and your profession."

## Responsibilities

Perhaps the most marked transformation from IAAP's fledgling days is the broad responsibilities that many administrative professionals shoulder today. The phrase, "Sorry, but that is not in my job description," is rarely uttered as the variety of tasks continues to expand. In addition to traditional secretarial

one-on-one interaction. Apart from the vast learning opportunities, the IAAP international conferences and regional events provide ways to network in the traditional sense. Integrating in-person and social media interaction is the best way to stay current, improve your communication skills, and even receive support in a variety of ways.

## Skills and Education

The first secretaries were required to have a specific skill set that included typing and/or taking shorthand, having proper phone etiquette, knowledge of hosting guests, and the ability to make and run a schedule. While these "hard skills" are still crucial to the role, many "soft skills"

have come into play in recent years, such as decision-making skills, problem-solving abilities, and leadership capabilities, to name a few.

Today's administrative professional is generally more educated than his or her predecessors, pursuing degrees and certifications to demonstrate a dedication toward the role and developing professionally within the industry. Also, this behavior seems to mimic the change seen in administrative roles as they absorbed more and more tasks or changed how tasks were completed to meet with the days' demands. In 2001, the Certified Authorized Professional (CAP) certification program was introduced and quickly

duties, many admins are engaged in every happening at the office from planning and executing meetings, planning important projects, writing, editing, and sometimes delivering important documents, and even website maintenance.

Thornton says, “We’re more involved in the administrative side. We’re not just the worker bee; we are making decisions as well.” Recent trends show many executives place a high level of trust in their assistants, which fosters a collaborative relationship that often leads to more advanced tasks than before. “It’s not a direction from your boss; you know what needs to be done,” Wilson says, and it’s hoped you’re trusted to do it, which frees up more time in the executive’s day.

Wilkinson adds, “It is important to know how to get along with and work with all different kinds of personalities out there, and you have to know how to manage different priorities.” Being aware of this will help develop the trust needed to complete these tasks. For example, Melby says she has developed this relationship and regularly engages in business conversations with her boss where her opinion is respected. She says, “The responsibilities of the role have changed dramatically. Anyone that truly holds the ‘executive’ title will be more like middle management than ever before.”

IAAP has shifted a bit in structure since its creation. The association was originally organized into chapters and divisions, but today’s organization is comprised of LANs (Local Area Networks) as well as larger branches that encompass geographic areas. However, the main goal continues to propel it forward. With a variety of conferences, gatherings, activities, programs, and communication tools, the network it has created continues to benefit from what it offers.

While many changes have occurred in these 75 years, it’s easy

to see the original vision still exists. As Thorton says, “The profession has changed but the motto of it, from the very beginning when the NSA first started in 1942, was that the organization was created to provide an opportunity for growth, education, community-building, and leadership development; that has not changed.”

# OUR NSA

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Beneath gray skies as well as blue

NSA will e’er be true,

And we’ll follow on to our shining goal

Where our lamp of learning will be brightly burning.

All our hopes and schemes, will no longer be just dreams

We’ll have a paradise in life apart from daily care and strife,

And we’ll know new joys each day, loyal friends of NSA

As faithful members of NSA

If breezes blow or wild storms rage

NSA our aid we’ll pledge

And we’ll stand together all for one

Then one for all—we’ll answer your call.

Our banner we will fly, our hopes we will keep on high

Then life will have a rosy hue as we go proudly on with you,

And we’ll all be happy ev’ry day, loyal friends of NSA

As faithful members of NSA

## OFFICIAL SONG

OF

## THE NATIONAL SECRETARIES ASSOCIATION

### About the author:

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