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AMERICAN SOCIETY OF NOTARIES: HISTORY OF A LEGACY

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I. MISSION STATEMENT

The American Society of Notaries (the Society) is dedicated to providing its members with education, professional service and technical support, promoting high ethical standards, and increasing public awareness of notaries' valuable contributions.

II. HISTORY OF A LEGACY

The Society is the first national nonprofit association for notaries public in the United States. Established in 1965, the American Society of Notaries is foremost in education, support and supply for the notary in America.

In September 1965, the American Society of Notaries was formed by Eugene E. and Sheila Hines, together with Arthur B. Barton, Jr., Arthur W. Purkel, and Marvin Weissberg. Gene Hines served as Director of the Society from its conception until 1994. Art Barton was the Society's first Chairman of the Board, serving from 1965 until 1980. Other past Chairs include Harry Drumheller, Jean Simmons, Ted Irvin, Barbara Babb, and Jack Diestelhorst, among others.

Gene Hines became aware that the notary in America had no source for notarial information and education. Notaries were given very little information and training when commissioned. This often created confusion about notarial duties, authority and proper procedures to follow when executing documents. At the time, some states issued handbooks but most were brief, often detailing actual laws without explanations of the application of those laws. Notaries needed an organization, a source for education, training and materials. As a result, Hines endeavored to form an organization dedicated to the education and support of notaries. In 1960, he began work on his first notary handbook for his home

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state of Kentucky. Hines' Kentucky notary handbook would be the first of several written to meet the informational needs of American notaries.

III. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The Society promulgated a Statement of Purpose in its Articles of Incorporation. It provided that, "The purposes for which the corporation is organized are to advance the science of jurisprudence as it relates to notarial functions; to uphold high standards for notaries public; to serve as a clearinghouse of information on matters relating to notaries public; and to encourage cordial and friendly relations among notaries public and other public officers authorized to perform notarial acts." The Society adopted a motto in January 1966, "Pro Lege et Grege," which means "For the Law and the People." After careful research, study and deliberation, the year 24 B.C. was established as the birth year of the office of notary public. In 1975 the Board adopted a resolution to this effect, and a commemorative medal was struck to celebrate the 2,000 years of service and contributions by the notaries of the world.

IV. FOCUS ON MEMBERS

Memberships were offered through solicitations to new and existing notaries. Members received a certificate of membership and member card, training information and reference materials. A toll-free notary helpline was established to enable the members of the American Society of Notaries to contact the offices for fast help and information on notary procedures.

In 1974, the Society began publication of the *American Notary* newsletter, which compiled information regarding Society happenings, legislative bulletins and opinions of the Director on various notary policies and procedures. The newsletter was provided to the members of the Society as well as state regulators across the country.

Handbooks and instructional materials were developed and made available to members. Books included handbooks for Massachusetts, New Jersey and Washington, DC. Texas, Virginia, Florida and others followed soon thereafter. The Society designed an All-States Notarial Record Book to provide instruction on how to thoroughly document notarial transactions, including a signature line for the document signer and consecutively-numbered pages.

In response to the lack of formal education available through state regulators, the Society also created the Career-Path Study Course to enable notaries to educate themselves with the assistance of the Society. Notaries were able to use the study guide and complete a test at the end of each chapter, ensuring their comprehension of the materials provided. A certificate of completion was issued when all tests were performed.

The Society also provided a wedding kit to those notaries authorized to perform marriage ceremonies. The kit supplied Florida and South Carolina notaries with the materials necessary to perform this duty in a professional manner. A kit for Maine notaries was added after the Society moved to Florida.

The Society provided stamps, seals, educational materials, reference guides and manuals, in addition to State-specific handbooks.

V. AMERICAN SOCIETY OF NOTARIES CODE OF ETHICS

A professional Code of Ethics was created by the Society to guide and encourage notaries to adhere to ethical as well as legal standards of excellence:

We, the members of the American Society of Notaries, having accepted the responsibilities of the office of Notary Public, in order to faithfully discharge our duties with both competence and integrity, resolve to adhere to the following standards of conduct:

To uphold the trust placed in me by the public I serve;

To maintain a professional manner suitable to the office I hold;

To treat each individual fairly and equally, with kindness and respect;

To always be satisfied that the individual appearing before me understands the contents of the document to be executed or oath to be administered before proceeding;

To always satisfy myself as to the identity of the individual appearing before me in my capacity as Notary Public;

To not betray the confidence of any individual appearing before me;

To never perform any notarial act in which I am a party in interest or from which I stand to benefit;

To never divulge the contents of any document nor the facts of execution of that document without proper authority;

To keep informed of the law regarding the duties and powers of the office of Notary Public in my jurisdiction and not compromise that law;

To not use the office of Notary Public as a means of financial gain, for myself or others, in any other business or profession;

To exercise extreme care to insure that the notarial seal, stamp and records are kept in a safe place and are not used by any other person;

To always conduct myself and perform my duties in a manner which will bring credit to myself, my office and the Society.

Adopted by the American Society of Notaries Board of Directors

May 4, 1980

VI. NATIONAL NOTARY PUBLIC DAY

The Society Board of Directors designated November 18, 1974 as National Notary Public Day and the week of November 7th was designated National Notary Public Week. The day was established to honor and recognize notaries' contributions to the world.

VII. COMMITTEES

Various committees were created in order to better serve the membership of the Society, and to assist the Director in handling the various functions of the office. These committees included membership, government relations, education, ethics and public relations. Committees were selected from volunteering members exhibiting interest, ability and skills, as well as experience in each field.

VIII. AN ORGANIZATION IN TRANSITION

In 1994, Gene Hines announced his retirement as director of the Society to Jack Diestelhorst, the Society's Chairman of the Board and President of Notary Public Underwriters (NPU). After much deliberation, the Board of Directors decided to make a dramatic change in the structure of the Society. After careful consideration, Diestelhorst spearheaded the effort to move the Society from Washington, D.C. to Tallahassee, Florida. The plan included moving the Society into temporary headquarters in a suite of offices with Notary Public Underwriters. In this way, Diestelhorst could personally oversee the Society and its activities.

Countless hours of planning, research and development went into the creation of an automated computerized system of maintaining membership records and history, which had been previously maintained on an off-site computer system. The goal of the move involved taking the Society from a family-owned and run organization to a board-run, volunteer driven, non-profit organization. In subsequent years, the Society has committed itself to increasing public awareness of the valuable role notaries play in our society, improving the education available to notaries, monitoring legal changes throughout the country, advancing unity with state regulators and bonding agents involved with notaries and promoting the Society constantly throughout corporate America.

The Board of Directors has actively pursued legislative

changes for electronic notarization in Florida, revised existing handbooks for notaries and written books for additional states. The Society published a new Recordbook for notaries that includes detailed notary procedures and checklists. The Society now has a presence on the Internet (www.notaries.com), providing guidance and information needed by the notary. Additionally, the Society has established an innovative program of self-education for the notary, the *American Notary Home Training Seminar*. The Society continues to work closely with state regulators and partners to meet notaries' needs across the country.

In the summer of 1997, the Society moved to new headquarters in another building in Tallahassee. The move established the Society's independence, and it became the separate and autonomous entity envisioned by the Board when the move to Tallahassee began.

IX. NEW HORIZONS

Membership has grown dramatically since the move, and the Society is becoming well-known in all areas of the country. The Society's input is sought when legislative decisions are made. Members know they can depend on the Society for immediate help, facts and information with just a toll-free phone call or an e-mail. The Society's greatly expanded product line provides for all the notary's needs.

Members benefit from instant access to help with the Society's toll-free helpline, increased resources and education tools, such as the *American Notary Home Training Seminar* and updated handbooks and reference materials. A greatly enhanced Member Benefits Package is offered, as well as excellent training information included in the New Member Kit. Quality supplies are available with new products added constantly and prompt and courteous customer service is assured.

The *American Notary* newsletter has evolved into a thought-provoking and informative quarterly for the notary in America, with up-to-the-minute legislative updates, Q&A's, carefully researched articles and writers and lively and interesting member input. Members are constantly praising the value of these newsletters as a quick and accurate reference tool for answers and information on notary issues and procedures.

The American Society of Notaries' Annual Conference has become a training and information extravaganza. Guest speakers and educators contribute their time and experience, knowledge and expertise and make the Annual Conference a training and enhancement occasion to remember.

Events stemming from National Notary Public Day (November 7th) and National Notary Public Week, first established by the Society in 1974, have provided a tremendous amount

of national attention and appreciation for the notary in America.

X. THE FUTURE

The Society is currently undergoing advancement in its computer software that will greatly enhance productivity and reduce costs. With an extensive website and the advent of the Electronic Notarization era, the Society is moving rapidly forward. Considering these innovations, combined with increased networking with legislators, state regulators and other leaders and providers of notary supply and information, the Society is leaping into the 21st Century, armed and ready for the next challenge.