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Notary News » Article

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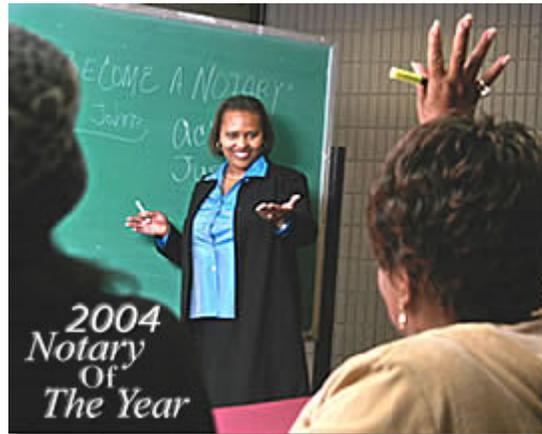
2004 Notary of the Year: Jamie Johns

Dedicated to Strengthening the Professionalism of Notaries

By: **David S. Thun**

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The job of a personal trainer is to make clients physically fit and strong. Jamie Johns is a successful personal trainer, but instead of building muscles, she builds professional strength, knowledge and self-esteem for novice Notaries.

A resident of Carson, California, Johns has dedicated her career to helping fledgling Notaries overcome their inexperience and hone their skills through educational classes and mentoring programs she developed. She is an active participant in the growing Notary Signing Agent profession and enthusiastically supports Notary services for the hearing impaired.

For her dedication to raising the professionalism, self-confidence and expertise of recently commissioned Notaries, Johns has been named the National Notary Association's Notary of the Year for 2004.

Johns became a Notary and a Signing Agent seven years ago. Immediately after receiving her commission, she began to realize how little understanding there was among signers and Notaries about the duties of the office.



Johns, a dedicated volunteer and activist in her community, accepts an award from Julie Ruiz Rader (right), councilwoman for Johns' home city of Carson, California.

“One of the main things I ran into was that people didn’t understand what it was a Notary did,” she said. “They asked me to practice law, and I also ran into Notaries who were charging too much for their services. That’s what led me to teaching — I wanted to dispel these misconceptions.”

In 1999, Johns started [Notary Access Association](#), her own personal teaching and training organization, to tutor and provide assistance to newly commissioned Notaries. A few years later, she began offering additional Notary education courses at the Carson Community Center.

Johns’ prowess as a Notary mentor and instructor is reflected in the way she encourages Notaries to see each other not as rivals but as allies and partners, said Stephanie Trotter, one of Johns’ students.

“She is not just concerned with money,” Trotter said. “I have called her at different hours just to ask a question, and she has always received my calls warmly. I’ve never met another Notary who volunteers such a wealth of information, not just to help herself but to help someone else excel in this business. For those in the Notary profession, she encourages an attitude of unity.”

Cooperation is an important step in promoting respect for the Notary profession, Johns said.

“I was always taught by my parents not to be selfish,” Johns said. “Some Notaries I’ve encountered don’t want to share advice. But I feel helping others improves the profession as a whole. Our attitude shapes our work. A lot of Notaries don’t have passion for what they do, and that leads to illegal transactions. But if we have the right attitude, people will have more respect for us. If we are united, we can’t be taken advantage of.”

Johns also offers tips to her students on networking with other Notaries and starting their own businesses, and organizes twice-a-year local mixers for Notaries and Notary Signing Agents.

“Her news updates by e-mail and her mingling events are great opportunities for other Notaries to network with other professionals in related fields,” said former student Miriam C. Frigard of Beverly Hills, California. “She has been a great help to her students to get that jump start to establish themselves in a new business.”

In addition to teaching general Notary and loan document signing courses, Johns provides mentorship, offering personalized assistance for aspiring Notaries and Signing Agents. Johns designed a program to help those who were too shy or hesitant to ask questions in a group setting, as well as those who had conflicting work schedules, child care issues or other situations that prevented them from attending regular

classroom courses.

Another part of her training regimen builds self-confidence. Inexperience often leads to worries or mistakes. When Johns discovered many of her Notary Signing Agent students were intimidated or insecure about their first assignments, she offered to come along to help guide them and make sure they stayed on track. This “ride-along” program has been extremely successful, she said.

“I go with them on actual signings and afterwards help critique them and offer suggestions on how they can make the signing go more efficiently, or help make the borrower more comfortable,” Johns said. “A lot of times, new Signing Agents just need that extra nudge for the first few notarizations to build their self-confidence. Usually if they do it one time, they don’t need me afterwards.”



Jamie Johns (right) works with students like Tarita Varner to build their confidence and make sure they understand the most important fundamentals of notarization.

In addition to helping her students build self-confidence, Johns also emphasizes that patience, honesty and preparedness are essential to new Notaries.

“Any time you are dealing with people, you have to be patient,” she said. “In the Signing Agent business, it’s easy to get into a mental rut of ‘hurry, hurry, hurry.’ But sincerity and them and make sure they stayed on track. This “ride-along” program has been extremely successful, she said.

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“Any time you are dealing with people, you have to be patient,” she said. “In the Signing Agent business, it’s easy to get into a mental rut of ‘hurry, hurry, hurry.’ But sincerity and honesty are important, too. When you are doing a job for the money you earn, that’s OK. But when you are sincere and honest in your work, your business will have a much longer lifespan.”

Ethical work habits are also crucial for Johns. When asked to work for a company that did not require its Notaries to keep journals, she told them she refused to do anything illegal. The job didn’t work out, to Johns’ relief. “I wouldn’t have wanted to work for a company like that anyway,” she said.

Johns said she supports California’s new law making education mandatory for new Notaries. Too many novices simply want to jump into their work without knowing what they are doing, she said.

“People need to know Notary laws before attempting to do Signing Agent work,” she said. “I love the fact they have this new law. It will push people to be educated, not to just try and pass a test.”

Johns said her students are interested in electronic notarization and the use of Enjoa™ as a secure electronic journal for recording their acts.

“They want to know if their fees will increase to reflect the need for new technology,” Johns said. “A lot of people want to know how it will work and how state laws will change.”

Notary education and training aren’t Johns’ only passion. Fascinated with sign language since she was a child, she studied and became fluent in American Sign Language after being asked to perform a notarization for a hearing-impaired signer. Johns frequently offers her services to the deaf community, notarizing documents and helping students qualify for their own Notary Public commissions.

“I would love to help a deaf person pass the state exam,” she said. “Sometimes deaf people have a hard time finding jobs, and I think working as a Notary would be a wonderful opportunity. I’m working with a few hearing-impaired people to become Notaries right now.”

When she’s not teaching Notaries, Johns serves as a member of the Carson Women’s Club, for whom she often offers her services as a Notary. She also spent time securing volunteers for events on behalf of the California State Athletic Commission.

Johns said one of the most rewarding aspects of her work is the feeling of accomplishment she has when helping people establish careers as Notaries. One student she worked with was into the third year of her commission but still had not performed a single notarization. Johns worked with her to help her gain confidence.

"It makes me feel really good when I'm helping people," she said.

The most important things for new Notaries to remember, Johns said, is that the work they do is an important part of business and society. Notaries should always strive to learn all they can about their profession, remember the significance of their duties and take pride in their function, she said.

"Carry the 'Notary Public' title with dignity, with education and with honesty," she said.