

*The Quarterly Newsletter of the
American Board of Forensic
Document Examiners, Inc.*

ABFDE News

October 2001

Volume XII, Number 3



From the Editor
 Susan Morton
 San Francisco, CA



TESTING, 1, 2, 3...

The summary of the results of the CTS handwriting proficiency test from last spring has been exciting much comment. The good news is that The Critics can no longer claim that the tests are so easy that anyone could pass them. The bad news is that we need to do some soul-searching.

For those of you who may not take the tests or be familiar with the summary, this test consisted of three questioned signatures in the same name and writing samples by three people, one of whom was the writer whose name was in question. This writer denied all three of the signatures. The problem posed was to determine whether any of the three writers wrote any of the three questioned signatures. The facts disclosed in the summary were that two of the signatures were genuine and that the third was a simulation done freehand from memory by an individual for whom samples were not submitted. The target answers were to identify the same-name writer as having written two of the signatures and some degree of elimination of all three writers as having written the third questioned signature.

The summary showed that everyone pretty much got the two identifications correct. It was the simulation that proved a problem. About 15% of the test takers identified it as genuine, as well. These examiners made the same mistake that the control lay people did in Moshe Kam's research. They got the correct matches, but also made an inappropriate match. Like the lay people, these document examiners got sucked in by general resemblance. In this case, there was no tremor or patching to knock the examiner up side of the head, but the ratios and letter forms were not quite right. It was easy to miss, if you weren't paying close attention.

Hello, folks. We are experts. *We are supposed to be paying close attention.*

(continued on page 9)

Editor Susan Morton
 Advertising Editor Kathleen Storer

Board Reports
 The Gavel Jan Seaman Kelly
 Continuing Education David S. Moore
 Recertification Paige E. Doherty

Contributors

William D. Duane
 Gregory A. Floyd
 A. Frank Hicks
 Joyce A. Lauterbach
 Howard C. Rile, Jr.

Composer

IntelliType

Contents

From the Editor 2
 New Board Members 3
 The Gavel 4
 ABFDE Testing: *The Facts* 5
 Recertification Report 6
 Mail Bag 7
 Continuing Education 8
 Correction 16

Advertising matter that appears in the ABFDE News implies neither endorsement nor recommendation by The American Board of Forensic Document Examiners, Inc.

Welcome a-Board

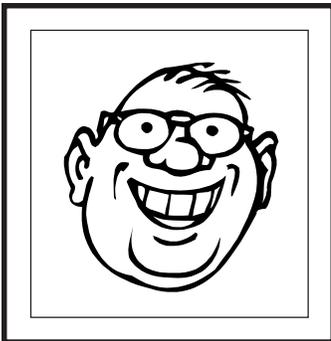
Joyce A. Lauterbach is an examiner of questioned documents at the Regional IRS Forensic Laboratory in Columbia, South Carolina. Joyce was fortunate and values the opportunity to have received her training under Jerry Brown at the Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation beginning in 1986. Joyce stayed at the Iowa DCI until 1994, when she moved to Miami, Florida, and was engaged in private practice. In 1997, she returned to government practice in South Carolina and made the move to federal employment this past August.



Joyce was certified by the ABFDE in 1991, and is a provisional member of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences and a regular member of both the American Society of Questioned Document Examiners and the Southeast Association of Forensic Document Examiners.

Joyce has a husband, Patrick, and a daughter, Arianne. In her younger days, Joyce was an avid scuba diver and bridge player. She still plays duplicate bridge regularly, but the scuba has been replaced by the Lexington County Choral Society. LCCS is a 120-member choir which just returned from a concert and sightseeing tour of Italy.

Gregory A. Floyd was born and raised in Washington, D.C., and the nearby Maryland suburbs. He attended Randolph-Macon College, in Ashland, Virginia, and received a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1970. In July, 1970, Greg accepted an appointment with the U.S. Secret Service as a special agent in the fraud squad of their Washington field office. In December of 1971, he transferred to the Secret Service crime laboratory and began their forensic document examiner training program. Ron Dick was the training coordinator at the Secret Service and played a prominent role in Greg's training, along with Ed Alford, Lyle Fowler and Tom McAlexander. During Greg's tenure with the Secret Service, he was the training coordinator in the questioned document branch and the section lead of the document examination section. Greg retired from the Secret Service in May, 2001, and is in the process of establishing a private practice from his Maryland home.



*This is not Greg Floyd.
Greg sent a great picture,
but someone(?) screwed it up.*

Greg has been a Diplomate of the ABFDE since 1980, and a member of the Canadian Society of Forensic Science since 1983. Greg has also been an instructor at the U.S. Secret Service questioned document course in Brunswick, Georgia, since 1984, and has provided training in forensic document examination for investigators in numerous international training seminars in Eastern Europe, Asia, American Samoa and Australia for the Secret Service's financial crimes division. He has also been an instructor at the U.S. Customs Service Advanced Asset Forfeiture/Financial Crimes Investigation course and a guest speaker at the International Association of Credit Card Investigators meetings. Greg was also a "charter" member of SWGDOC, the subcommittee for the handwriting guideline, until its recent demise.

Greg and his wife of 14 years, Louise Layton, Chief Operations Officer of Wedgewood Productions, a meeting and event-planning firm in Annapolis, Maryland, enjoy travel, music, automobiles and wine (not necessarily in that order). Greg is also a practicing metaphysician and epistemologist.

The Gavel

A Message from Our President

Jan Seaman Kelly
Las Vegas, NV



“*The Board of Directors is comprised of volunteers who have a vision of moving this profession forward.*”

It is my honor to serve as president of the ABFDE. It is also humbling when reading the names of those who have come before me and realizing I have some mighty big shoes to fill. The focus of my presidency includes the following:

1. Establishing a comprehensive public relations program. A successful public relations program will allow us to educate the legal community and respond to the unsupported and flawed criticisms of our profession.
2. Meeting the established criteria of Forensic Specialties Accreditation Board (FSAB). This includes independent validation of our tests and the testing of the grandfathered Diplomates.
3. Providing opportunities for Diplomates to assist the Board in committee assignments. The Board is always in need of volunteers. Working on a committee as a non-director allows the Diplomate to gain an understanding as to how the Board operates should he/she desire to seek a director position in the future.
4. Increasing communication between the Board of Directors and the Diplomates. This is your Board. We will attempt to give a brief presentation at all the professional meetings. We will also attempt to have an Open House at every meeting to allow Diplomates or those interested in seeking certification to ask questions.

Forensic Specialist Accreditation Board

FSAB has been discussed in past articles of the ABFDE News. It is an accreditation board for certifying bodies of the various forensic disciplines. To meet FSAB requirements, the Board has instituted a few changes to achieve compliance toward accreditation. In this article, I will discuss the necessary changes and how the Board plans to implement them.

Certification Testing of the Grandfathered Diplomates

FSAB requires a certifying body to have a program in effect to conduct competency testing on all untested grandfathered Diplomates. The program established by the Board requires all grandfathered Diplomates to take the certification test at the end of the current five-year recertification period. The first group of grandfathered Diplomates is scheduled for recertification in 2003.

To assist the grandfathered Diplomates in their preparation for the test, the Board will host a short seminar on the testing process at the ASODE meeting in August 2002. It is a goal of the Board to hold this type of seminar at several professional meetings within the next two years. In the next few months, each grandfathered Diplomate will receive a hard copy of the revised Syllabus and a copy of the Objectives for Training monograph. A mentoring program is in place for the Diplomate who recognizes he/she has

(continued on page 10)

ABFDE Testing: *The Facts*

by: Jan Seaman Kelly, President

ABFDE's testing process has drawn criticism from a few Diplomates in the last few months. I have discussed the perceived problems with the directors assigned to the Test Committee, past ABFDE presidents, a few Diplomates and test candidates to determine if the criticisms point to an area the Board should review and implement changes. Part of the criticism appears to stem from misinformation which has created an inaccurate perception as to how the tests are given and graded. The purpose of this article is to clear up the misunderstandings by discussing the facts regarding the testing process.

Purpose of Testing

From the many discussions I have had since July 1, I have found that there seem to be two philosophies about the purpose of the testing process. Past and present Board of Directors and the majority of Diplomates view the testing process as a means of assessing minimum competency by requiring the examiner to successfully complete a multi-phase testing process. Each phase in the testing process provides a measurement of the candidate's working knowledge in the field of forensic document examination. The written test measures the pool of knowledge retained by the candidate; the practical test measures the candidate's application of this knowledge and use of methodology; and the oral presentation measures the candidate's ability to demonstrate and articulate his or her findings.

The philosophy held by a minority of FDEs, including some Diplomates, is that the tests should be easy (with no failure rate), since the examiner is already doing casework, and the addition of this individual would mean income for the Board. This line of thinking is contrary to the objectives of ABFDE. In the ABFDE's Rules and Procedures Guide, the Board's objectives "are to establish, enhance and maintain standards of qualification...." Certification is based upon a candidate's personal and professional education, training, experience and achievement, as well as on the results of a formal examination process.

Specialized Testing

The pool of tests covers the wide range of problems frequently encountered by forensic document examiners. The Board has been criticized for several years for not providing specialized tests to those FDEs whose casework is limited to one or two areas. The proponents of specialized testing state that if the scope of an FDE's practice is limited, then the FDE should not be required to demonstrate proficiency in all areas of document examination. Opponents to specialized testing counter that the historical foundation of forensic document examination is one wherein the document examiner encounters various types of cases and approaches each case in the same manner using established examination techniques and methodology.

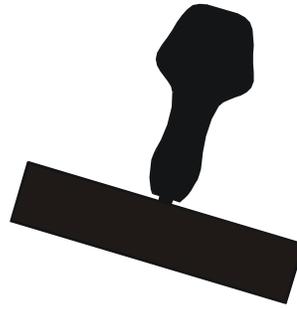
The testing process of the ABFDE is similar to that used by the certifying or licensing bodies of other professions, such as nursing or the law. There are many specialized areas of expertise within these professions. However, all three professions require a general knowledge base for testing in order to obtain certification or licensing. For example, I hold a nursing degree and was required to take the Oklahoma test for state licensing in registered nursing. Even though my nursing expertise is ICU, I had to study not only ICU-related issues but also the general knowledge base for a registered nurse. I also had to be knowledgeable of illnesses that are geographically specific. In nursing school, I studied illnesses geographically specific to Oklahoma, not Rhode Island. However, it was understood that if I desired to pass the licensing test, I would need to be familiar with illnesses specific to all other areas of the country. The law graduate seeking a license to practice as an attorney may choose to specialize in one area of the law. However, the bar exam covers all areas of law, and the test candidate is expected to be familiar enough with the various areas to answer the questions correctly. If the prospective attorney desires specialization in a limited area (such as criminal trial law or probate law), he/she must obtain that certification after, and in addition to, obtaining the more general license.

The position of ABFDE has always been that the document examiner must demonstrate basic

(continued on page 12)

Recertification Report

Paige E. Doherty
Denver, CO



“One committee in particular is in strong need of Frequent Writers to prepare written questions for the certification tests.”

“I not only use all the brains that I have, but all that I can borrow.”

— Woodrow Wilson.

And I will be borrowing a lot (!) because on July 1, 2001, I was appointed chairperson of the Recertification Committee. To my delight and good fortune, I am working with three dedicated—and brainy—directors: Joyce Lauterbach, Dave Moore and Fred Panhorst. These members have all been working diligently over the past several months to complete your 2000-2001 NOPA forms.

As you should already be aware, this is the time of year when each Diplomat receives a completed Notice of Points Awarded (NOPA) from his/her Recertification Committee member. This NOPA enumerates the points earned for activities listed on the Diplomat's Annual Update for the past recertification year. The NOPA also summarizes the total points acquired to date during the five-year recertification period. This process of issuing annual NOPAs was designed to assist the Diplomates in tracking their accumulation of the minimum 50 points required to recertify after a five-year period.

As a reminder, the Board of Directors passed a resolution in 1997 requiring submission of the Annual Update form with supporting documentation to the Diplomat Manager every year. Failure to submit the Annual Update results in forfeiture of any points accumulated in that recertification year. If you submitted an

Annual Update and did not receive a 2000-2001 NOPA in return, or if you have any questions concerning your points, please contact your Recertification Committee member:

If your last name

starts with:

A-F

G-L

M-R

S-Z

Contact:

Fred Panhorst

Paige Doherty

Joyce Lauterbach

Dave Moore

As outlined on the NOPA, there is a variety of activities in which a Diplomat may participate to earn recertification points. Through a series of three articles, I will expand on these categories and the criteria a Diplomat must satisfy in order earn recertification points. This issue will address the categories of *holding an office or serving on committees, training provided to non-document examiners, passing the written/practical examination and participating in miscellaneous activities.*

Holding an Office or Serving on Committees

A Diplomat may earn points by holding an office or serving on a committee affiliated with a forensic society recognized by the ABFDE. One point per year per office or committee may be accrued, with a maximum of ten points during the five-year recertification period. For example, if a Diplomat served as president of the Southwestern Association of Forensic Document Examiners (SWAFDE) and as Membership chairperson for the

(continued on page 15)



From William D. Duane

Dear Board Members,

In the July issue of the ABFDE News, the article entitled, "Recertification Report," displays a blatant bias against ABFDE members who were grandfathered into the organization by denying them the same opportunity in obtaining points by submitting ten questions for future examinations.

It continues by stating that, "This is a wonderful opportunity for Diplomates to earn a point...." Apparently, someone forgot that the title of Diplomat includes both grandfathered and tested members.

This opportunity should be removed or revised to include all members.

If the questions are to have literature citations from the assigned topic area, they also can be easily identified as to the individual submitting the question, thus negating a possible conflict in the testing process. The simple process of including the Diplomat certificate number in the citation and querying the future grandfather test-takers on their test application regarding their certificate number could easily resolve a good idea which was poorly presented.

Yours truly,
William Duane

cc: Susan Morton, Editor
Nancy Berthold, Chair

From A. Frank Hicks

Dear Susan,

In the immortal words of Joe Friday, "Just the facts, Ma'am." After much consideration, I have decided that I really need to respond to the letter to the editor from Diana Harrison in the last issue of the ABFDE News. I will strive to limit my comments to the facts.

First, it is a fact that Peter Tytell handled the E30.02 ASTM subcommittee meeting in Seattle as well as anyone could have handled it. He did a terrific job of allowing those who wanted to speak to do so and yet not allowing them to run on forever. He kept the discussion moving at as fast a pace as was reasonable and fair to all in attendance. Neither I nor anyone else I have heard has been critical of the manner in which Peter handled his difficult task at this meeting.

It is also a fact that the formulation of the SWGDOC handwriting guideline was done to encompass the opinions of as many forensic document examiners as possible. I was a member of the previous version of SWGDOC for a few years and,

(continued on page 17)

From Howard C. Rile, Jr.

Dear Editor:

I'd like to take the opportunity to respond to my friend and colleague, Gideon Epstein's, "Let's Talk" column for July 2001. I agree with him completely concerning the value of and need for a certifying body for this profession. I also share his frustration at the lack of support of the majority of FDEs who, one would think, would recognize the need for a well-supported and well-run certifying body. We both wondered why qualified document examiners do not apply. He believes that the problem arises in the testing process because it is "unfair and does not take into consideration the type of cases that they work or don't work." He also believes that document examiners feel they can do more harm to their career by applying, failing the testing process and not becoming certified than if they hadn't applied at all.

While I disagree in part, he is partly correct in his observations. The testing process of the ABFDE

(continued on page 18)

Continuing Education

David S. Moore
Fair Oaks, CA

October 2001

16-19 Printing Process Identification and Image Analysis for Forensic Document Examiners

Presented by the Rochester Institute of Technology
Rochester, NY

Contact: David Tontarski,
Rochester Institute of Technology
Corporate Education & Training
67 Lomb Memorial Drive, Rochester, NY 14623
(800) 724-2536, ext 815 / Fax: (716) 475-7000 /
dct1020@rit.edu

20-21 Mid-Atlantic Association of Forensic Scientists Fall 2001 Weekend Workshop

"Digital Imaging for Document Examiners"
Hershey, PA

Contact: Gerhard W. Wendt
Pennsylvania State Police QD Section
1800 Elmerton Avenue, Harrisburg, PA 17110
(717) 705-8085 / Fax: (717) 705-6318 /
gwendt@state.pa.us

November 2001

6-10 Canadian Society of Forensic Sciences 48th Annual Meeting

Delta Chelsea Hotel, Toronto, Ontario

Contact: Canadian Society of Forensic Sciences
2660 Southvale Crescent, Suite 215
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1B 4W5
(613) 738-0001 / Fax: (613) 738-1987 / www.csfs.ca

This list of opportunities available to Diplomates seeking recertification credits may not be all-inclusive. Provide details of upcoming meetings or workshops you want included in this newsletter to

David S. Moore
Moore Document Laboratory
9010 Barrhill Way, Fair Oaks, California 95628
(916) 980-3205 / Fax: (916) 989-9674
dmoore@mooredocs.com

February 2002

11-16 American Academy of Forensic Sciences Annual Meeting

"Certification, Accreditation, Education, Competency and Personal Professional Integrity"
Atlanta Marriott Marquis Hotel, Atlanta

Contact: Betty C. Gayton, Chair
QD Section, Division of Forensic Sciences
Post Office Box 70808, Decatur, GA 30037-0808
(404) 244-2831 / Fax: (404) 244-2642 /
betty.gayton@gbi.state.gov.us

May 2002

26-28 Southwestern Association of Forensic Document Examiners

Town & Country Resort & Conference Center -
San Diego

Contact: David Oleksow / Sandry Homewood
Forensic Science Laboratories, LLC
1901 First Avenue, 1st Floor, San Diego, CA 92101
(619) 595-7095 / Fax: (619) 238-6122

August 2002

4-10 International Association for Identification 2002 Educational Conference

Riviera Hotel - Las Vegas, NV

Contact: Candy Murray, Conference Coordinator
20601 Netherland Street, Orlando, FL 32835
(407) 568-7436 / Fax: (407) 568-7689
Conference@theiai.org

14-18 American Society of Questioned Document Examiners

Doubletree Hotel - Mission Valley, San Diego

Contact: Howard C. Rile, Jr.
100 Oceangate, Suite 670, Long Beach, CA 90802
(562) 901-3376 / Fax: (562) 901-3378 /
HCRQDE@aol.com

September 2002

2-7 International Association for Forensic Science

Convention Centre Le Curum - Montpellier, France

Contact: Societe Internatinal du Congres et Services
337, rue de la Combe Caude,
34090 Montpellier, France
+33(0) 4 67 63 53 40 / Fax: +33(0) 4 67 41 54 27 /
www.iafs2002.com

Editor

(continued from page 2)

A 15% failure rate is not reason to despair over the whole profession, but it does need to be analyzed and understood. What caused it? What can we do to reduce it? Blaming the test is not an option, as I have heard some try to do. It was a fair test. Eighty-five per cent of those tested got it right. So what happened?

I read over all the answers and the comments, and two attitudes seemed to keep cropping up, connected to both the wrong answers and to some of the right ones. (Are some others on thin ice?) I have noticed these biases before and have always found them worrying. The first is a strain of arrogance: "I am so good, I don't need to study this closely. I could never be wrong." The other is thinking in the box: "It must be one of these writers so all I have to do is associate the questioned writing with the sample that matches best." The writers of these responses clearly had no idea they were starting with any assumptions and would no doubt have sincerely denied doing so. Yet these attitudes are embedded in their language.

These are both traps that any of us can fall into. It is very hard to strike a balance between suitable self-confidence and cockiness. Paranoia is a good antidote. The knowledge that one can slip up at any time on any case helps keep one grounded. Some of us are lucky enough to self-generate paranoia; others need to cultivate it. Paranoia is not a sign of psychopathology in document examiners. It is a good, healthy attitude. Entropy really is out to get us. You can screw up. You will screw up. Minimize it. Post pithy sayings where you see them. Discuss close calls with other examiners. Hang out with people smarter than you are. Get a cat. Look at a picture of yourself naked before you begin each examination. Do whatever it takes, but keep your ego from exceeding your capabilities. If you don't, other forces will do it for you, as these 15% know to their sorrow.

The "in-the-box" thinking is just as dangerous. Unfortunately, it gets reinforced because it only rarely causes trouble. Most of the time when you sit down to a case with some questioned writing and three subjects, you get away with answering the question, "Which of these writers did it?" The right person is usually among the suspects. But sometimes not. The correct question to ask and answer

is, "Did any of these writers do it?" The first question puts you in a box—you must choose (a), (b) or (c). The second question adds (d) none of the above. Now, none of us is going to pick one when the writings are all grossly different. But in a case where two of the knowns are very different and one looks like the questioned, that unconscious bias can point you in the wrong direction. You could start stretching things to match your mind set, seeing only what you expect to see. One way to avoid this pitfall is to pose the question to be answered in writing. If your report form does not provide for this, do it in your notes. The act of writing out the purpose will force you to focus your thoughts.

Other things you might try are:

- Read about famous "out-of-the-box" thinkers. Science, commerce, military strategy, sports and even fiction offer compelling examples of original thought. How did Charles Darwin come up with Natural Selection? How did the American Patriots overcome the vastly superior British military forces to win the American Revolution? How did Sherlock Holmes solve his cases? How did Jobs and Wozniak figure out that Personal Computers would become popular and profitable to make?
- Do mind exercises to help you bash on the sides of your box. Here is one:

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

How would you express the number of stars? Six? Half a dozen? More than five, but less than seven? How about .3 of a score? Can you think of others? I want to hear thumping on cardboard.

- Read arguments by thoughtful people with whom you vigorously disagree on some subject—politics, religion, philosophy, whatever. Construct rational refutations to their positions.

We all have biases. Denying their existence will not make them go away. In fact, it makes them more dangerous. You can fight the biases you recognize; it is the unconscious ones that will bite you. Know your biases and learn to compensate. Mere mortals cannot hope to achieve the goal of perfect objectivity. We can only do our best to get as close as possible. Recognizing our limitations can at least forewarn us of slippery patches along the way. The results of this proficiency test are not comforting, but the need is for repair, not despair.



Gavel

(continued from page 4)

limited knowledge or experience in some area. Those interested in studying with a mentor should contact Dave Moore.

Independent Validation of Tests

Independent validation of our examinations, both written and practical, is an FSAB requirement. The Board is researching the available options to determine which one meets the needs of the Board, as well as FSAB requirements. Once known, I can discuss the viable options to the ABFDE community through the newsletter and at the Open Houses scheduled at the various professional meetings.

Increasing Annual Dues

There has been much speculation on whether the dues will increase. I have heard the increases being quoted as going to \$300 and even up to \$500 a year in order to cover the costs associated with independent validation. At this time, the Board does not know the cost of validating the tests, as each option has its own price tag. Until the Board has completed researching the options for validation, it is premature to assess how much the dues should be increased.

The last increase in annual dues occurred in the early 1990's. The Board of Directors began sponsoring workshops in 1998. These workshops served dual purposes of providing training to questioned document examiners on a variety of topics and generating additional income for the Board. The costs of operating the Board have risen over the last seven years, and an increase in the annual fee is justified. However, the amount of the increase is subject to discussion and will be on the agenda at the May 2002 Board meeting. I would like to hear from each of you in order to know your position, as well as to answer any questions you may have.

Public Relations

An effective public relations campaign is the cornerstone of a successful business or entity. Private practice examiners are familiar with the following statement, "What happens when you don't advertise? Nothing!" This saying is applicable to each one of us in the forensic document field. One of my priorities as president is to establish a comprehensive public relations program that will promote ABFDE Diplomates and our profession.

Joyce Lauterbach is the current chair of the Public Relations Committee. Her committee has

been assigned the awesome task of updating the ABFDE Resource Kit. The committee will prepare a package of information to be distributed to the judiciary and members of the legal community. This project is important, and Joyce needs volunteers to revise the kit.

Our discipline is being attacked from many directions. Saks, Risinger, Denboux and Faigan have been faithful in their quest to extinguish the existence of the forensic document examination discipline. Each of these men has been relentless in their mission, and they have dedicated themselves to "banishing handwriting from the court" (quote by Saks).

Graphologists and the under-trained continue to challenge legitimate FDEs. Non-Osbornians have made great strides in growth and acceptance by being diligent in three areas: 1) uniting together to promote their version of document examination, 2) dedicating their time in writing articles for journals, magazines and entire textbooks, and 3) investing in their profession by donating necessary funds for test validation and promoting themselves using professional advertising literature.

Dedication to their cause is a common attribute shared by the non-Osbornians and the Saks group. AFDE's presence on FSAB is a prime example of their dedication to being recognized as a legitimate forensic document organization. Saks has remained focused on his agenda of banishing us from the courtroom. It is time that we come together and unite to defend ourselves and our profession.

Saks and Company

Responding to statements made by Saks is another focus of the Public Relations Committee. Mr. Saks made several false statements in his last affidavit. As a community, we should respond to these statements with objective data and information. Kathleen Storer has experience in court challenges stemming from Daubert hearings. Preparing an effective response is an overwhelming undertaking for one or two examiners. Therefore, I have joined with Kathleen in attempting to establish small groups of volunteers whose assignment is to research two or three of Saks's statements in his last affidavit. The responses created from the research will be compiled into an affidavit to counter all of Saks's statements. It is urgent that we unite as a group and complete this project, as Saks has made his objective clear. Our response needs to

(continued on page 11)

Gavel

(continued from page 10)

be swift and reflect the strength of our community. I urge each of you to invest in your profession and your future by contacting Kathleen or me to assist with preparing a responding affidavit. This is a short-term project that can be completed by the end of this year.

Joint Workshop

The establishment of an effective public relations program is a priority. Through public relations, we can educate the judiciary and respond to the attacks from Saks and Company. To be effective in educating members of the legal profession, we must know how to teach and to communicate our message in a meaningful and effective way.

Lloyd Cunningham is the current president of Southwestern Association of Forensic Document Examiners (SWAFDE). He shares my concern over the lack of interest in public relations. This concern has caused both of us to place a priority on establishing a comprehensive public relations program. Good PR people make good PR. Therefore, Lloyd and I have tentatively agreed that our two organizations will host a joint workshop to teach the forensic document examiner how to teach. The *Teaching, Testimony & Public Relations* workshop will concentrate on effective methods of teaching and techniques to improve testimony. Being an effective teacher and courtroom witness promotes good public relations.

To prepare a workshop of this nature requires enormous effort. Lloyd and I are seeking participation from examiners who have experience in teaching the legal profession, law enforcement, corporate security, etc. We are asking those of you with this experience to submit a teaching outline. In addition to the teaching outline, please complete the enclosed questionnaire, and in the comment section specify which subject you enjoy and effectively teach the best. Mail the two documents to me. The members chosen to present a segment of their teaching program will be allotted approximately 30 minutes for their presentation.

The workshop will include instructors who specialize in *Adult Experimental Learning Techniques* and an expert who specializes in courtroom testimony techniques for crime laboratory personnel.

The objective of this workshop is to equip each of you with the necessary tools to be an effective

teacher, witness and a good representative of our profession. The date and location for this joint workshop has yet to be determined. This information, plus a detailed description of the agenda, will be published in the next ABFDE newsletter.

Incentives

Lack of time is the most common justification given by legitimate document examiners for not writing articles or a book. Several books have been written by non-Osbornians who recognize the importance of positive promotion and having articles or books published. It is disturbing that the literature written by these individuals contains numerous inaccuracies. To provide reference literature with correct information, we should be active in publishing articles in peer review journals and writing books. The Board of Directors has approved an increase in recertification points to encourage Diplomates to publish articles in non-QD journals or magazines. For example, the point award for publishing an article in a state bar or law enforcement journal has increased from 2.5 to 5 points.

The New Horizon is a recognition award that will be presented annually to Diplomates who have published extended research or, historically, have contributed to the field by publishing various works, with each work focusing on a specific research area. The first New Horizon plaque will be presented at the 2002 ASQDE meeting. The Diplomat may nominate him/herself or may be nominated by another Diplomat. A copy of the Diplomat's work should be submitted along with the nomination to the Board president.

The Charles Scott Award will be presented to the Diplomat who has actively promoted the field of forensic document examination to judges, lawyers and law enforcement agencies in a one-year period. Activities considered for this award include speaking engagements to judges and lawyers (luncheons or continuing education seminars), assisting colleagues in preparing for Daubert hearings or Saks challenges, and assisting with the response affidavit to counter Saks. The objective of the award is to encourage dissemination of positive and correct information about the forensic document examination and the ABFDE to the judiciary and members of the legal community. Nominations are based on the activities recorded annually from July 1 to June 30. The first Charles Scott Award will be presented at the ASQDE 2002 meeting, and nominations can

(continued on page 16)

Testing

(continued from page 5)

competency in all aspects of forensic document examination. The Board of Directors have discussed the issue of specialized testing at least twice within the last six years. Even if the Board were to decide the current employment climate mandated a change in the purpose of testing from general to specialized testing, lack of appropriate candidates and funding make it impossible. As it stands now, the Board needs volunteers to prepare practical tests. To motivate Diplomates, the Board recently increased recertification points awarded for preparation of test questions and practical problems. Thus far, the Test chair is aware of only three Diplomates preparing tests. This limited response reflects continuation of the past trend in which only a few Diplomates were willing to assist the Board in this regard. The Board has asked, begged and offered incentives (bribery) for volunteers to assist with the myriad of projects the Board has undertaken. Based upon the lack of response, both present day and historically, I anticipate that there will not be enough volunteers to prepare an adequate number of tests designated for specialized testing.

Another consideration is funding. The requirement for future independent validation of examinations is a certainty. No matter what option is chosen for validation of our tests, a cost will be associated with each test validation. The forensic document community is a small group, and the cost of specialized testing would have to be passed on to those examiners interested in taking such a test. I fear the candidates would find the cost of taking the test prohibitive.

The ABFDE Rules and Procedures Guide clearly states the testing process is comprehensive and consists of the "written, practical, and oral examinations based upon the broad range of problems frequently encountered in document examination." Applicants are made aware the testing process covers all areas of casework, and they can refer to the Objectives for Training and the Syllabus for specific guidance. For those who, prior to testing, recognize they are weak in a particular area, the Board refers them to a mentor so that they can be well prepared prior to working on the test. If the candidate fails a practical problem, it is suggested he/she seek a mentor to assist with additional training or information. This allows the candidate to be able to demonstrate basic competency in that area at a future date.

If the testing candidate needs assistance in finding a mentor, the Board provides that assistance.

The Testing Process

The testing process begins with the written test. In the past, the tests were given at professional meetings or could be proctored and taken at the test candidate's laboratory. Due to FSAB requirements, the written tests will now be given only at professional meetings. If the candidate successfully completes the written examination, he/she proceeds to the practical tests.

The candidate is required to examine five practical problems, prepare detailed notes and a report of findings. With the exception of the photocopier problem, all practical problems are original documents or good-quality photographs. To my knowledge and the knowledge of past directors in charge of testing, photocopies have never been used in the practical problems.

The testing process has evolved over the years, and with each evolution, the changes have brought improvement. The establishment of the blind review by the three test reviewers occurred in 1994. To prevent any possibility of bias by the reviewer, a number is now assigned to the test candidate. The reviewer does not know who worked the test or where the candidate is employed. This assures the test candidate that the practical problems are objectively and independently graded by the three reviewers.

The Test chair and the president are the only ones who know the testing candidate's name and the results of the blind review process. I have reviewed files of test candidates from the last year and was impressed by the agreement among the reviewers' assessment sheets. Even though the reviewers operated independently of each other, they were in agreement as to the strong points or shortcomings of the candidate's methodology.

Brian Carney, Paige Doherty and Howard Birnbaum are seasoned reviewers on the Test Committee. Greg Floyd is the newest member of this committee, having been appointed when Brian became vice president on July 1. I have spoken to each of these members to ask his/her thoughts about how we can make the testing process better and to communicate to the forensic document community that the certification process is fair and objective.

(continued on page 13)

Testing

(continued from page 12)

Note-Taking and Reports

To determine the test candidate's understanding and application of proper methodology, each reviewer relies upon the notes and report submitted with each practical problem. The notes are the only means of communication from the test candidate to the reviewer. If the notes are sparse, the reviewer has no objective way of determining whether the appropriate tests were conducted or what the candidate observed.

It is understandable that the requirement of extensive notes and detailed reports seems awkward to candidates who have a practice of preparing minimal-to-no notes and/or brief reports. In discussing this issue with candidates, I suggest that they treat the case notes and the report as part of the test. I explain the need to be detailed, as this is their only means of communication with the reviewer. For the assessment to be fair and objective, the reviewer's view has to be that if it is not written down it was not observed or tested.

Unsuccessful Completion of the Testing Process

The majority of testing candidates successfully complete the testing process. Unfortunately, there are some candidates who are unsuccessful in their first attempt to complete the testing process. For a test to be valid, there will necessarily be some who fail. While the tests are not constructed to create failure, it is and must be a possibility in any legitimate testing process. Those who fail can appeal the decision to the Board of Directors. When the appeal is made, the Directors review the candidate's practical problems and assess the validity of the Test Committee's findings regarding the results.

What are the factors that may cause a candidate to fail? I have reviewed a number of test files and have come up with several possible reasons for failure.

The first factor that may cause failure is the candidate's limited casework experience and/or technical knowledge. A few individuals who practice in a specialized area may have difficulty passing some practical problems due to the fact that ABFDE's testing process covers all aspects of forensic document examination. ABFDE's approach to eliminating this factor is to offer mentoring to interested individuals prior to entering the testing process. Mentoring is also available to those who recognize

they have limited knowledge or experience in some area and were unable to pass the practical problem which focused on that particular area of forensic document examination. The mentoring is confidential, and, once the mentoring is completed, the candidate will enter or re-enter the testing process.

Lack of mental preparedness is a second factor that sometimes leads to failure. Most people have a built-in fear of testing. The test candidate who seeks certification demonstrates a great deal of courage and confidence. However, when an agency requires its document examiner to take the certification test, additional stress may be experienced. Even though the agencies that made certification mandatory had good intentions, it prevents the employee from being mentally prepared to take the test.

A third cause of unsuccessful completion of the testing process is the candidate's lack of focus, i.e. inattention. Work and family obligations were often given as the reason for failure to return the tests within the mandated 45 days. The Board recognizes that casework and family do not go into a holding pattern while the candidate focuses on working the practical problems. The Test chair attempts to work with the candidate in arranging to send the examination at a time that can be dedicated to examining the practical problems and completing them in a timely manner. However, it is the responsibility of the candidate to follow through with the completion of the examination. Successful completion of the practical problems requires the candidate to remain focused on the examination process and to have limited interruptions and distractions.

A fourth cause of failure is that the candidate does not take his/her time in working the practical problems. There have been a few cases where the candidate did not examine the practical problems with the same scrutiny and thoroughness that he/she would presumably give to actual problems.

Validation

A new procedure implemented July 1 is the recording of the pass/fail ratio of each individual test problem by the Test chair. In the past, official records or statistics on the performance of each practical problem were not kept. While it is true the older tests have not been validated by an outside source, the reviewers have kept their own records regarding the pass/fail ratio of individual tests. Each test currently in the test pool has a majority pass rate and has been checked to make sure it does not

(continued on page 14)

Testing

(continued from page 13)

exceed minimum competency. These problems are prepared for the purpose of being used in the practical testing process; therefore, the correct answer is known. The tests have been validated, at least internally, by those who have taken these tests the last 10 or 15 years.

New procedures are now in place to validate the test prior to its use. The practical tests are prepared by Diplomates who submit the test problems to the Test Preparation Committee. Jim Lee, chair of this committee, sends the test to six validators, three who are directors on his committee and three Diplomates who are not directors. Each validator takes the test and assesses whether the practical problem tests the candidate for basic competency. If the practical problem is deemed suitable for use as a test, it is sent to the Test Committee chair. The Test Committee chair reviews the practical problem to assess whether it is appropriate and tests basic competency. If so, the problem is incorporated into the pool of practical problems to be used for certification testing.

FSAB requires validation of all tests. Several options are available, and the Board is researching each option to determine which one is both acceptable to FSAB and cost efficient.

Checks and Balances

I've been a proud member of the Board for six years, and I don't know of any instance in which a candidate was passed or failed on anything other than his/her test performance. I am also unaware of any diplomate being granted recertification without having met the criteria. However, to offset any allegations of impropriety, I feel having a system in place to audit or check the committee's activities will give assurance to the candidate and the Diplomates that the conduct and responsibilities of the committees are objective, fair and proper. Therefore, the Executive Committee will begin auditing or reviewing the work of the Test Committee, the Test Preparation Committee and the Recertification Committee every year. This type of annual audit is already conducted of the Treasury by the Financial Committee. The first round of audits is scheduled for the May 2002 Board meeting. The audit process allows the Executive Committee to review each committee's work to insure that everything is in order. This review also allows members of each committee

to meet, discuss and review their procedures of the past year and seek methods of improvement where deemed necessary.

The Future

It is important to remember that the Board of Directors are volunteers who have a desire to contribute to the forensic document community. Changes in procedures result from an observed need or a response to constructive criticism. This article has discussed the changes that have occurred in the testing process over the last few years.

As president of this fine organization, I have and will continue to respond to criticism concerning the Test Committee by researching the appropriate candidate's test file. To date, I found the criticisms raised about individual examinations were without factual basis.

I support the current members of the Test Committee. Each Director assigned to this committee can be characterized as ethical, knowledgeable, fair and objective. After reviewing their assessment sheets of numerous test candidates, I find their agreement as to the candidates' performances to be a strong indicator that the grading process is objective and fair. Brian Carney, Paige Doherty, Howard Birnbaum and Greg Floyd are charged with an awesome responsibility, and it is one they do not take lightly. To make the determination about whether someone passes or fails is a most difficult task. I can assure the Diplomates and the test candidates that these four individuals have the right skills for this job, and I am proud to stand beside them.

For those of you who have criticized the Board in its handling of the testing process, I challenge you to direct your passion and energy toward assisting the Board. Those of you who feel the practical tests currently used are not proper tests, then please prepare a practical test you feel is appropriate and submit it to the Test Preparation Committee. Your practical will undergo a validation process and, if accepted, will be added to the pool of tests.

This is your Board. I encourage you to make a worthwhile investment in your profession and the Board by offering your time. As a group, there is so much we can accomplish.

Recertification

(continued from page 6)

American Society of Questioned Document Examiners (ASQDE) during 2000-2001, then he/she would earn a total of two points, one for each position.

Serving on ABFDE committees also falls under this category. One committee in particular is in strong need of *Frequent Writers* to prepare written questions for the certification tests. Approximately 400 multiple-choice questions are needed to test future applicants on the various topics in forensic document examination. To earn one point per year,

the Diplomate can write ten multiple-choice questions, with literature citations, from the assigned topic area. Any Diplomate may participate, regardless of whether he/she was grandfathered or certified by testing. Jim Lee is steering this committee. For more information or to participate, contact Jim at (850) 478-7777, ext. 2123.

Training Provided To Non-Document Examiners

Diplomates may also earn points by giving formal lectures on any aspect of document examination to non-document examiners. These presentations may address a broad scope of audiences, ranging from attorneys to law enforcement personnel to students to the general public. Typically one-half point per half-day lecture can be earned, with a maximum of ten points. **For the 2001-2001 recertification year, however, a Diplomate can accumulate two points per half-day lecture.** The Board of Directors believes that the ABFDE should be a household word in the legal community and strives to encourage Diplomates to foster this awareness.

The Written/Practical Examination

Another option for Diplomates is to take the Board-administered test. The test is comprised of a written examination, then three practical problems.

Forty points are earned if a Diplomate successfully completes the testing process. As the Rules and Procedure Guide explains, a Diplomate may not test for two consecutive recertification periods. This means a Diplomate who tests to recertify in October 2001 cannot test to recertify again in October 2006. The minimum 50 points must be earned through activities other than testing.

Miscellaneous Activities

This category covers a broad scope of activities that do not fit into any other categories. Activities in this category are evaluated on a case-by-case

basis; therefore, I encourage Diplomates to include any relevant professional activities on their Annual Updates. The table shows examples of previously approved activities and their point allocations.

Examples of activities that do not qualify for points are: serving as lab supervisor or section head, conducting interviews to fill a

vacant QD position, serving as an oral exam panel member for ABFDE testing candidates, opening your own QD laboratory, serving as a technical consultant for a congressional committee, assisting law enforcement agencies with evaluating new security documents and aiding governments with the criminal prosecution of suspects.

The preparation of practical problems for certification testing also falls into the miscellaneous category. Due to the influx of testing applicants, the Test Preparation Committee vitally needs new practical problems. This committee is seeking as many Diplomates as possible to share their expertise and prepare practical tests in all aspects of document examination, especially handwriting. **To encourage RECERT Diplomates to prepare practical problem sets, the Recertification Committee has increased the points awarded from two points to five points**

(continued on page 16)

Activity	Points	5-Year Maximum
Practical test preparation for ABFDE	SPECIAL SALE!! 5 points per test! Offer expires 7/1/02 After 7/02: 2 points per test	10 points
Practical test for other testing services such as Collaborative Testing Services	2 points per test	10 points
College course (one semester)	½ point per class (3-hour course for 12 weeks = 6 points)	12 points
Collaborative Testing Services proficiency testing, ASCLD testing, or employment by accredited ASCLD lab	1 point per year	5 points
ASCLD lab inspector	1 point per year	5 points
Tour of manufacturing plants such as paper and pencil or pen manufacturers	½ point per ½ day	No Maximum

Recertification

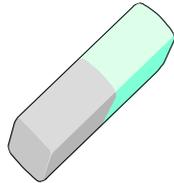
(continued from page 15)

per test set during the 2000-2001 recertification year. The maximum points awarded in a five-year period remains at ten. This is an ideal opportunity to earn recertification points while contributing to a worthwhile cause. Interested Diplomates should contact Jim Lee, chairman of the Test Preparation Committee, at (850) 478-7777, ext. 2123 for more information.

The next Recertification Report will discuss the categories of *professional meetings, papers presented, professional memberships, panel and plenary discussions/poster presentations and papers published* in the next issue of the ABFDE News.



KORRECTION CORECTION CORRECTION



"An error doesn't become a mistake until you refuse to correct it."

— Orlando A. Battista

In the July 2001 issue of the ABFDE News, the Recertification Report inadvertently excluded grandfathered Diplomates from participating on the new ABFDE subcommittee as *Frequent Writers*, preparing written questions for future certification tests. The criteria should have stated that *any Diplomat might participate on this subcommittee and submit questions, regardless of whether they were grandfathered or certified by testing*. I apologize for any confusion this may have caused or disrespect that may have been inferred. For additional information about participating on this committee, please refer to the Recertification Report in this issue.

Thank you,

Paige Doherty, Chairman
Recertification Committee

Gavel

(continued from page 11)

be made by the Diplomate for him/herself or another Diplomate and should be sent to the Board president.

Let's Move Forward!

I realize I have covered many topics, and the success of each one is determined by the participation of volunteers. The Board of Directors is comprised of volunteers who have a vision of moving this profession forward. Invest in your profession and offer your services to the Board.

When I became president, one Diplomate stated my appointment was a way for me to give back to the profession. My reply was that I had repaid my debt to the profession long ago. To "give back" is merely replacing what you have taken. Contributions I now make are made to advance this wonderful profession. This was not my frail attempt at being clever. It reflects my philosophy that giving back to the profession is only the beginning. "Giving to" the discipline follows "giving back" and allows the discipline to grow and move forward. If our profession is to survive the challenges that lay before us, we must unite and work together. Our commitment and dedication to each other and to our profession has to surpass the dedication demonstrated by the non-Osbornians and Saks.

Let's move forward! Volunteer your services and talents in assisting the Board in promoting the profession of forensic document examination.



Mail (Hicks)

(continued from page 7)

as you know, it used to be composed of representatives from all of the federal laboratories that have QD units and most, if not all, of the regional and national organizations that have QD members. In every meeting, I was most impressed with the efforts by all of the representatives to reflect the desires of the majority of their constituents. There were even infrequent issues where representatives voted in a manner that conflicted with their own desires but was a desire held by a majority of their constituents. I have no doubt that any forensic document examiners who cared enough to express their desires on an issue before SWGDOC had those desires presented by their representative(s).

Ms. Harrison states, "...there was usually more than one dissenting vote regarding portions of the handwriting guideline in the SWGDOC meetings." There was, in fact, more than one dissenting vote cast on Thursday, December 14, 2000, when a motion was made to leave the section about reporting conclusions (Section 8) in the proposed Standard Guide for the Examination of Handwritten Items. There were exactly two dissenting votes. The other 16 representatives from the various federal labs and national and regional organizations voted in favor of this motion. Based on Ms. Harrison's comments in her letter, this does not constitute "consensus." In the context in which I used the word in my article in Volume XII, Number 2 of the *ABFDE News*, it most certainly does. My use of the word is found in Webster's Third New International Dictionary and states: "Collective opinion: the judgment arrived at by most of those concerned."

I wholeheartedly agree that the inclusion of the section about reporting conclusions in the proposed Standard Guide for the Examination of Handwritten Items does not represent the desires of the FBI's QD Unit, as evidenced by their representative at the SWGDOC meeting in December of 2000, but to say that "...consensus had not been reached at SWGDOC" on this issue doesn't find any support in the facts. Ms. Harrison states that "...a guideline should be produced which encompasses as many document examiners as possible." Unfortunately, based on her actions and those of other FBI examiners who attended the SWGDOC meetings and the ASTM E30.01 subcommittee meeting, what they actually believe is that "a guideline should be produced that encompasses the wishes of the FBI QD Unit."

Ms. Harrison seems to object to the use of the term "opinion guideline" and insists that E1658 is a "terminology guideline." She then has a quote from McAlexander, Beck and Dick that refers to "...terms that express our *opinions*..." and "...the language we use to express those *opinions*..." (emphasis added). A further quote from E1658 itself refers to, "...the gradations of *opinions*..." (emphasis added). My observation has been that the term "opinion guideline" is simply a generic term used by many people to refer to the information in E1658. Maybe we can reach a consensus to call it the "Standard Terminology for Expressing Conclusions," which is the ASTM name for E1658.

I must apologize for stating in my earlier article that those opposed to the inclusion of the Standard Terminology for Expressing Conclusions in the proposed Standard Guide for the Examination of Handwritten Items had not offered alternatives to be discussed. This was incorrect. The opposition had repeatedly stated at the SWGDOC meetings that they wanted this section removed from the Guide. Contrary to what Ms. Harrison says, these statements did not fall on deaf ears." All of the ears at the various meetings heard these proposals and voted them down over and over. The fact that a sixteen-to-two majority doesn't agree with you doesn't indicate that there are 32 deaf ears.

In her next-to-last paragraph, Ms. Harrison quotes part of a statement I made in my earlier article. The fact is that when referring to the "...group, or maybe several groups..." who were opposed to the proposed Standard Guide for the Examination of Handwritten Items (my reference never named any group, by the way), I stated that these people continued their opposition "...in spite of the fact that this opinion scale is already a published ASTM guideline, has been peer reviewed and, based on my survey of Diplomates, seems to be used by the overwhelming majority of the community." Ms. Harrison ignored everything preceding the words "seems to be" and stated that a survey that was apparently conducted by the FBI's QD Unit came up with different results than my survey of Diplomates. I can't say I'm surprised. I got a number of calls while the FBI's survey was being conducted from people asking me what was going on. What I didn't get was a call from anyone with the FBI's QD Unit asking my input on their survey. Neither did another examiner in my section. You can add two more people to the list of those who do

(Mail continues on page 18)

Mail (Hicks)

(continued from page 17)

use the 9-level opinion scale. It certainly makes you wonder what other examiners were overlooked during the survey. If you would like to review the results of my survey of ABFDE Diplomates, please refer to Volume XII, Number 1 of the ABFDE News. Incidentally, I did not attempt to alter the results of that survey to reflect any particular viewpoint. The two respondents to my survey who did not use the 9-level scale but who said they fully supported it were reported to use whatever scale they said they actually used. Nothing but the facts.

I have attempted throughout this letter to use the pronoun "I" and not "we." The opinions expressed in this letter are solely mine. I encourage those who have opinions they wish to express to do so, regardless of which of the many sides of the issues their opinions may fall. The more *facts* we get out there, the easier it is to make wise decisions.

Sincerely,
A. Frank Hicks

Mail (Rile)

(continued from page 7)

was set up similar to other certifying bodies to test the minimum competence of the individual. While this does not sound like a very lofty goal, it is a very practical one. The Board is, and probably forever will be, a voluntary organization. Over the years, the individual directors have contributed a great deal of their time and effort during their tenure. I think it would be correct to say that each of them has experienced frustration in their respective periods on the Board. Designing, administering and evaluating tests, if done properly, is very taxing and time consuming. All of the past presidents of the Board have repeatedly attempted to get input from other members in the field to prepare meaningful tests that can be used for reasonable periods of time and would accurately reflect the scope of the work of the document examiners. It would be not only difficult, but defeat the purpose of certification, if tests were manufactured for and only dealt with limited types of problems that reflected a particular applicant's work history. Even if an individual FDE only worked certain types of cases at different times in his or her career, he or she nevertheless should

remain aware of and reasonably competent in all areas.

Another consideration would be how the legal profession, and specifically our critics, would view our testing process if we culled problems to suit an individual applicant's strengths and gave certification based on a skewed testing process. I tremble to think of the ridicule that would result from such a practice. A reality of any testing process is that in order for it to be considered valid, there must be a failure rate. Testing for a minimum level of competence suggests that the majority of applicants should pass, but a certain minority would not.

The Board, over the length of its existence, has wrestled with this problem. In order to assure an unbiased evaluation, when test results are received, all information related to the individual is removed. The tests are sent out to the individual evaluators who have no knowledge of whose test they are grading. The Board also attempts to assist individuals who, for whatever reason, are not initially successful. If an individual is not successful, he or she is counseled and, if requested, a mentor is assigned who hopefully can identify and assist the individual in getting up to speed. The individual applicant can remain in the process and retake the test after a certain period of time. This entire process is, from the point of view of the Board, kept strictly confidential. Individual directors are cautioned that they are not allowed to discuss the status of any individual in the testing process. If the individual applicant, for whatever reason, decides to divulge his or her dealings with the Board, it is beyond the control of the Board.

Mr. Epstein is also correct in his evaluation of the risks taken by individuals who apply for certification. Since most agencies do not require certification, and most private examiners may not feel it necessary, there truly is very little incentive for individuals to apply for certification. Those who do should be commended for their commitment to the field. If they are initially unsuccessful, hopefully they will keep trying until they are. In any case, they should be commended for their courage and commitment to being a professional and confident in their skills.

I also agree with Mr. Epstein that everyone must have confidence in the testing process. His suggestion, however, that the tests should be peer-reviewed by a separate body chosen for a specific period of time is, from a practical point of view,

(continued on page 19)

Mail

(continued from page 18)

totally unrealistic. It is hard enough to get document examiners to assist in the testing process, let alone to form a separate committee to review the testing process. I think that it would be of greater value if more document examiners contributed to the Board and got directly involved with the testing process rather than trying to second-guess it.

The major problem with the ABFDE is most assuredly not because too many individuals are clamoring to help the Board, but the extreme apathy of the majority of document examiners. I'm reminded of a cartoon from the Pogo series in which the main character says, "We have found the enemy and they are us."

A solution to this problem would be for all state and federal agencies to *require* that everyone who is employed as a forensic document examiner become ABFDE-certified. At the same time, both criminal and civil courts should require that all individuals testifying as FDEs be ABFDE-certified. While I think these are good solutions, they will most likely not occur.

If our own internal divisiveness and apathy were not sufficient, a new problem has arisen that could conceivably be even more serious to the long-term survival of the ABFDE. For those of you who attended the recent ASQDE meeting in Des Moines, you will recall the presentation by former ABFDE president Frank Hicks and current directors Brian Carney and Dave Moore. The Forensic Specialty Accreditation Board (FSAB) committee has been established to accredit all certifying bodies in the forensic disciplines. Ironically, the need for this arose out of Dr. O'Block's group's demand to be recognized by the American Academy. At this time, Dr. O'Block's group has chosen not to be involved with the FSAB; however, the process has started and is lumbering towards some goals. What has been proposed will drastically impact the way the ABFDE operates. Following are a few points:

1. Untested "grandfathered" Diplomates would no longer be allowed. All Diplomates must be tested.
2. The testing procedures and problems must be independently validated on a regular, ongoing basis. An initial estimated cost was in the \$30,000 to \$50,000 range—way beyond the current financial ability of the Board.

3. Yearly dues for the ABFDE may have to rise dramatically to cover the anticipated costs relating to test validation.
4. The FSAB has recognized other self-styled certifying bodies in the document field. One of these bodies is already significantly ahead of the ABFDE in addressing the requirements of FSAB. While the group has, at most, 50 people, they have reportedly raised the funds to have their test validated.

Reviewing the current problems that the document community has, both internally and externally, it is very easy to become pessimistic. To borrow one of Peter Tytell's favorite phrases, one gets the feeling that we are engaged in rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic.

In closing, I'd like to thank Gideon for his thought-provoking column and hope that he continues his good work.

Howard C. Rile, Jr.
Past President, ABFDE



Our ethics teach us to love our enemies. To that end, I have decided to make a contribution to the Taliban Relief Drive.

I am donating a ham.

Ed.

American Board of Forensic Document Examiners, Inc.

Administrative Office
7887 San Felipe
Suite 122
Houston, TX 77063

