

# Fast Fingers

► **A new era for court reporting offers broader opportunities to make a living. It just might be your type.**

**By Tom Waring**  
Times Staff Writer

**J**im Finlan attended college without graduating, then worked in sales for a couple of years but “hated it.” As the 25-year-old from West Chester was looking for a career change, he had to look no further than the Chester County Courthouse, where his mom Alexis is employed by the county as a court reporter.

Finlan’s mom attended the Orleans Technical Institute court reporting program 20 years ago, and today he is in the first year of a three-year program at the same school. He sees court reporting as playing a key role in important legal proceedings.

“I always thought it was a dead profession, but there are so many different ways to make a living,” he said.

Last week, Orleans Technical Institute, at 2770 Red Lion Road, began celebrating the 25th anniversary of its court reporting program.

On April 4, program director Carol Crawford read a proclamation from the city of Philadelphia that lauded the program’s 100-percent job placement and certification from the National Court Reporters Association’s Council on Approved Student Education. Students and staff signed an anniversary poster, watched the unveiling of a commemorative banner and enjoyed cake and beverages.

On Saturday, Orleans will hold an open house for the program. Some big selling points will be the available jobs in the field,

the potential to make good money, flexible scheduling and freelance opportunities.

“If you put in three years, in five years you’ll be making sixty-five-thousand dollars a year and some will be making a hundred-thousand,” said Marlene Cohen, an employment specialist and internship coordinator.

In general, there are four career avenues: courtroom/judicial reporting; freelance; broadcast/closed captioning; and Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART).

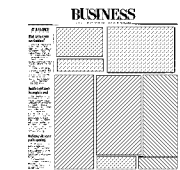
The National Court Reporters Association has found that there is a nationwide shortage of court reporters. The Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook Handbook lists job prospects as “excellent,” noting that employment is projected to grow 18 percent through 2018. The demand is especially high for real-time broadcast captioning and translating services for the deaf and hard-of-hearing.

How many jobs are available for Orleans grads?

“More than I can place,” Cohen said.

Many court reporters work in judicial settings and sit in on business meetings, stockholder sessions, public hearings, arbitrations, high school and college classrooms and webcasts. They are charged with delivering a verbatim account of the spoken word.

Orleans offers an associate’s degree in specialized business. The curriculum combines stenography



skills, legal and medical terminology and court procedures. The school also offers career advice, job search assistance and financial aid.

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"We cater to the individual student," Cohen said.

The program started in 1986 as the Court Reporting Institute. It was located in Center City and operated by JEVS Human Services. In the summer of 2007, JEVS moved the Center City location and the main site at 1330 Rhawn St. to Red Lion Road.

Classes are offered during the day and in the evening. They start every September and January, with rolling admissions.

Students develop shorthand skills of 225 words per minute and learn to transcribe and edit their notes. Some 89 percent of court-reporting professionals are women, but Orleans officials see an increase in the number of men entering the field. The typical student ranges in age from late teens to people in their 40s. Many are people making a career change, and others are moms looking to enter the work force.

As the students near graduation, they take an unpaid internship in a court setting. They work with a professional in a partnership called "sitting second chair."

Cohen said a successful student will show up on time, pay attention to detail, practice the craft and be motivated. Once on the job, much of the interaction is with judges and lawyers,

"You have to act professionally," she said.

Rachael Smith, 23, of Pennypack Woods, worked as a machine operator for three years. She was a passenger in a car accident and had to give a deposition. Afterward, her lawyer suggested she enroll in a court-reporting program.

"I looked into it, and I liked the idea of using the machine and being in the

courtroom," she said.

Smith said the students become friends and help each other all the time, especially when speed and academic tests are upcoming. "We all cheer each other on," she said.

Treissa Siegfried, 24, of Norristown, graduated from DeSales University with a degree in criminal justice and works as a security guard in Allentown. She sees the court reporting profession as the best way to use her education.

"I was looking for career training and wanted to stay in the field," she said.

Brittany Everly, 22, of the Far Northeast, graduated from Bloomsburg University in May 2010 with a degree in deaf education. Last September, she enrolled in the court reporting program. She attends classes Mondays through Wednesdays from 8:45 a.m. to 3:45 p.m. and also works six or seven nights a week at Carrabba's restaurant.

Everly has liked the experience so far and is looking forward to helping deaf students keep up with the course work in classrooms. Her professional focus will be on CART captioning.

The students start out by learning to type the alphabet and tap multiple keys at the same time. The machine features 23 keys, and most words and phrases are recorded by shorthand. For instance, "Ladies and gentlemen of the jury" is simply "LAGOTJ."

Students attend class all 12 months of the year, since any extended break would slow their progress. Everly likened the program to learning a language.

"I've loved it," she said. "It's very hands-on. If you have a problem, there are tutoring hours and the teachers are willing to stay. I can't wait to be working. It's going to be great." ••

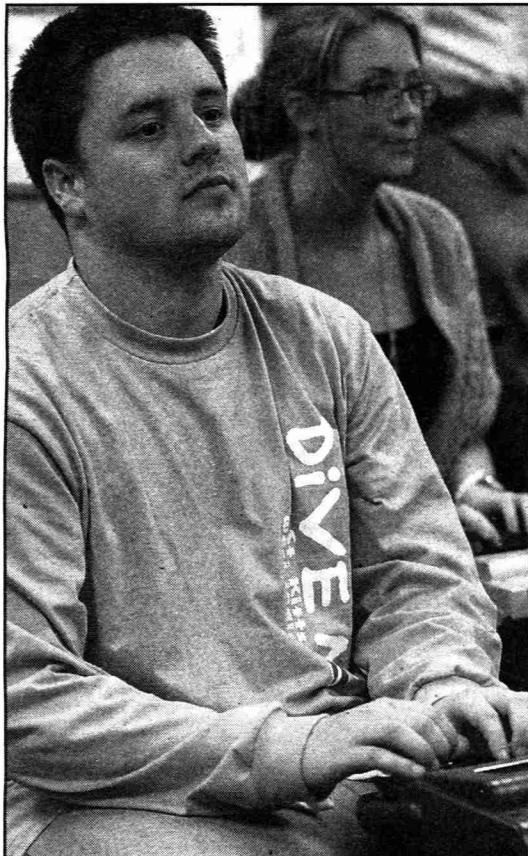
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## What you need to know . . .

An open house for the court-reporting program at Orleans Technical Institute, 2770 Red Lion Road, will take place on Saturday from 10 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Prospective students can learn about the profession and will be able to speak to teachers and current and former students. They'll see a courtroom demonstration and learn about the jobs available to them.

Food and beverages will be served. For more information, call 215-728-4426 or visit [www.orianstech.edu/court-reporting](http://www.orianstech.edu/court-reporting)



JENNY SWIGODA / TIMES PHOTOS

**Jim Finlan and Brittany Everly** refine their skills in Orleans' court reporting program.