

NAJIT: The First Forty Years

By Janis Palma, USCCI, Former CITA/NAJIT President

NAJIT was born as CITA—the **Court Interpreters and Translators Association**—in 1978, at the initiative of a few interpreters in New York who were appalled at the state of affairs for language minorities in courts all over the United States, and the state of affairs for interpreters in the court systems. The idea of creating an organization came from Dena Kohn (now Dena Millman) and María Elena Cárdenas (R.I.P.) Its Certificate of Incorporation was filed on **July 5, 1979** and the original incorporators were María Elena Cárdenas, Richard Schöen, and Marta Celono.

Dena mentioned during a telephone interview:

María Elena and I, we would do conferences, we'd talk about the fact that something had to be done, something had to happen. There was no organization, nothing, for the court interpreters, there was zero. There was no law, there was no way to meet, no way to come together, there was nothing.

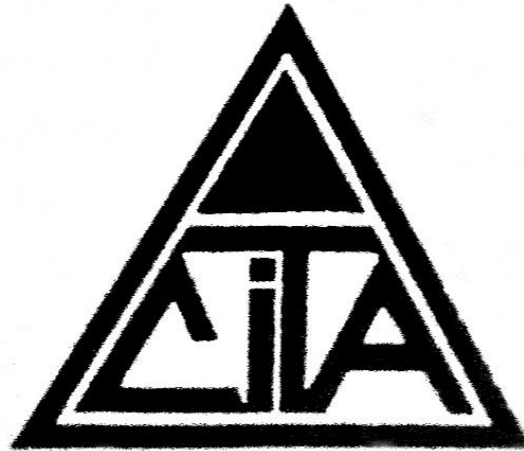
We had a few meetings in my apartment, but without a doubt the very first meeting was where everybody talked about the fact that we needed to organize because there was nothing. I think in those days we were making \$35 dollars a day, or maybe it was \$55, I don't know. But way back in the 70s it was really awful. So the first meeting was in my living room. David Fellmeth - state court interpreter - and Valery Schuckin - a Russian interpreter - were also there.¹

The first CITA Officers were María Elena Cárdenas, President; David Fellmeth, Vice President, Valery Schuckin, Secretary; Dena J. Kohn, Recording Secretary, and Norma Bonner, Treasurer.

María Elena created the logo for CITA. The idea for the name of the organization was also hers, one hundred percent. She was in publicity and had studied advertising, so she came up with that idea. It was "CITA" such as when you have "una cita en el tribunal", CITA as the

¹ Telephone interview with Dena Millman on December 8, 2013.

“Court Interpreters and Translators Association”, I actually loved it; and she also made the triangle, which is the symbol for a defendant. It was all done very consciously by her.²



In 1981 CITA published its first membership directory, which included 55 members from 10 states, Puerto Rico, and Canada.³

In December of that same year CITA organized its first symposium on court interpreting ethics and practice. The speakers' presentations were later published as monograph #3 in 1983: *The Judicial Community Looks at Court Interpreting: Four Viewpoints*. CITA publications back then were actually typed up in 8-1/2" x 14" paper that would then be hand collated, folded, and stapled in the style of a saddle-stitch binding to form the booklets, all by hand.

At that first symposium, which Dena remembers was held at a hotel in New York City, she offered a few introductory remarks that provided the audience with some much needed insight into the reality of interpreters at that time. CITA had created a committee to study common ethical and practical issues for interpreters, consulted with lawyers and judges, and then offered recommendations so that “if someone in the Bronx has a question, or someone in Massachusetts, they can both

² Ibid.

³ *Chronology: Three Decades of Court Interpreting*. *Proteus*, Summer 2009, Vol. XVIII, No. 2. (15-16) (Compiled by Dagoberto Orrantia, Ph.D., USCCI.)

consult a standardized code of performance in which they both know what is expected of them in court.” CITA also wanted judges and lawyers to be on the same page, as far as what they could expect from an interpreter. So Dena, who at the time was CITA’s Recording Secretary, Chair of CITA’s Committee on Court Interpreter Ethics and Practice, as well as the Supervisory Interpreter for the Southern District of New York, brought to the table a representative from the federal defense bar, one from the District Attorney’s Office, a federal judge, a state judge, and interpreters working in state and federal courts, to talk and listen to each other.⁴

This was CITA’s strategy for many years: bring all the stakeholders to the table to learn from each other, and by doing so, the professional standing of interpreters in the eyes of the legal community grew, as did the respect for our work. The other side of the coin was that interpreters attending these activities organized by CITA were learning to do things the right way from the start, which also served to enhance the perception and understanding of the critical role played by interpreters within the justice system.

As Sara García-Rangel remembers it,

I think Maria Elena wanted the group to be in the fashion of old guilds where you would have apprenticeships and that is why at the beginning the training and education were the main focus after the code of ethics. When the federal exam was first given very few people passed it and Maria Elena realized that more interpreters were necessary to cover the needs of the courts. Because I lived in New Jersey I did not attend all the meetings, [but] I did attend the first presentation—or at least one of the first presentations—by a Judge, [plus] Jack Lipson, who was the chief of the Public Defenders, and a prosecutor. The prosecutor said that simultaneous interpreting was

⁴ These were: U.S. District Judge Kevin Duffy from the Southern District of New York, Judge Shirley Levittan, Acting Justice of the New York Supreme Court, Criminal Part; Jack Lipson, Chief Attorney and Supervisor of the Federal Defenders Unit of the Legal Aid Society, Southern and Eastern Districts of New York, Michael Diner, Assistant District Attorney for the Criminal Part of the Supreme Court of New York; David Fellmeth, Senior Interpreter at the Criminal Court in New York and CITA’s Vice President, Valery Schuckin, independent Russian interpreter, and Louis Valle, independent Spanish and Italian interpreter.

*impossible because he could not even repeat in English what another person was saying, so no one could do it in another language. The judge talked about the importance of vocabulary and I remember that, for instance, in a theft charge you had to know other synonyms because you could not just say (when reading the charge) “and he stole, and stole and stole and stole”, etc.*⁵

Monograph #2 was from a CITA annual dinner held in 1982. So even though the symposium came first, it took a little longer to compile the presentations and put together its publication than it did for the publication of the speech given by Dr. Carlos Astiz during the 1982 annual dinner. Monograph #2, titled *Language Barriers in the Criminal Justice System: A Look at the Federal Courts*, was probably one of the most important publications in the field at the time, as it was based on the scholarly research of a professor in the Graduate School of Public Affairs at SUNY Albany⁶. Dr. Astiz’s original research project—*Interpreting Services in American Criminal Courts: A Violation of the Due Process Clause?*—was funded by two grants from the National Institute for Justice awarded to the State University of New York at Albany in 1978 and 1979. This work takes one of the first looks from an academic perspective at the new federal law on court interpreters⁷, as well as some cases involving interpreter-related issues. Another important paper at that time was Dr. Alicia Pousada’s *Interpreting for language minorities in the courts*.⁸ Her work, however, did not get the same level of attention from interpreters, although it did from the academic world. What is also important about the work of these scholars is that they tells us how the issue of language access to the courts, and competent interpreting services, were being addressed by academics in bilingual education, political science, and other fields not necessarily related to interpreting and translating as a discipline. David and Margareta Bowen⁹, from

⁵ E-mail from Sara García-Rangel received on December 5, 2013.

⁶ Dr. Astiz is currently Professor Emeritus with the Department of Political Science at SUNY Albany.

⁷ The Court Interpreters Act, 28 U.S.C. §1827 et seq.

⁸ Pousada, Alicia. *Interpreting for language minorities in the courts*. In J. Alatis (Ed.). Language in public life. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1979 (186-208). Dr. Pousada currently teaches at the University of Puerto Rico’s English Department and to this date continues to write about language issues in the courts, particularly the federal court in Puerto Rico.

⁹ Professors of interpretation and translation at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., Margaret Bowen was Head of the Division of Interpretation and Translation during the 80s. This program has ceased to exist at Georgetown.

Georgetown University, Roda P. Roberts¹⁰ from the University of Ottawa, and Marilyn Frankenthaler¹¹ from Montclair State University were also significant contributors to the academic groundwork built during the 80's that nourished the professional practice of judiciary interpreting.

In 1977, shortly before Dr. Aztis's research project, a doctoral student at the University of Arizona—Roseann Dueñas-González—was working on her dissertation, *The Design and Validation of an Evaluative Procedure to Diagnose the English Aural-Oral Competency of a Spanish-Speaking Person in the Justice System*. The works of these two scholars, Astiz and Dueñas-González, were greatly influential in the design of the federal certification exam.

Dr. Astiz's work became readily accessible to interpreters everywhere through CITA's publication as one of its monographs, and for many years it held its status as a fundamental work of reference on the state of affairs for language services in the courts. It also set a very high standard for the monograph series. In fact, the core issue in the *Language Barriers* monograph, which was equal access to the courts for linguistic minorities, is still relevant to this day and continues to be addressed in the U.S. through several initiatives for the Limited English Proficient (LEP) individuals. Foremost on the list of examples is President Clinton's Executive Order 13166 of August 11, 2000, *Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency*¹², an initiative in which NAJIT's Past President, Isabel Frammer, was actively involved for many years.

¹⁰ Currently a lecturer at the University of Ottawa, Dr. Roda Roberts was one of our most important role models for the training and testing of judiciary interpreters during the 80s, when Canada took the lead with projects such as the Bilingual Canadian Dictionary, of which Dr. Roberts is still Project Manager. In addition, the University of Ottawa also had a School of Translation and Interpretation that had been founded in 1971, and which was a much closer model for the U.S. than the European schools.

¹¹ A Ph.D. in Spanish from Rutgers, with a special interest in Latin American Literature, who later got a JD from Seton Hall University, Dr. Frankenthaler (now Marilyn Taylor) took a particular interest in court interpreting and legal translation with the confluence of these two fields of study. Currently a Professor of Political Science and Law at Montclair State University, in 1985 she published *Skills For Bilingual Legal Personnel: Translating, Interpreting, And Cultural Fluency* which has been reprinted in 2007 by Indo American Books. [<http://www.iabooks.com/servlet/iaGetBiblio?bno=38408o>]

¹² See the Order at <http://www.justice.gov/crt/about/cor/Pubs/eolep.php>, and U.S. Department of Justice Resources Document for this Executive Order at http://www.lep.gov/resources/tips_and_tools-9-21-04.htm, as well as assessment and planning tools related to this Order at http://www.lep.gov/resources/2011_Language_Access_Assessment_and_Planning_Tool.pdf.

During the early 80's CITA's annual dinners were customarily held at a restaurant in New York City. In Sara García's words, *they were great to meet other interpreters. They were very nice social gatherings. And we went to good restaurants.*¹³ When the annual dinner was held in 1982, the CITA officers were still the original five. These annual dinners continued until 1988, when CITA held its first annual meeting outside of New York. After 1988 all of CITA's annual meetings—and later NAJIT's—would be held in different cities throughout the U.S., trying to alternate between the east and the west coast so they would be equally accessible to interpreters all over the U.S.

In the summer of 1983 Dena Kohn offered a training workshop for court interpreters, one of the first. Also that summer, during CITA's annual dinner, David Fellmeth became President.¹⁴ And that same year CITA reproduced Alicia Betsy Edwards' paper at the American Translators Association's 1982 National Convention, *Documents are a Court Interpreter's Best Friend*, as Monograph #4. In 1995 John Benjamins published Edwards' The Practice of Court Interpreting, in which Chapter 2—*Case Preparation*—gathers for the most part the paper presented by her at the ATA conference and later published by CITA.

Dena Kohn's training was repeated at the workshop sponsored by the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts in San Antonio, Texas in 1983. I distinctly remember her "Do's and Dont's" presentation. This was my first training experience as a certified interpreter, and as soon as I approached Dena she spoke to me about CITA and next thing you know Victoria (Vicky) Funes and I were organizing a Southwest Chapter in Brownsville, Texas. Vicky and I were staff interpreters in the Southern District of Texas, together with Fred Kowalski. Vicky later moved to Chicago and I moved to New York. At this time Vicky is happily retired as a former staff interpreter for the U.S. District Court in the Northern District of Illinois, and I am happily retired from the U.S. District Court in Puerto Rico.

The Southwest Chapter was the first chapter ever created under the CITA Bylaws. We started a newsletter that we called **CITATIONS Southwest** and used it

¹³ E-mail from Sara García-Rangel received on December 5, 2013.

¹⁴ *Chronology* (Orrantia), Op. Cit.

as a tool to communicate with staff interpreters all over the States. This was not seen with good eyes by some people and, believe it or not, it did get us in trouble. Nonetheless, *Citations Southwest* continued to be published sporadically—typed in columns to resemble a real newsletter, with artwork literally cut (with scissors) and pasted (with glue), then photocopied and mailed—until 1985, when it became simply ***Citations***, CITA’s official newsletter, which I edited from New York until *Proteus* was born in 1992.

By then, the association’s newsletter could no longer be called *Citations*, because the organization was no longer called CITA. After much brainstorming, Dagoberto Orrantia and Richard Palmer (R.I.P.), two interpreters from the Southern District of New York and professors of literature and interpreting at the City University of New York’s John Jay College, came up with the name. *Proteus*, however, was truly Nancy Festinger (R.I.P.) and Dagoberto Orrantia’s love child. Their passion for language came across for over 20 years in every single issue of *Proteus*, which David Mintz later joined, another interpreter from the New York-New Jersey area—now a staff interpreter in the Southern District of New York—recruited by NAJIT to volunteer his outstanding talent with all things having to do with computers, including the creation of the very first NAJIT web page. David went on to join the NAJIT board of directors in 1993 and chair it in 1997.

Back to 1983, CITA published Monograph #5, *Perspectives on Court Interpreting: State and National Levels*, by Jon Leeth, Carlos Astiz, and David Fellmeth. John Leeth was the Chief of the Court Interpreters Unit within the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts. One of the things the association has been doing from very early on is building bridges and opening channels of communication with the Administrative Office. Forty years later we can be very proud to say that the officer in charge of the interpreter program at the A.O. is a certified interpreter: Mr. Javier Soler. This did not happen spontaneously. This is the result of NAJIT’s hard work on behalf of interpreters everywhere (not to take away from Mr. Soler’s merits in occupying that position, of course.)

In 1984 CITA published Monograph #6, a speech by the Hon. Kevin T. Duffy, U.S. District Judge. In April of that same year CITA organized its second symposium in which interpreters from different fields got together to explore their professional

differences and similarities. The symposium was called *A Cross-Section of Interpreting Specializations*. The monograph published from the symposium presentations, #8, was called *Parallel Interpreting Professions*.

In November 1984 CITA held its annual dinner at a New York City restaurant, where the guest speaker was David DeFerrari, a United Nations terminologist.¹⁵ At that time, the relationship between conference and court interpreters was not friendly at all. CITA played a very important role in getting interpreters from both fields—conference and judiciary interpreting—to get to know each other, learn from each other, and close—or at least narrow—the enormous gap between the two at that time. Of course, conference interpreters had an academic tradition, a long history, and took great pride in their work. Court interpreters, on the other hand, were orphaned in the world of academia, or perhaps fostered by some disciplines, but were otherwise destitute when it came to educational and reference materials, not to mention actual experience, or a history as a recognized and respected profession. Like Dena said during one of our telephone conversations:

When I first started interpreting—and I first started interpreting, actually, with Maria Elena, who was interpreting before me—you know, '73, '74, '75, some trials in Brooklyn and stuff like that, I mean, there were no requirements. Zero. You would say, “Hi, my name is Fulana de Tal and I’m an interpreter.” That’s all. My first big trial in the Southern District? There was no exam! There were these two people, one of them was Gustavo Hoffman, who listened to me and said, “You’re good”, so I ended up doing a trial.¹⁶

Monograph #7 was published in 1985: *Equal Access to Justice for Linguistic Minorities: A Model for Policy Development — The New Jersey Approach*, by Robert Joe Lee. Lee was in charge of the New Jersey Supreme Court Task Force on Interpreter and Translation Services created in 1982, and later became the chief of the Office of Court Interpreting, Legal Translating, and Bilingual Services within the

¹⁵ *Chronology* (Orrantia), Op. Cit.

¹⁶ Telephone interview with Dena Millman on December 8, 2013.

Administrative Office of the Courts in Trenton, New Jersey. The work done by the New Jersey Supreme Court Task Force and later the Office of Court Interpreting under Robert Joe Lee's leadership played a pivotal role in the direction and shape the profession took during the post-federal certification decade of the 80's and beyond. Having him as a CITA ally was extremely important at the time, also. We had the ear of the people who were going to shape public policy for interpreters, not only in one state, but all over the U.S., as it turned out.

New Jersey's groundwork in the certification of interpreters in various language combinations later became the foundation for the National Center for State Court's creation of a consortium exam. That exam has become the benchmark for state certification all over the U.S.

In 1983 CITA's elected officers were David Fellmeth, President; Dena J. Kohn, Vice President; Nancy Festinger, Secretary; Sara García-Rangel, Recording Secretary, and Norman Bonner, Treasurer. However, Monograph #8, *Parallel Interpreting Professions*, published in 1984, lists all the officers, except the treasurer, as "interim" for the years 1984 to 1985, with Dena J. Kohn as President; Nancy Festinger as Vice President; Sara García-Rangel as Secretary, and Norma Bonner as Treasurer. As I recall, all the officers had been elected to a 2-year term in '84, but David Fellmeth resigned as President shortly after that, therefore Dena had to assume the position of President, Nancy that of the Vice President, and Sara remained as the Secretary. This transition served to eliminate the Recording Secretary position from the Board permanently. The interim positions were then held until an election could take place. At that time, elections were done by mail, all ballots typed, copied and stuffed into envelopes by hand, and when the results came back, they would also be counted and tallied by hand. As Nancy put it in something she wrote for *Proteus*:

In 1982 I took the federal exam and when I passed, my daily rate automatically went from \$55 to \$175. To celebrate, I took a trip to Paris. Then I began working as a freelancer under Dena Kohn and Mirta Vidal in the Southern and Eastern Districts of New York. [...] Almost right away, Dena and David [Fellmeth] drafted me as secretary for the nascent CITA. I answered inquiries, licked envelopes, sat in on the planning sessions for annual meetings, typed up the monographs, and

generally helped with whatever needed to be done. It seemed that every time a holiday rolled around, there was pressing CITA business to take care of. Mainly there was a lot of esprit de corps (also known as wishful thinking) and it was catching. Everyone around me was so determined to put court interpreting on the map, and the only way to achieve that was by working together.¹⁷

The enthusiasm was, indeed, contagious. In 1985 CITA published Nancy Festinger's *Key Verbs for Court Interpreters, English-Spanish*, a painstaking compilation by her of those verbs she found to be of critical importance for interpreters. In 1986 it was published in English only, so interpreters in other languages could do their own research and create a working glossary in their particular language.

In May of 1985 CITA's Southwest Chapter held a first—and only—symposium on court interpreting and legal translation on South Padre Island, Texas. We thought it was a great success. Interpreters and non-interpreters came to learn, and that's all we wanted. Education was the only way to bring court interpreters to the level of competency we all desired, and therefore gain the respect we all through we deserved.

In December of 1985 Nancy Festinger became CITA's president. Dena Kohn became Vice President, Vicky Peña stepped in as Secretary, and Norman Bonner remained as Treasurer. Many of CITA's volunteers were freelance interpreters who often worked in the Southern or Eastern Districts of New York, so it was quite common for us to coincide in one or the other courthouses and come up with ideas for CITA, such as how to attract more members to join, how to reach out to state court interpreters, and occasionally we would also help out with tasks such as collating, stapling, and stuffing envelopes for CITA.

By then I had met professors José Varela-Ibarra and Dagoberto Orrantia at a workshop for court interpreters in Calexico, California, sponsored by the San Diego State University's Imperial Valley Campus. When Professor Varela-Ibarra invited me to be one of the instructors, I remember saying, "But I've never done this before."

¹⁷ *Thirty Years: A History Quilt*. Proteus, Summer 2009, Vol. XVIII, No. 2. (12-13)

And he said, “It doesn’t matter. You still know more than they do.” And he was right. The three of us were certified interpreters with actual court experience, training *ad hoc* interpreters or simply bilingual people who wanted to learn how to become federally-certified interpreters. Dagoberto Orrantia wrote in NAJIT’s 30th Anniversary issue of *Proteus*:

I took the federal examination in 1982 but did not start working in the courts until 1983. By then my friend Helena Quintana, who had also read my call for help in La Red, had put me in touch with José Varela Ibarra, and he invited me to participate at a conference he was organizing in California. There I met Janis Palma, and through her, after that year I became more involved with CITA.¹⁸

During those days we had to create everything from scratch when it came to court interpreter training. In fact, CITA published a *Glossary of Federal Court Terminology*. I had started to compile back in Brownsville, based initially on a list of terms published by the A.O. for jurors. Legal glossaries and dictionaries were still hard to find. We had a *Drug Terminology General Glossary* that had been published by the Los Angeles Superior Court in 1980¹⁹ and whatever we ourselves could put together.

I remember Dagoberto Orrantia used to come to every training workshop with stacks of papers containing reading materials and exercises he would put together for the students. We used our own experiences as interpreters to teach, did a lot of research on all the current theories applicable to interpreting—such as sociolinguistics and communications—mixed in with a lot of passion. But no two workshops were ever the same and we talked a lot about creating something we could reproduce over and over, rather than having to come up with new materials every time. This conversation went on for many years, and among the first concrete results from these talks was the creation of a *Center for Legal Translation and Interpretation Studies* in 1986 at the City University of New York John Jay College of Criminal Justice, where Dagoberto Orrantia and Richard Palmer were teaching.

¹⁸ *Thirty Years: A History Quilt. Proteus*, Summer 2009, Vol. XVIII, No. 2. (p. 12)

¹⁹ Rainof, Alexandre and Alberto Natiidad, eds. *Drug Terminology General Glossary, English-Spanish, Spanish-English*. Los Angeles Superior Court, March 1980.

The very first workshop was actually a round table discussion on the subject of ethics, with a lot of audience participation. Sara García remembers from CITA's first years that,

One of the first things discussed was the Code of Ethics. At the time there was this idea that interpreters were sort of spies and would tell one side what they had learned from the other side. I could not believe it, but I found the same to be true when some unqualified people went to work at the prosecutors' office when I began working in New Jersey—about 6 or 7 years after I had already started to work in New York. The original Code of Ethics document also contained practical advice, like what to do with answers partially in English and partially in Spanish, or how to ask for clarifications, etc.²⁰

CITA's focus was still on bringing together interpreters from state and federal courts and raising the competency levels for all skills in order to earn that same degree of respect conference interpreters enjoyed. The rivalries between state and federal, certified and non-certified, court and conference interpreters were fierce, but so was the race among interpreter and translator associations to attract new members to their ranks, particularly those getting certified by the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts. The main contenders at that time were the American Society of Interpreters (ASI)²¹, based in Washington, D.C., the California Court Interpreters Association, and CITA. But the American Translators Association was also interested in attracting interpreters.

There were many concerns among interpreters about pay and working conditions that at the time created a tug-and-pull among members wanting to go in different directions. Some wanted an organization that tackled labor issues in the manner of a labor union; others wanted a professional association that provided leadership in other areas, such as education, ethics, and advocacy. Interpreters were approached by the Newspaper Guild (AFL-CIO), and in fact *The*

²⁰ E-mail from Sara García-Rangel received on December 5, 2013.

²¹ Presided by Alvaro F. Galván in 1988. [See an article in The Miami News from 1988 about working conditions for interpreters in state courts: <http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=2206&dat=19880905&id=Q3FYAAAAIBAJ&sjid=DD0NAAAAIBAJ&pg=5996,1285355>]

Translators and Interpreters Guild was chartered in April 1991—first only as The Translators Guild, then two years later adding the word “Interpreter” to the name—as a “labor union for translators and interpreters”.²²

CITA followed the education, ethics, and advocacy line in the belief that good pay and working conditions would follow if interpreters learned to be true professionals, and the association maintained good lines of communication with the government bodies in charge of setting working conditions and pay for interpreters so our collective voices could be heard as a unified force.

A presentation by Nancy Festinger to the European Legal Interpreters and Translators Association (EULITA)²³, offers an interesting perspective of CITA/NAJIT’s evolution as an organization. During its first stages, Nancy observed that members joined out of a need to belong, but also out of a personal sense of loyalty to one or several leaders. This, of course, was not a strong foundation for the association to grow. It also made internal governance difficult. During those first years the duties and responsibilities of each board member were not all that clear and things did not always get done, nominations for future board members were not a highly structured process, activities were organized spontaneously and sporadically, and yet we managed to grow because the original aims of the organization remained strong:

To promote professional standards of performance and integrity.

To advance the highest quality services.

To advocate training and certification of interpreters through competent and reliable testing methods.

To achieve wider recognition for the profession and art of court interpreting.

To make the public and the judicial community aware of the unique role and function of a court interpreter.

²² *Introducing The Guild*, *Proteus*, Vol. III, No. 1 - Spring 1994 (p. 5)

²³ Festinger, Nancy. *Development of a Court Interpreter Association: NAJIT* [<http://eulita.eu/development-court-interpreters-association-najit>] European Legal Interpreters and Translators Association (EUITA) Inaugural Meeting, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 2010.

In 1987 I became CITA's President. One of the first things I wanted to do was to "take CITA out of New York." I wanted to do away with the perception by many interpreters that CITA was a New York-based organization, which was a deterrent for many to join.

In 1988 we managed to organize our first annual conference in New Orleans. We did not have a huge turnout, but we all thought it was a great success. No longer were CITA's annual meetings a dinner at a fine restaurant in New York City with a guest speaker and a lot of great socialization but limited mostly to the Tri-State area interpreters. New Orleans was a full-day program with presenters who could contribute to the professional growth and development of conference participants. Of course, we kept the social portion very much alive. It was important for interpreters from different parts of the country to meet and talk to each other. I had learned this lesson back in 1983 when I met Dena Kohn in San Antonio during the AO workshop for staff interpreters. As stated by Aleé Alger-Robbins a few years later,

One tremendous benefit I receive from attending conferences is the chance to network with my colleagues so that we can talk about common problems. Why? Because chances are, someone else has already dealt with the same problem, and has come up with a creative solution that never would have occurred to me. The best tidbits I've gleaned from other interpreters have been passed on while we were talking in the hallways during breaks at conferences or local meetings.²⁴

CITA was already attracting members from all over the country and earning a reputation for the work it was doing towards the professionalization of judiciary interpreters. We felt this was the time to push for national standing as **the** association that could bring together interpreters working in legal settings, as well as translators, and be the *one* association that could speak on their behalf with a unified voice. It meant breaking away from the old misconceptions people had about CITA, and that's how the idea to change the name started. The new name

²⁴ Alger-Robbins, Aleé. *Networking. Proteus*, Winter 1992. (p. 5) At that time Aleé was a member of NAJIT's Board of Directors.

had to embody the new image. However, we didn't want a complete break from our roots, so we kept the design elements of the CITA logo, with the new letters inside the triangle.



The question was put to a vote and **in 1989 CITA became the National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators: NAJIT**. The newsletter's name was changed to *NAJIT News* right after the association's name change, and Mary Ellen Pruess, from Colorado, became the editor. Annual meetings continued to be held all over the U.S.

The official amendment to CITA's name was filed in the State Of New York on **January 13, 1989** by Mirta Vidal (R.I.P.), as Assistant Secretary, and me as President of the Association.

In 1989 NAJIT published a small booklet called *Primer for Judiciary Interpreters*, which I prepared, to tend to some of the practical aspects new interpreters needed to learn very quickly: how to keep records, bill clients, etc., and also a *Handbook for the Legal Profession* and an *Introduction to Judiciary Interpreting*, all of which were intended to fill voids in the resources available to interpreters at the time. Very few copies of these publications, if any, have survived.

In 1990, after I moved from New York to Puerto Rico—my homeland—NAJIT's annual conference was held in San Juan. That year NAJIT also sponsored 3 workshops for interpreters: one in Chicago, one in Austin, and one in Dallas.

Organizational changes in 1991 included a Board that no longer had 4 officers elected every 2 years. The board would have 5 members, two of which would be elected on alternate cycles to the other three, for 2-year terms. That way continuity on the Board would always be assured. A chairperson would be elected by those board members, rather than have the members elect a president. The secretary and treasurer responsibilities would also be assigned by the board members. From that point forward, the NAJIT board was formed by the candidates receiving the highest number of votes for the open positions during each election cycle.

The next five-member board of directors elected in 1991 during NAJIT's annual meeting in Washington, D.C., included Samuel Adelo (Chairman), from Santa Fe, New Mexico, Aleé Algiers-Robbins, from San Diego, California; Mirta Vidal, from New York City, New York; Sara García-Rangel (Treasurer), from Montclair, New Jersey; and Mary Ellen Pruess (Secretary), from Lakewood, Colorado. NAJIT also had three active committees: Accreditation, Education and Training, and Publications.

CITA—now NAJIT—had clearly evolved from a “New York-based” to a broadly representative ***national*** organization. Reaching out to other groups and individuals with common interests has also been a long-standing tradition with NAJIT. The 1991 conference had an Australian judge as a keynote speaker: the Honorable Judge Margaret O’Toole, of New South Wales. We also had Sylvia Straub, then the Executive Director of the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) as one of the presenters. It also became customary for NAJIT to sponsor a panel discussion, workshop, or presentation at the ATA conferences.

Conversations about creating an exam by the profession and for the profession are documented as far back as the early 90’s. In his remarks to the members during the annual meeting in DC, Sam Adelo said: “*The consensus at the meeting on professional accreditation was that we should seriously study the feasibility of creating a mechanism for accreditation. Maurice Gilbert will be committee chairman.*”²⁵ It took at least another decade for this dream to come true.

²⁵ *Annual Meeting a Success*. Proteus, Vol. 1, No. 1, Winter 1992. (p. 2)

Another project that took over two decades to become a reality was the Administrative Office's official guidelines for the practice of judiciary interpreting in federal courts. Many interpreters gave their input through a committee created by the AO and by the mid-80's a draft had already been put together. Ed Baca, who was John Leeth's successor as Chief of the Court Interpreters Unit within the AO and who was present during NAJIT's conference in D.C., suggested the final document could be ready by 1992. However, it was not actually published until 20 years later, as Volume 5 of the Guide to Judiciary Policy²⁶, long after the Court Interpreters Act had been amended in 1988.

Sam Adelo and Mirta Vidal also joined a National Center for State Courts' project "to conduct a two year study to identify, compile and develop resources that can be used by courts to improve the quality of court interpreter services."²⁷

A professional management firm—Plaza II Executive Center, Inc., in Santa Fe, New Mexico—was contracted for the first time to do clerical and administrative work for NAJIT. As Sam put it during his address to the conference participants: "*With a burgeoning membership, we can no longer rely on a volunteer staff of well-intentioned but busy freelance interpreters.*"²⁸ That year membership dues were also raised to \$50.

A New Jersey Chapter was created in 1991. A year later the first issue of **NAJIT-NJ News** was published, edited by David Mintz. In the winter of that same year the first *Proteus* issue came out, edited by Dagoberto Orrantia and Nancy Festinger. José Varela-Ibarra had started a more scholarly journal from his home-base in Brownsville, Texas, called *Difference, Journal of the NAJIT*.

1992 was the year that the Federal Trade Commission came down hard on all interpreters and translator associations in a "price fixing" investigation. Fortunately, Sam Adelo, who was also an attorney, was the one who received the FTC notice and subpoena, so everyone moved very quickly to respond to the FTC

²⁶ Available to the public at

<http://www.uscourts.gov/FederalCourts/UnderstandingtheFederalCourts/DistrictCourts/CourtInterpreters.aspx>

²⁷ *Project Announcement*. *Proteus*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Winter 1992. (p. 6)

²⁸ *Large Attendance, Infusion of New Ideas Mark NAJIT's Thirteenth Annual Meeting*, *Proteus*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Winter 1992. (p. 1)

under the skilled leadership of Mirta Vidal, who had just been elected to be the NAJIT Chair.

Contrary to what Deanna L. Hammon wrote in her *Editors Remarks* (p. 6.) to Volume VII of the American Translators Association's Scholarly Monograph Series²⁹ about NAJIT having "published a list of prices its members should charge", NAJIT did no such thing. Interpreters were—and probably still are—always trying to find out what other freelancers are charging for their services in other cities or other states. NAJIT conducted a survey and published the results in one of the *Proteus* issues, but the Federal Trade Commission cleared NAJIT of any wrongdoing, since the association was informing about prevailing rates being charged by interpreters and translators all over the country, rather than mandating what members should charge. ATA was also cleared, although it did have "a Rate Guidelines Committee (RGC) that once a year published a list of fees that it recommended translators take into consideration."³⁰ The American Society of Interpreters (ASI) and The American Association of Language Specialists (TAALS) did not fare so well. The FTC 1994 Report states:

"Two separate consent orders with The American Association of Language Specialists (TAALS) and the American Society of Interpreters (ASI) prohibit the associations headquartered in Washington, D.C. from conspiring with their members to fix the fees charged for providing translation services at conferences or high-level meetings of private business concerns, government officials and agencies, and other entities. The complaint accompanying the consent orders alleged that TAALS and ASI restrained competition by publishing lists of fees their members were required to charge for language interpretation and by establishing rules that, among other things, set guidelines for the provision of amenities to members, limited hours for services, and prohibited its language specialist members from engaging in any form of truthful and nondeceptive personal publicity and advertising. The consent orders prohibit the associations from interfering in the pricing practices of its members for three years and,

²⁹ Professional Issues for Translators and Interpreters, Dianna L. Hammon, Ed. John Benjamins Publishing Company: The Netherlands, 1994.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

for a period of 10 years, require the associations to declare out-of-order any person who makes a statement at an association meeting concerning fee standards.”³¹

Every single professional association involving interpreters and translators in the U.S. quickly learned of the FTC order and has abided by it ever since:

“By order of the Federal Trade Commission, ASI is prohibited from recommending, suggesting, or enforcing fees. Under United States Law, interpreters and other language specialists must unilaterally and independently determine their own fees.”³²

With Mirta Vidal now as Chair, NAJIT moved towards a higher level of organizational management by contracting the services of Arlene Stock (Dynamic Management Services) as its first Executive Director. Arlene held that position until 2002.

The NAJIT Annual Conference in Tucson in 1993 had a record attendance of ninety members, which was a reflection of the success NAJIT was having in bringing interpreters and translators together. In fact, that year NAJIT also organized a Southwest Regional Conference in Austin, Texas.

NAJIT continued to sponsor educational activities for court interpreters on a regular basis. An advanced interpreting workshop was sponsored in 1995, as well as a seminar for certification candidates that year, in addition to a roundtable discussion for interpreters in 1999.³³

During NAJIT’s 15th Annual Conference in New York City in 1994, one of the featured speakers was Lawrence M. Solan, author of *The Language of Judges*. At the time NAJIT was deeply committed to the National Center for State Court’s initiative, and the promulgation of standards for the profession, carefully assessing the competencies needed by interpreters working in either state or federal judiciary contexts, fine-tuning ethical considerations as an integral part of a

³¹ Full report at: http://www.ftc.gov/sites/default/files/documents/reports_annual/annual-report-1994/ar1994_0.pdf

³² See full text at: <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-1994-02-23/html/94-4042.htm>

³³ E-mail communication received from Arlene Stock on January 2, 2014.

judiciary interpreter's proficiency, and fleshing out appropriate language for future statutes governing the practice of interpreting in state courts. Also that year, NAJIT's annual dues went up from \$50 to \$75.

In 1994, the New Jersey Chapter was closed. As reported in the *Proteus*, "The New Jersey Chapter of NAJIT (NAJIT-NJ) has disbanded. Bedeviled from the start by quarrels over editorial control of its newsletter, the Chapter floundered for two years during which quarterly *NAJIT-NJ News* was its only sign of life. (...) NAJIT-NJ's *de facto* directors [were] Miriam Leniz and David Mintz[.]"³⁴

Foremost in the minds of all interpreters was the matter of certification for other languages. The Administrative Office of U.S. Courts announced that year that it would have a written exam for interpreters of Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean, Arabic, Polish, Italian, Russian, Mien, and Hebrew. This project, however, never got off the ground. Soon after, in 1995, the National Center for State Courts created a multi-state consortium for court interpreter testing. This is what we know today as the Consortium Exam.

When David Mintz was elected Chair of the Board in 1996, he used his computer skills to launch NAJIT into a new era by creating a website that went live for the first time in March of that year plus an online directory and a NAJIT listserv the following year. In his own words:

We established an Internet presence just when a thing called World Wide Web was in its transition from exotic nerdiness to mainstream normality. (Back then it was dial-up modems and DOS file systems with the 8+3 file-naming constraint. Many [of today's NAJIT members] will be too young to remember that.) I don't have hard numbers, but I think we went from something like 250 to 1000 members in the space of a very few years.

*I was an intrepid early adopter in the fall of 1995 when I came across a title in a bookstore: *Build Your Own Website with HTML*. I thought,*

³⁴ *NAJIT-NJ Bites the Dust*, *Proteus*, Vol. III, Nos. 2 and 3, Summer-Fall 1994 (p. 18)

*hey, there's an idea, maybe I can make a website for NAJIT. And a few months later najit.org was live.*³⁵

When NAJIT was still CITA, annual meetings were customarily held during the month of November. In 1992 they were moved to February, “a time of the year that is convenient for travel and that would permit members to attend the fall meetings of two sister organizations, CCIA and ATA.”³⁶ In 1997 the Annual Conference was moved to May and held in Miami. It was also renamed to *Annual Meeting and Educational Conference* to better reflect the contents of its program.

Another change that took place in the early 90’s was the Association’s member categories. When CITA was created, there were only three member categories: active, associate, and student. At some point prior to 1992, categories became “Individual”, “Student” and “Institution”. In 1992 members voted to add a life membership category.

During David’s chairmanship, he, Mirta Vidal, and Arlene Stock filed for the incorporation of the *Foundation for the Study of Translation and Interpretation* on **February 14, 1997**, amended by David and Fritz Hensey, the NAJIT Secretary at that time, on June 30, 1997 to the *Society for the Study of Translation and Interpretation* (SSTI). That same year SSTI obtained its 501(c)(3) tax exemption from the IRS, thanks to the generous assistance provided by Sandra Morra throughout the whole process.

Sadly, 1997 was also the year in which we lost one of CITA’s founders and pioneers, María Elena Cárdenas³⁷. Her dream, however, had truly come to fruition. With Christina Helmericks as Chair, in 1998 NAJIT joined ASTM International (formerly known as the American Society for Testing and Materials), to define standards in court interpretation. Teresa Salazar summarizes the project in a *Proteus* issue:

³⁵ April 9, 2019 email from David Mintz.

³⁶ *Election Results: Board Assumes Post*, *Proteus*, Vol. 1, No. 1 - Winter 1992.

³⁷ See *Proteus* Vol. VI, No. 2 - Spring 1997.

[http://www.najit.org/membersonly/library/Proteus/HTML%20Versions/back_issues/cardenas.htm]

For the past two and a half years, NAJIT has been participating in drafting an industry standard for the interpretation field under the auspices of the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM).

The scope of the standard is very broad and seeks to provide anyone in need of contracting and working with interpreting services with a practical reference source that covers the theoretical aspects as well as the practical applications of the profession. To begin with, the standard provides the user with a terminology list and covers conference, court, educational, medical, and sign language interpreting, as well as the different settings in which services are performed. It provides the user with information regarding interpreter qualifications, a code of ethics based on the universal canons common to the codes of ethics of most professional interpreter organizations and sets out appropriate working conditions and equipment for different settings.³⁸

In 2000, with Christina Helmericks as Chair, NAJIT held one of its most successful annual conferences in Miami, with 226 attendees. That was also the year *Proteus* was redesigned to add a color masthead and new format.

By then the NAJIT certification project had begun, a monumental undertaking, for which RFPs were sent out to several potential providers and was ultimately awarded to *Measurement Incorporated*, a Durham, North Carolina-based and highly experienced test-development company. Mirta Vidal reported to the members during the annual meeting and later in a summarized version published in the Summer 2000 Proteus:

“Some of you may think NAJIT's efforts to create a certification program for judiciary interpreters has been a long time coming. Actually, most of you were not even members when the idea began to be seriously considered. I remember sitting with Dagoberto Orrantia

³⁸ Proteus, Vol. IX, No. 4 - Fall 2000

[http://www.najit.org/membersonly/library/Proteus/HTML%20Versions/v9n4/salazar_v9n4.htm]

See also her follow-up report in the Summer of 2001 Proteus issue.

[<http://www.najit.org/membersonly/library/Proteus/HTML%20Versions/v10n3/salazar.htm>]

and Janis Palma, who was then chair, in a restaurant in San Juan nine years ago having a heated argument about whether or not we should have an exam, what kind of an exam, and how it could be done. (...)

(...) When, in response to the survey three years ago, we were given a mandate by the membership to create a certification program, we knew it was time to stop debating the issues and get down to work. And once we knew what we had to do, many of the questions we had agonized over began to resolve themselves. (...) So after the San Antonio conference two years ago, the NAJIT Board appointed Alex Rainof, Gladys Segal and myself to constitute the SSTI Board to spearhead this effort.

(...) This is a historic step, one we have worked long and hard to take. The SSTI board is confident that the certification program we are about to put in place will help to create a new and higher standard for the interpreting community. NAJIT's credential will give interpreters an additional incentive to expand their knowledge and develop their skills, and ultimately will contribute to the further professionalization and recognition of our field. (...)

(...) As I look back on that first lively debate in San Juan and realize how close we are to making what was then a mere figment of our imagination a reality, nine years doesn't seem like such a long time. The really hard work, of course, is still ahead of us."³⁹

The NAJIT English<>Spanish interpretation and translation certification exam was pilot-tested during the annual conference in Chicago in 2001. This was a gigantic milestone for the Association and for the profession because for the first time ever we had an instrument to measure the skills and competencies that would set the standard for judiciary interpreters as defined and designed by judiciary interpreters, not conference interpreters, not people from government or academia (although interpreters in the academic world were involved.) Lois

³⁹ Proteus, Vol. IX, No. 3 - Summer 2000.

Feuerle, who was very close to this whole process as a member of the NAJIT Board, wrote in 2013:

The NJITCE, better known as the NAJIT Exam, is different in that it was developed at the behest and under the sponsorship of a professional organization rather than a governmental agency. The decision to develop a very demanding exam that tests both interpreting and translation skills for court interpreters was made in 1998 based on a survey of NAJIT's membership.

NAJIT worked in close collaboration with a test development company, with NAJIT providing the substantive content and insight into the KSAs required by court interpreters and the outside company providing the psychometric expertise. It was an expensive enterprise even though NAJIT provided the consultants and subject matter experts free of charge.⁴⁰

Indeed, financially speaking this has been NAJIT's largest undertaking. The arguments back and forth over every little detail got very heated at times, but this credential was an overt sign of NAJIT's and the profession's coming of age. And come of age we did! In 2002, during NAJIT's annual conference in Phoenix, the oral component of the exam was administered for the first time and the first group of ***Nationally Certified Judiciary Interpreters and Translators*** (Spanish) was born.

The NAJIT Exam differs from the Federal and former Consortium examinations in that (1) its Written test includes a demanding translation component to qualify successful candidates to translate as well as to interpret, and (2) the Oral tests the candidate's skill in interpreting both from Spanish into English and from English into Spanish. The NAJIT Written tests the candidate's linguistic abilities in both Spanish and English.

⁴⁰ Feuerle, Lois. *Testing Interpreters: Developing, Administering, and Scoring Court Interpreter Certification Exams*. *The International Journal for Translation & Interpreting Research*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (2013)

*The NAJIT Written Exam is very comprehensive and includes sections on reading comprehension, grammar and syntax, antonyms, synonyms, analogies, idioms, proverbs, ethics, and translation into both English and Spanish. Both the Spanish and English sections of the NAJIT Written are designed to match the level of difficulty of the Graduate Record Examinations (the GREs).*⁴¹

By 2013 there were “[e]leven states [that] currently accept successful completion of the NAJIT exam as sufficient qualification for state court certification without further testing.”⁴² Those states were Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Iowa, Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Texas, and Wisconsin.

In July 2002, Ann G. Macfarlane became NAJIT’s Executive Director, and the association’s headquarters moved to Seattle, WA. In order to avoid any conflicts between the educational activities that NAJIT was sponsoring, and the new testing initiative, the NAJIT and SSTI Boards jointly agreed to separate the two by leaving the educational activities to NAJIT and the exam procedure to SSTI, which was a separate legal entity. Mirta Vidal became SSTI’s President, joined by Carmen Barros of New Jersey, and Alexander Rainoff from California on the SSTI Board.

In February 2003, NAJIT published a position paper on *Information for Court Administrators*, sponsored an eastern regional conference in New York, at the Fordham University School of Law, a Southern Regional Conference in Austin Texas in September of that same year, and held its annual conference in Nashville in May. At that annual meeting I gave the SSTI report to the NAJIT Board and the membership, which began like this:

Last September Mirta Vidal stepped down as President of the SSTI Board for health reasons. As everyone knows, Mirta was the driving force behind the NAJIT/SSTI certification exam project. We all have a great debt of gratitude with Mirta for her years of tireless efforts to make this dream a reality. In recognition of her work, she was

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

unanimously appointed as President Emerita of the SSTI Board of Directors, and she has graciously agreed to continue to honor us with her sage advice.

In 2004 we had the greatest loss of all. **Mirta Vidal-Orrantia**, past NAJIT president and founding president of SSTI, passed away in New York. She did single-handedly for NAJIT and our profession what no one else had done before, equaled only, perhaps, by our dear Esther Navarro-Hall, who we also lost last year. Our debt to Mirta as professional judiciary interpreters and translators is so great that I hope that if there is one thing you remember from this whole historical account is Mirta Vidal's name as one of our great pioneers and trailblazers.

NAJIT did go on, of course, and for its Silver Anniversary held its 25th conference and annual meeting in Denver, Colorado, where Alexander Raïnoff became Chair of the Board. That year NAJIT published a position paper titled *Direct Speech in Legal Settings*, and in February held an Eastern Regional Conference on Forensic Interpreting in Miami, Florida.

Curtailing expenses became a concern for NAJIT and in 2004 the Board sent out an RFP for the Association's management services. The contract was awarded to ERGA, Inc., a management firm in Seattle. In 2005 the annual conference was held in Washington, D.C., and NAJIT started to pay more attention to community outreach through projects such as the "I Speak..." language card to help law enforcement officers identify the language of non-English speakers they encounter. The Association also published two position papers: *Preparing Interpreters in Rare Languages* and *Summary Interpreting in Legal Settings*.

In 2004 the NAJIT Board reaffirmed our organization's tradition of proactive approaches to the profession's growth and evolution, by approving a resolution "in recognition of the importance of the next generation" and declaring 2006 the "Year of the Student". A scholarship fund was also established for these young apprentices to be able to attend NAJIT's annual conferences, perhaps inadvertently but nonetheless synergistically furthering Maria Elena Cárdenas original vision for CITA-now-NAJIT. This new generation of interpreters, as part of what is now known

as the **NAJIT Scholars Program**, not only come to NAJIT's conferences to learn, but they also infuse the organization with fresh insights and abundant energy.

As a NAJIT Director and later Chair, Isabel Frammer also brought a certain continuity to NAJIT's long tradition of working with sister organizations and government bodies, first by becoming a member of the American Translators Association's Public Relations Committee, and later in her many initiatives with state and federal government entities. In a 2005 *Message from the Chair* published in *Proteus*, Alexander Rainoff wrote: "*From an organizational point of view, NAJIT and ATA can accomplish much more working together than either could achieve simply on its own.*"⁴³

Internal relationships, however, between NAJIT and SSTI, had to be spelled out, particularly after a separate institute was created as a special project to honor the memory and legacy of Mirta Vidal-Orrantia. Peter Lindquist, who was SSTI's President in 2005, wrote in *Proteus*: "Now that NAJIT involves three interdependent organizations, the first priority of the new SSTI board has been to define and clarify its role relative to NAJIT and MVOITI⁴⁴. Working together, the boards have crafted a document describing the division of responsibilities among NAJIT, SSTI and MVOITI. SSTI is responsible for oversight of the certification program, research, and support for the training work performed by MVOITI. Other areas of responsibility marked out for SSTI include exploring credentialing and training in languages other than Spanish (LOTS), the possibility of a peer-reviewed journal, and development of funding sources for these and other NAJIT/SSTI/MVOITI projects."⁴⁵

The growth of an organization is sometimes painful and, sadly, **The Mirta Vidal-Orrantia Interpreting and Translating Institute** only lived for a few short years. But in those few years we did accomplish a lot, particularly that other dream of standardizing educational and training materials so courses could be reproduced anytime and anywhere by the same or different instructors, because we had developed materials for students *and* instructors. This milestone was made

⁴³ *Proteus*, Vol. XIV, No. 1, Spring 2005.

⁴⁴ The Mirta Vidal-Orrantia Interpreting and Translating Institute, created in 2004.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

possible by the hard work of those behind-the-scenes heroes like Dr. Dagoberto Orrantia, yes, the same one who came to those first workshops loaded with loose sheets of paper for the students to practice, and read, and learn.

A lot of talented volunteers gave freely of their time and talent to develop course materials that included audio CDs for consecutive and simultaneous practice, among them Olga Alicea, Tommy Kavelin, Aída Ríos, and Moisés Hernández, all certified interpreters in Puerto Rico.

In 2006 the annual conference was held in Houston, Texas, as NAJIT continued to publish position papers, adding 4 titles that year: *Equal Access as it Relates to Translation and Interpretation*; *Language Assistance for Law Enforcement*; *Modes of Interpreting*; and *Onsite Simultaneous Interpretation of a Soundfile is Not Recommended*.

The last three position papers published by NAJIT are: *Team Interpretation in the Courtroom (2007)*, *Telephone Interpreting in Legal Settings (2009)*, and *General Guidelines and Minimum Requirements for Transcript Translations in Any Legal Setting (2009)*. The position paper initiative reminds me of the original CITA Monograph series, but of course, these are all available online now. No “correcting tape”, white-out, or staples required. These informative publications come to life in direct response to members’ interests and concerns.

In 2007, during the annual conference in Portland, NAJIT took an unprecedented action by adopting a *Resolution Condemning and Deploring Torture*. That year membership reached 1,100 members, Isabel Framer became chair of NAJIT Board and Andy Ozols became Executive Director. Added benefits to NAJIT members came in the form of a professional liability (errors and omissions) insurance policy through Lloyds of London, “tailored specifically to the risks we incur as judiciary interpreters and translators”⁴⁶ and a special collections program from Dunn & Bradstreet to assist “with instances of non-payment for services rendered.”⁴⁷ The open listserv switched over to a members-only e-mail discussion group, growing from 104 to 238 subscribers with the switch.

⁴⁶ *Message from the Chair, Proteus*, Vol. XVI, No. 4, Winter 2007-08

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

In 2008 the annual conference was held in Pittsburgh, membership reached 1,300; Robin Lanier became the Executive Director, and NAJIT's headquarters moved to Washington, D.C. "With our operations now based in Washington D.C., NAJIT will be readily available and visible for advocacy and PR work with government agencies, non-profits and other public interest associations." By then NAJIT was already "the largest and only judiciary interpreter and translator's association with international members" in the U.S.

Board Chair Isabel Frammer pushed the envelope with NAJIT's outreach initiatives, and in 2009 NAJIT signed an MOU with the American Red Cross to improve language access to Limited English Proficient populations during disaster events. That year the annual conference was in Scottsdale, Arizona.

Isabel was followed by Rosemary Dann as Chair of the NAJIT Board. In her *Message from the Chair* published in *Proteus*, she announced a major change for NAJIT in 2009: "As we embark on our fourth decade, NAJIT will no doubt undergo changes and face new challenges. One recent development is that Measurement, Inc. will no longer function as the administrator of our certification exam: NAJIT itself has assumed that responsibility. ... the board feels that self-management is the best course of action... [and] The newly constituted Certification Commission has taken the helm..."⁴⁸ Sadly, the Certification Commission never again offered the NAJIT certification exam, and to this date it remains dormant in some file cabinet under lock and key.

As an attorney, Rosemary aimed to strengthen NAJIT's relationship with the bench and bar, as well as court administration offices, and bar associations throughout the U.S., while also building bridges with other professional associations for interpreters and translators, in and outside of the U.S. She was also very wise to put a stop to member requests for NAJIT to take positions on issues outside of the association's mission and scope.

"NAJIT advocates at the state and federal levels on issues that affect the profession, but increasingly members have asked NAJIT to get involved in political issues far beyond the scope of the profession itself.

⁴⁸ *Proteus*, Vol. XVIII, No. 3, Fall 2009.

There are significant gray areas in this realm. For example, NAJIT actively supports efforts to provide qualified interpreters in the courtroom to assist LEP individuals in gaining access to justice, but NAJIT takes no position on other issues such as immigration reform.

It is the firm belief of NAJIT's board that taking positions on broad social issues would jeopardize the required neutrality of our profession."⁴⁹

In the Spring of 2011 *Proteus* made its debut as a digital newsletter. A cost-cutting measure that, nonetheless, left out some of the basic information the printed *Proteus* offered as a repository of NAJIT's history, such as the current list of Board members in every issue. While it allows for embedded videos and greater interactions between NAJIT members and the NAJIT Board, the old format was my greatest source of information for this historical account and I miss that in the new format.

In November 2012 we lost another one of NAJIT's heroes, one of the original volunteers who elevated NAJIT to what it is today through her dedication and commitment to excellence, which came through loud and clear in every issue of *Proteus* she edited with her infinite love for this profession. A very tough act to follow, Rosemary Dann agreed to take over as *Proteus'* editor once Nancy stepped down due to her health concerns.

From 2011 through 2014 Rob Cruz was NAJIT's Chair. He was a passionate advocate and networker, making sure NAJIT had a presence in every organization and every activity pertinent to our profession, most importantly the U.S. Department of Justice's compliance division that oversees Title VI complaints. In Rob's words: "This solidified NAJIT's positioning as the *go-to* association for Title VI compliance in the judiciary. It allowed us to participate on an ABA working group that authored *Standards for Interpreting in Courts*, perhaps the most comprehensive document of its kind."

⁴⁹ *Message from the Chair, Proteus*, Vol. XIX, No. 2, Summer 2010.

He also brought with him computer skills and social media savvy that has been put to good use for NAJIT members' benefit. Under Rob's chairmanship NAJIT developed *Talking Points* members could use in their own advocacy initiatives, as well as a Power Point presentation created by a new Bench and Bar committee, all of which are available now through NAJIT's webpage. NAJIT was also instrumental in advocating for certified interpreters to be appointed in civil matters at no cost to the Limited English speakers, also known as LEPs.

Rob recalls that:

At the time that I became Chair, the relationship between practitioners and their respective professional associations was becoming very strained. Many professionals were concerned that specialized national and international associations like NAJIT, IMIA, ATA, AIIC and others were too narrowly focused and that general troublesome issues or concerns that affected all interpreters, regardless of specialization, were not being addressed by a united front. There was a movement afoot to create a "Generalist" interpreter association with some talk among NAJIT members of changing the association's name and scope to fill that need. I made it a focus early on in my tenure as Chair to listen to the reasons behind that desire and attempt to address it without jeopardizing the hard-fought inroads, reputation and credibility that NAJIT had within the judiciary arena. With the cooperation of other national association leaders, we were able to create a loose coalition comprised of the main associations in order to address important professional issues or causes using the collective strength of the individual associations in a unified way. The organization was comprised of NAJIT, ATA, AIIC, IMIA, Mano a Mano, an organization of trilingual (Spanish, English and American Sign Language) interpreters in the United States and NCIHC (National Council of Interpreters in Healthcare). The group was named the National Interpreter Association Coalition (NIAC). The group has authored joint letters and standards, met in person at member associations' conferences and generally advocated for causes that impact the individual associations'

*missions and interpreters in general. NIAC continues to hold monthly conferences calls that are attended by the leaders of the member organizations and recently created a website for the group.*⁵⁰

Another milestone for NAJIT was getting the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Occupational Outlook Handbook to include and more aptly describe interpreting and translating as professions. This is an ongoing collaboration and, while improvements are still needed, NAJIT's voice on the matter plays a vital role.

In 2011 NAJIT collaborated on an *Amicus Curiae* brief filed with the U.S. Supreme Court for the Taniguchi v. Kan Pacific Saipan case. The case hinged on whether interpreting and translating were interchangeable professions, or whether they were similar but different, a matter that had not been formally addressed previously by the Court. NAJIT served as the subject matter expert and ultimately the Supreme Court held that the professions were indeed separate and distinct and leaned on the NAJIT brief to reach that conclusion. "A victory," in Rob's words, "for both professions since the decision can now be cited when educating stakeholders and clients."

Esther Navarro-Hall (R.I.P.) was elected to the NAJIT Board in 2013 and became the Chair in 2014. She was a tireless leader, whose first order of business was to re-brand the association, starting with the contracting of a new management company: Comprehensive Management & Consulting, Inc. (CMAC). It was a new direction for NAJIT, having a management company that was not only in the hands of a practicing interpreter and translator, but one who had been an integral part of NAJIT's leadership: Rob Cruz. Esther immediately got to work on the creation of a new logo and tag line, the migration of all back-end operations to more modern platforms, and a redesigned website for a more contemporary look. Esther had a way of bringing people together to make changes much needed in the association, and the profession, inspired by her unique vision but always being mindful and inclusive of everyone's opinions and concerns.

She was very much aware of the importance of training and education, not only for the mainstream languages, but for all languages, with the indigenous

⁵⁰ March 22, 2019 email from Rob Cruz.

having a special place in her heart. She was continuously building strong ties with other organizations and entities in the U.S. and abroad that we could benefit from or could benefit from us, such as Red T⁵¹, the International Federation of Translators and Interpreters (FIT), the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC), the International Association of Professional Translators and Interpreters (IAPTI) and, most importantly, the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts. There was not a trip she'd make to D.C. when she would not call Javier Soler to meet for lunch, or just to share a brief hello, a seemingly small gesture that nonetheless strengthened NAJIT's relationship with the A.O. Esther was welcomed with open arms everywhere she went as NAJIT's ambassador.

One of the documents that came out of these collaborations was the "T & I Descriptions" that can be found on NAJIT's webpage. She also created an "Advocacy Day" in conjunction with the NAJIT annual conference in Virginia in 2017, and a document titled *Advocacy 101*, all of which nourished the new NAJIT tagline: *Empowering Interpreters and Translators Worldwide*.

Esther took NAJIT's helm in 2013 and expertly steered us forward with newer and more powerful tools, while still remaining faithful to the association's truest foundations. She was fiercely committed to having professional interpreters and translators in the legal field define their own needs, their own issues, their own priorities, and their own agenda. She was also instrumental in bringing together all the stakeholders when pressing or controversial issues had to be address, with NAJIT as the centrifugal force that made it all happen in a cohesive and collaborative space.

In 2017 Esther stepped down as Chair of the Board and Rafael Carrillo was elected to the position by his fellow board members. His tenure was short, unfortunately. Internal disagreements led him and Esther to resign from the NAJIT board altogether, which was not only a great loss for the association, but also caused a considerable amount of uncertainty as to NAJIT's future. The remaining board members had to take quick and efficient measures to reassure members

⁵¹ Red T is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization advocating for the protection of translators and interpreters in high-risk settings. <https://red-t.org/>

fearing NAJIT would disband. Gladys Matthews was elected as the new chair until new elections were held in 2018.

In Gladys' words:

NAJIT's board is a working board, which means that its members have to be able and willing to [give] the time it takes to make a difference. While it is time-consuming, service on the board is truly gratifying. (...) I was lucky, as Chair, to work with a highly committed team of board members and management company. All of them were willing to put in the time it took to support NAJIT, and they always kept the interests of the members and the good of NAJIT foremost in their considerations. The work dynamic that ensued, such as quick and substantive responsiveness to issues and membership concerns, was great to be a part of.⁵²

These were, indeed, trying times for NAJIT, but the worst tragedy hit in November 2018 when we also lost our beacon of light, **Esther Navarro-Hall**. Unbeknownst to most of us, she had been ill even while she continued to lead all of us through the dark tunnel of immigrant family separations at the border, finding volunteers to interpreter for the detainees, especially those who spoke indigenous languages by bringing back to action the Interpreter Brigade she had created.

Her vision and legacy, as well as Mirta Vidal-Orrantia's and Nancy Festinger's, do live on. NAJIT's leadership role and relevance continue to strengthen within the community of professional interpreters and translators; membership numbers continue to rise, as does attendance at every conference.

The current Chair of the Board, Aimee Benavides, is bringing it all home:

My personal vision, which is very fortunately shared by the current board, is to put NAJIT in a position of leadership within our profession and among the legal community. NAJIT wants to be an active participant in the granting of CEUs to better assist individual AOs by streamlining the process while maintaining high standards. As

⁵² April 16, 2019 email from Gladys Matthews.

practitioners ourselves, we are uniquely qualified to lend our expertise in determining the professional skills required by interpreters and translators to perform well in the field. Our logo is "empowering interpreters and translators worldwide" and we have interpreted that as giving practitioners the tools they need to succeed. This should also include tools and advice regarding how to succeed as a freelancer and how to run a successful business.⁵³

Among the new initiatives under Aimee's leadership are healthcare benefits "to provide extra support and additional options for our freelance members." Technology has also enabled the creation of a *NAJIT Academy*, a virtual training and education space that began under the former board and continues to be developed and expanded by the current board, and a NAJIT YouTube Channel that will also be used for educational purposes, in addition to having short informational videos accessible to everyone. The use of social media is also growing exponentially through NAJIT's Facebook page a virtual town-hall held to give members a chance to hear what the board is doing and for the board to hear directly from members.

Current goals include an enhanced national presence by providing regional training opportunities in conjunction with local associations. Perhaps the most significant of the current board's plans is the idea of reviving the NAJIT credential, although limited to the translation portion of the exam. This would give NAJIT members an opportunity to acquire a legal translation certification that is aligned with the profession's standards as defined by the profession.

One thing the board is working on is making sure we have a plan for sustainable growth. With the number of certified interpreters and even court employees in the U.S. alone, NAJIT should have twice if not three times the number of members. As technology advances, we have to continually re-think how we are reaching out to current and future members. The benefits people expect from their association also change over time.

⁵³ April 11, 2019 email from Aimee Benavides.

*To summarize- we want to see NAJIT grow and we want to help develop the next leaders who will continue to advance the future of our profession!*⁵⁴



⁵⁴ Ibid.