

COMMUNITY

‘THE LADY WHO CAN TYPE FAST’ Hailey Rolffs reflects on first year as court reporter

The Hometown Press recently caught up with one of our former interns and 2018 Lynnville-Sully graduate Hailey Rolffs, daughter of Bob and Diana Scandridge of Sully. Rolffs serves as a court reporter in Springfield, MO.

By Hailey Rolffs

What has two thumbs, wears pointy shoes, and can document people talking over each other at 225 words per minute? It's me. I am a certified court reporter and registered professional reporter.

I first was introduced to stenography when a woman came to our school for a demonstration. I didn't think much of it then, but I started babysitting for Shelly Rankin of Reasnor, who is a closed captioner, a few months later. Shelly sparked my interest, helped mentor me through school, and remains my go-to gal to this day.

After graduating high school in 2018, I attended DMACC in Newton. DMACC is the only school that offers an NCRA (National Court Reporters Association) certified program within a five-state radius – Iowa, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Missouri – and lucky for me, it was only 20 minutes away from my home. Other locals involved in the program are Rebecca Morningstar and Kenzi Lanser. The Realtime Court Reporting Program is a two-year (or six semesters) program; despite the speedy program, the average national court reporting student graduates in 33 months. It is a very grueling, demanding, I-want-to-pull-my-hair-out-type program that comes with a voice in your ear that whispers to give up every single day. I didn't listen to it.

I started in August 2018. The first two semesters are centered around theory. Theory consists of learning the “steno language.” Steno is readable and writable, but not speakable. Theory is where I learned that my “Y” is actually “KWR” and my “I” is actually “EU.” After you train your fingers to navigate your machine in theory, the following semesters consist of speed building.

Classes slowly work on increasing speeds: 120 words per minute (wpm) to 160, then to 200, then to 225. The rigorous testing process consists of five minutes of dictation. Students



Above photos: Hailey Rolffs is on the job — and loving it — as the Official Court Reporter of Division 6 of the 31st Circuit Court of Missouri. She also goes by “the lady who can type fast, Madam court reporter, or the girl with the rockin’ shoes.”

then around an hour to go back through and clean up what they wrote. In order to pass a test, a student has to get a 95% or higher.

While finishing up the final speed semester, you also complete an internship. This is where you get to decide which path of stenography you want to follow. There are three main options: Freelance court reporting, which is when reporters mostly do deposition work; closed-captioning and CART, which is real-time-based reporting for television or individuals hard of hearing; and then there is

official court reporting, which is your typical in-

court reporter that has a judge in a black robe and bumbling attorneys. That is the path I chose.

I was able to graduate a semester early in May 2020. Within a month, I secured a job in Springfield, MO. This was the perfect opportunity for me as my brand-new husband, Jaden Rolffs (grandson of locals Dale and Julie Van Wyk), would be playing baseball for Missouri State University while majoring in administrative management and marketing research.

Due to COVID, the courthouse was still on lockdown, so my first day included poor Zoom connections where attorneys were saying a bunch of legal words I didn't know while cutting in and out, meeting lots of judges – none of whom I remembered because they were all in masks, and a flat tire.

That was Aug. 3, 2020. Now, a year later, I look back and chuckle at that cluster of a day. A year later, I know all the judges and attorneys. I can understand their legal jargon through poor connections and masks, and most importantly, I love my job.

My official title is Hailey Rolffs, CCR, RPR, Official Court Reporter of Division 6 of the 31st Circuit Court of Missouri, but I go by

the lady who can type fast, Madam Court Reporter, or the girl with rockin' shoes.

My job has two main parts: Writing and editing. The writing part, a.k.a. the typing part, is the most well-known aspect of being a court reporter. I make a verbatim record of the courtroom proceedings. This includes all the “mm-hmms” and “uh-huhs.” Proceedings on the record range anywhere from bond modification hearings to jury trials. I am placed right below the judge and in between the attorney and the witness, the prime spot for getting every spoken word.

If/when cases get appealed, they go to the Appellate Court. The Appellate Court reviews cases and determines if the law was correctly applied throughout the case. This is where the second part of my job comes in, editing.

When a transcript gets ordered, I go through what I wrote and clean it up, e.g. add commas, periods, make sure I used the right their, there, and they're, etc. I have to edit but still maintain a verbatim record, no matter how poor the grammar.

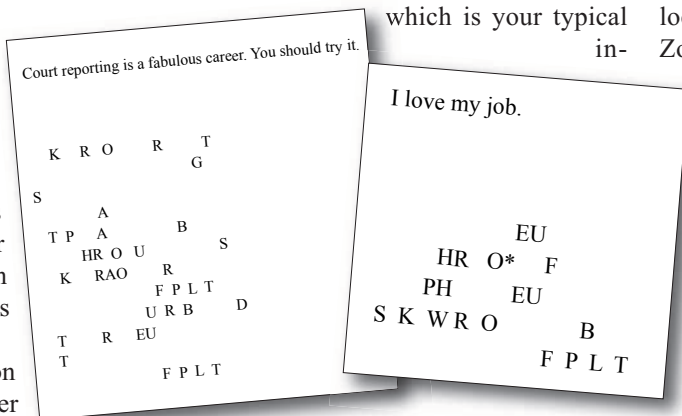
Some days, my hands go home sore. Some days, my heart goes home heavy. We try murders and rapes. I see photos that make my stomach churn. I hear evidence that gives me a lump in my throat.

However, I also get to see people in bad situations have the chance to turn their life around. I get to see attorneys fight for their clients, and I get to be part of a truly unique legal system.

One of the best parts of my job is getting to soak in the knowledge of all those around me. My judge has taught me so much about the legal system and also about how to be a young professional.

I love my job as a court reporter. I love the experiences. I love being a part of the legal system. I love challenging my fingers to move faster every day, and court reporters are in high demand.

The average age of the reporter is 55, meaning so many jobs are available, including 10 court positions in Iowa along with countless freelance and captioning opportunities. If you think you or anyone you know might be interested, or are just curious, don't be afraid to reach out to me at hrscandridge@gmail.com, or do some digging yourself on what a great career it is. We need you!



Above are two sentences Rolffs wrote in English and then typed using her steno machine.

STENO MACHINE

HOW IN THE WORLD DOES THAT THING WORK?

A steno machine has 22 keys, none of which are labeled. That totals 4,194,303 possible combinations. Multiple keys are pressed down at once (like a chord on a piano). That is called a stroke. One stroke can equal a syllable, word, or phrase. Stenographers write phonetically, meaning cat is written as kat. When words and phrases are used a lot, briefs are created. Briefs are shortened strokes for high-frequency words. “Beyond a reasonable doubt” can be written in one stroke. Real-time writers must be conflict free, meaning they must distinguish between homophones, e.g. there, they're, their; buy, by, bye, bi-, etc. The record also needs to reflect WHO is speaking. For jury selection, over 60 speaker designations are needed. It takes hours and hours to learn, but becomes muscle memory after awhile.



Court reporter Hailey Rolffs (right) is pictured with her judge, Becky Borthwick.

“It has been such a joy to work with Ms. Rolffs. She made a flawless transition to our court. She possesses a poise and wisdom far beyond her years.

“Court reporters are integral to our system of justice. A proper record must be made for each proceeding in order for the rights of the litigants to be protected through the appellate court process. Without the potential review of a higher court, those rulings would lack the checks and balances built into our system. A verbatim record is the only way to insure those rights.”

– Judge Becky Borthwick