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NAJIT MOURNS LEADERSHIP LOSS

Mirta Vidal • 1948–2004

The Board of Directors of the National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators mourns the untimely death of Mirta Vidal Orrantia, past president and life member of NAJIT, who was also founding president and president emerita of the Society for the Study of Translation and Interpretation. She died in New York on January 3, 2004. Mirta was an extraordinary leader and example to us all, not only because of her excellence as a professional linguist, but also because of her tireless dedication to improving conditions and advancing professional recognition and respect for interpreters everywhere. She worked in the New York federal courts for some twenty years, both as a staff and freelance interpreter. She was the first head of the interpreters office in the

Eastern District of New York and later joined the staff of the Southern District for a brief period. When not on staff, she continued to be active as a freelance court and conference interpreter. In addition, voluntary work for NAJIT and SSTI occupied much of her time over the past ten years.

Mirta Vidal Orrantia first joined the NAJIT board of directors in 1991. She became president in 1992 and served in that capacity for three years. During her tenure the membership of the organization doubled. Mirta organized the highly successful Miami conference in 1996, and continued on the board until 1999, serving as treasurer during that last year. In recognition of Mirta's many contributions, the NAJIT board of directors, upon

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CALIFORNIA'S SENATE BILL 371

Alexander Raïnof

Senate Bill 371, a momentous and controversial bill relating to court interpretation, was first introduced to the California state legislature by Senator Martha M. Escutia (D-Norwalk) on February 21, 2001. After numerous amendments and much debate (for a history of the bill see <http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/>), the bill was registered on September 28, 2002 in Chapter 1047 by the California secretary of state just a few hours after Governor Davis' approval. The bill took less than two years to become law. Its intent was clearly stated in a hearing of the California senate judiciary committee (chaired, incidentally, by Senator Escutia) on May 8, 2000:

"This bill would make legislative findings and declarations about court interpreters in the judicial branch and express a legislative intent to convert the current system where court interpreters are independent contractors to the courts to a system where they become employees of the judicial branch and

may be represented in employment matters by a bargaining unit to their employer."

The new law, known as the Trial Court Interpreter Employment and Labor Relations Act, "sets forth provisions and procedures governing the employment and compensation of certified and registered trial court interpreters, and court interpreters pro tempore, employed by the trial

> *continued on page 5*

NAJIT SILVER ANNIVERSARY



**Denver earlybird rate
until April 20
— don't miss it!**

(See page 19)

25th Annual Meeting and Educational Conference

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NAJIT MOURNS LEADERSHIP LOSS > *continued from page 1*

petition of the membership, appointed Mirta a life member in May of 2003. According to the NAJIT bylaws, life membership may be bestowed upon distinguished individuals based upon their outstanding contributions to the Association.

Throughout those years, Mirta was active as a fierce and devoted champion of professional interpreting standards. Her passion for carrying out the NAJIT membership's desire to establish a professional measure of competence by peer review culminated in the formation of SSTI in 1997, and eventually led to the creation and completion of the National Judiciary Interpreters and Translators Certification Examination: Spanish, to which Mirta dedicated countless hours, weeks, and months during the last years of her life, being its staunchest supporter and promoter.

In addition to these important accomplishments, we are privileged to have in *Proteus'* archives several articles written by Mirta, including an analysis of telephone interpreting and her excellent report on interpreter fatigue, with its ardent defense of team interpreting. There is no doubt that we will be using this article for many years to come to fortify our bench/bar education efforts. Mirta's influence extends far beyond our borders—even now a colleague is translating this article into German for the next meeting of a professional association in Europe.

As we look back over Mirta's contributions, her knowledge and evident passion for our profession, we have a constant reminder of all that we are striving for in terms of high standards and professional dedication. We shall always owe Mirta a huge debt of gratitude for her outstanding work on behalf of the entire interpreting community. We pledge to honor her memory by working to the best of our ability to advance the professional image of interpreters and secure the conditions we know are necessary for maintaining high standards of ethics and performance, which Mirta both celebrated and embodied. Mirta Vidal Orrantia's legacy will remain with NAJIT forever. ▲

NAJIT BOARD NEWS

The NAJIT Board has accepted the resignation of Steven Mines as Membership Committee Chair and has appointed Inés Swaney to the position. The Board has approved Washington, D.C. as the site for the 26th Annual Meeting and Educational Conference; the venue will be the Hotel Washington, right across from the White House, with dates of May 11-13, 2005. NAJIT board meetings minutes and policies will now be available to members on the Member Portal of the website; they can also be requested in hard copy from headquarters. ▲

HAVE YOU RENEWED YOUR MEMBERSHIP?

If not, this is the last issue of *Proteus* you will receive. Go to www.najit.org now to renew easily and quickly—don't miss a single issue of our newsletter!

NAJIT occasionally makes its member information available to organizations or persons offering information, products, or services of potential interest to members. Each decision is carefully reviewed and authorization is given with discretion. If you do not wish to have your contact information given out for this purpose, please let headquarters know and we will adjust our records accordingly.