

Fort Myers administrative assistant honoree multidimensional

BY RYAN LENGERICH • rlengerich@news-press.com • April 21, 2010

6:26 A.M. — Administrative assistants still answer phones, but in today's fast-paced, technology-driven world, the work stacks up like never before.

"I think that we are giving a lot more responsibility, our executives and company owners have realized and seen through our work that it's not just typing and answering phones," said Karen Distelrath, 48, administrative assistant at Pitman-Hartenstein & Associates Inc., a Fort Myers civil engineering firm.

Distelrath is good at her job. So good, in fact, she was named the 2009 Administrative Professional of the Year by the Fort Myers chapter of the International Association of Administrative Professionals.

The organization will name one of seven applicants this year's winner at a breakfast event this morning. The candidates filled out an application and wrote an essay to a committee of past winners.

"For other [administrative assistants] to say 'yeah, you are good' is a very nice feeling," Distelrath said.

There are 4.2 million administrative assistants and secretaries around the country, according to the U.S. Department of Labor. Last year 3,100 administrative assistants surveyed listed keeping up with technology as the top industry issue.

"The more you can learn about texting and iPads and iPods the better," Distelrath said.

In Lee County Commissioner Frank Mann's office, Christine Berry said she answers 50 to 60 e-mails a day from constituents and government officials. Another 10 to 15 calls come from the public. No commissioner could keep up with the communication, research and meeting preparation on their own.

"I'm on the front lines," Berry said. The most frustrating part of the job, she said, is when a problem can't be solved. "If the county can't do exactly what that person needs done, that's frustrating," she said.

Real estate lawyer Kevin Jursinski relies on paralegals Lisa Hendrix and Nicole Frei. Hendrix has worked with Jursinski 24 years.

"When you call, you want someone who will be knowledgeable about your particular needs, that's where this person comes in," Jursinski said. "You have to have the confidence in people that help you."