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MCLE to accredit courses; past credits may not apply

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Illinois' Minimum Continuing Legal Education program should begin accreditation for MCLE providers within the next two weeks, the program's director said Friday.

No MCLE courses have been accredited yet, Karen Litscher Johnson said, but the MCLE board will consider retroactive approval of credits for programs already attended.

Some CLE providers have issued certificates of credit to Illinois attorneys, but if any of those courses are denied accreditation, the provider must notify the lawyers, Johnson said.

The Illinois Supreme Court adopted an MCLE rule in September 2005. Attorneys could start accruing MCLE credits on Jan. 1, 2006. A two-year reporting period began July 1 for Illinois lawyers whose last names began with the letters A through M.

"We anticipate a type of rolling launch to accrediting courses," Johnson added.

For example, Johnson said, in the initial week of accreditation, courses that were

conducted before July could be accredited along with a course that would be offered during a future month.

"We don't want to just focus on the past or just in the future," Johnson said. If a provider is accredited for courses in the future, the provider could highlight the accreditation in promotional materials.

Customized software is set to be installed next week that will allow MCLE providers to submit course applications online, Johnson said.

"With the customized software, we will have a very efficient program soon," Johnson said. "I know that a lot of people don't see the workings of the board. I think they will be pleased seeing how much we've accomplished."

Johnson was hired as the program's director in April. For more than two months, Johnson was the lone program employee, but within the last two weeks, she's had company.

Five more employees have come on board during that period. Richard C. Palmer joined as the program's deputy director. He left a job as director of profes-

sional development at the Chicago firm of Wildman, Harrold, Allen & Dixon, Johnson said.

Other employees include a registrar, project coordinators and an administrative manager.

The program staffers will be busy next week as the program moves to its permanent offices at 200 W. Monroe St. in Chicago and launches its Web site.

The Web site will provide answers to questions frequently asked by lawyers and CLE providers, Johnson said. The Web page, www.mcleboard.org, is expected to be up by Wednesday. Until then, information about the program, including rules, are online at www.state.il.us/court/MCLE.

The first attorneys subject to the MCLE requirements will have until June 30, 2008, to fulfill the mandate for 20 hours of credit. That requirement increases to 24 hours in the following two years and 30 hours in each two-year period after that.

The two-year reporting period for attorneys whose last names begin with the letters N through Z will begin on July 1, 2007.