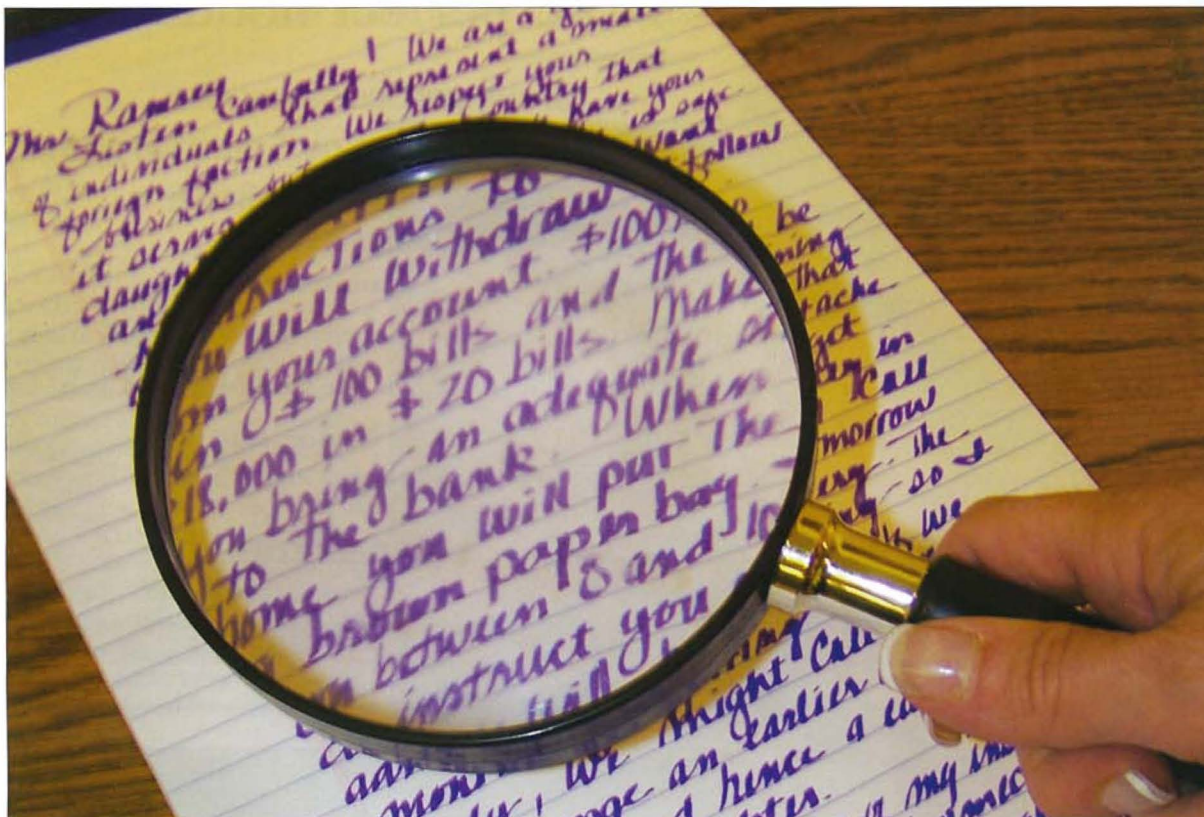


## PEN AND TELLER



### Expert analyzes letters of the law

BY DEBRA TALCOTT

Using handwriting analysis to solve a legal case is not just the stuff of made-for-TV movies. Just ask Ruth Holmes, owner of Pentec, Inc., the forensic and personnel consulting firm she operates in Bloomfield Hills.

"There are two distinct areas that entail handwriting in the legal arena," says Holmes. "One is document examination for authenticity and establishing the identity of the writer. The other is handwriting evaluation for personality used in jury and trial consulting."

Holmes says the American media, in their quest for information, tends to blend these two areas of handwriting expertise in coverage of well-known cases such as the anthrax letters, the Jon Benet Ramsey ransom note, and the multiple identities of Clark Rockefeller, the Boston man charged

recently with kidnapping his daughter. Since Holmes works in both document examination and handwriting evaluation, she refers to herself as a handwriting "examiner."

Holmes, who has provided her expertise on a vast number of cases over the last 25 years, first served as an expert witness in 1986, after completing a 3-year apprenticeship with a court-qualified document examiner. She is certified by the National Association of Document Examiners (NADE) and the American Board of Forensic Examiners (ABFE). In 2002 Holmes

was accepted for membership in the Michigan-Ontario Identification Association (MOIA), a division of the International Association of Identification (IAI).

Attorneys and law enforcement agencies seek the forensic services of a handwriting examiner when they need to authenticate a signature, writing, or numbers that appear on documents that are in question such as forged checks, wills, deeds, contracts, stock transfers, or beneficiary forms. Police cases often involve identifying persons responsible for bomb threats, drug records, anonymous letters, prison notes, suicide annotations, car paper fraud, and graffiti. Employers in the business sector might consult a handwriting examiner to verify signatures, dates, and figures on documents such as employment appli-



