

LEGAL AID NEWS

OF NAPA VALLEY

ADVISING SENIORS, IMMIGRANTS, AND LOW-INCOME PEOPLE THROUGHOUT NAPA COUNTY

SUMMER 2008

Chairman's Message

The first half of 2008 has been exciting and rewarding for Legal Aid of Napa Valley. We've expanded our ability to serve Napa County's most vulnerable residents, added new staff and increased our funding.

In January, we welcomed Marlo Cohen to our staff. An experienced lawyer who is English/Spanish bilingual, Marlo will serve as Development Director, Staff Attorney and Pro Bono Coordinator.

In May, Legal Aid was extremely fortunate to receive a significant cy pres award in connection with the settlement of a class action law suit against Northern Trust. Our profound thanks go to Niall McCarthy of Cotchett, Pitre & McCarthy, lead plaintiffs' lawyer in the case, for recommending that award.

Thanks to a generous grant from the Jewish Community of Napa Valley and the pro bono assistance of Annette Kramer of Forty-two Pacific, we've redesigned and expanded our website. The site is easier to navigate and contains more up-to-date information about our programs and clinics. Check us out at www.legalaidnapa.org.

In this issue, we continue our "Staff Spotlight" with a profile of Kristi Lesnewich, the lead attorney in our Senior Legal Services Program and our longest-serving staff member. Earlier this year Kristi was appointed to the Napa County Commission on Aging. Congratulations, Kristi!

Michael J. Holman
Chairman

Legal Aid Assists Vulnerable Clients Hard Hit by Economic Downturn

The economic downturn and housing crisis affecting the nation has not spared Napa County, and Napa's low-income residents have been especially affected.

This year, housing foreclosures have risen dramatically in Napa County, with 100 mortgage default notices issued in January alone, compared to 144 annual defaults just a few years ago. The effects of those defaults have rippled through the community, and lawyers in Legal Aid's Baseline Legal Services Program have been inundated with requests for assistance.

Legal Aid of Napa Valley's Baseline Program serves Napa County's most vulnerable residents — people living at or below the poverty line, including the homeless, veterans, the disabled, and victims of domestic violence—who are often single mothers with young children.

"Napa County residents are struggling to keep their families fed, sheltered and clothed," said Diana Dorame, Legal Aid's Executive Director. "Every day in our Baseline Program we see people who are in desperate need of legal assistance to secure these basic needs."

A case in point is Jennifer Murray, who recently turned to Legal Aid for assistance when she was served with a 14-day eviction notice. Though

Jennifer had always paid the rent on her downtown Napa apartment on time, the owner of her apartment building had defaulted on his mortgage, and the building was in foreclosure. Jennifer was employed, but her savings were limited and she worried that she would not be able to find another apartment on such short notice, or pay a new security deposit since her current landlord did not have the money to return hers.

Legal Aid's Baseline Legal Services attorney stepped in and began negotiations with the bank that now owned the foreclosed building. Through a program called Cash for Keys, Legal Aid worked out an agreement that allowed Jennifer to stay in the apartment for 30 days and receive a one-time payment equal to one month's rent and her original security deposit. In exchange, Jennifer agreed to leave the apartment in good condition on the negotiated day. Because of Legal Aid's intervention, Jennifer received the time and resources she needed to find and secure a new place to live.

"Our clients often have problems that seem relatively small, but can become critical for people who live on the edge of poverty," Ms. Dorame said. "Whenever possible, we try to intervene before a crisis hits."



< Honorary Co-Chairs Ambassador Kathryn Hall and Hon. Scott Snowden host Legal Aid's third annual Celebrate Spring Gala at The French Laundry. Story on page 2.

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Celebrate Spring guests (from left) Dick and Sue Wollack and Gretchen and Robert Lieff enjoy French Laundry gala.

French Laundry Celebration Raises Over \$70,000

Legal Aid's third annual "Celebrate Spring" event at The French Laundry was a record-setting success. The May 1 gala, with Ambassador Kathryn Hall and retired Judge Scott Snowden serving as Honorary Chairs, raised more than \$70,000 to benefit Legal Aid. Silverado Farming Co. joined returning sponsors Dickenson, Peatman & Fogarty, and Gaw Van Male in underwriting the event.

"The 2008 event sold out a month in advance, and has become Legal Aid's signature fund-raising event," said Board Chair Michael J. Holman. "It's only possible through the amazing generosity of Chef Thomas Keller and his extraordinary staff. We couldn't be more grateful for their continuing support."

Sixty guests enjoyed Mr. Keller's signature nine-course tasting menu, which was paired with exquisite Napa Valley wines generously provided by Hall Wines, Paul Hobbs Winery, Jason Kesner, Cliff Lede Vineyards, Richard and Marilyn Mendelson, Shafer Vineyards and Snowden Vineyards.

Guitarist David Ramey performed for the guests during the pre-dinner reception in The French Laundry's garden. The guests' gift packages included donations by Doc's Trophy Shoppe, India Tree, Monteverdi Spirits, Niesen Massey Vanillas and Shackfords. Table floral arrangements were provided by BJ's Petal Pushers. The invitations were designed by David Hughes of Level, Inc. and printed by John Lister of PressArts. Bill McClave was the event photographer.

For the third year in a row, lawyers from San Francisco-based law firms Howard, Rice, Nemerovski, Canady, Falk & Rabkin, and Morrison & Foerster were major contributors to the event.

Legal Aid and Employers Unite to Educate Wine Industry Workers

Legal Aid of Napa Valley is teaming up this summer with local wineries and vineyard management companies to educate Napa County's vineyard staff about their legal rights.

At locations throughout Napa Valley, Legal Aid will hold free, bilingual educational seminars for the people that help power one of Napa's most important industries. This effort is part of Legal Aid's Immigrant Legal Services Program, and is designed to reach as many Napa County residents as possible by going to their place of employment to answer their legal questions.

"We see ourselves as pioneers among legal services organizations around the country by proactively reaching out to local employers and their employees at their work sites," said Diana Dorame, Executive Director of Legal Aid. "Many of the people we see at these clinics don't know that Legal Aid exists, and the managers and owners of these companies have been thrilled to learn there is a place that can assist their employees who need legal help."

A typical legal clinic is staffed by Legal Aid's bilingual immigration attorney and legal advocate who make a one- to three-hour presentation to employees at their work site. Topics covered usually include a general overview of Legal Aid's services, immigration law, landlord/tenant matters, creditor issues and financial scams. In addition, employees can choose to have a one-on-one legal consultation to discuss their legal concerns confidentially.

"As an employer, we strive to provide resources and education pertinent to our employees," said

Pete Richmond of Silverado Farming Company, one of the employers for whom Legal Aid has conducted a legal clinic. "Important legal rights and responsibilities are clarified, which helps our employees become more invested in the community and in the work they do here."

Among the employers who have invited Legal Aid to hold clinics at their work sites this year are Vista Vineyard Management, Cain Vineyard & Winery, Beckstoffer Vineyards, Trefethen Family Vineyards and Stag's Leap Wine Cellars. Employers who are interested in having a clinic at their facility should contact Marlo Cohen, Legal Aid's Development Director, at (707) 259-0579.

Legal Aid's Immigrant Legal Services Program was launched three years ago with generous grants from Auction Napa Valley, and also has received vital support from the van Loben Sels/Rembe Rock Foundation.

Legal Aid's bilingual staff members Richard Coshneer, an attorney who specializes in immigration law, and legal advocate Sarahid Rivera assist clients in all facets of immigration matters, including naturalization, adjustment of status, family visa petitions, and the filing of petitions to protect immigrant victims of domestic violence and other crimes. Through its Immigrant Juvenile Outreach Program, Legal Aid also helps immigrant children who are (or were) in foster care after being abandoned by their parents obtain legal residency. To date, more than 2,800 Napa County immigrants and their families have been served through the program.

Save the Date for 2008 Women Lawyers' Event!

The Napa County Women Lawyers' fourth annual dinner and silent auction to benefit Legal Aid of Napa Valley is coming up soon!

Save Thursday, September 25th, from 6:00 to 9:00 pm, for this year's event at the beautiful Carneros Inn. Always an exquisite evening of fine wine and food, the Napa County bench and bar will turn out to support Legal Aid. The auction will feature wines made by local attorneys and other special items.

For information, tickets or to donate an auction item, please contact Selena Medlen at (707) 252-9100.

Staff Spotlight: Kristi Lesnewich

It's been said that if you do what you love, you'll never have to work a day in your life. If so, Kristi Lesnewich—Legal Aid's Senior Legal Services staff attorney since 2003—has been on vacation for a long time.

"I truly love my clients, and I feel very fortunate that I'm given the opportunity to assist so many seniors," said Kristi. "This may sound cliché, but to me seniors truly are the 'Greatest Generation.'"

Though Kristi specializes in all aspects of elder law, she's currently most focused on financial abuse and scam awareness. "I'm afraid the situation is going to get much worse," Kristi said. "With people losing their homes and recession fall-out, some will turn to even more desperate, illegal means of obtaining money from seniors."

As a member of the Napa County District Attorney's Elder Abuse Prevention Counsel, Kristi speaks frequently with seniors and their caregivers about financial and physical abuse of the elderly, and goes to court as necessary to obtain protective orders.

A new appointee to the Napa County Commission on Aging, Kristi moderated a Commission-sponsored Scam Stopper event in May. She advocates making caregiver licenses a mandatory legal requirement for all in-home caregivers. Until then, Kristi is working to educate seniors and their families about the importance of a thorough background check for caregivers.

In her tireless efforts to improve the lives of seniors throughout Napa County, Kristi also serves as Vice Chair of the Latino Elder Coalition, and is a member of the Healthy Aging Population Initiative.

In her spare time, Kristi loves to travel both for work and pleasure. She's participated in four medical missions to the Philippines, Guatemala and Outer Mongolia, volunteering as a surgery nurse and recovery room assistant. For fun, she chooses Palau, Central America, the Caribbean and other destinations where she can scuba dive.

Kristi and her partner, Dr. Rebecca Jackson, live in Napa with their four Australian Shepherds and a 17-year-old cat. She loves to

cook and entertain the many friends they've made around the world.

"Legal Aid and the seniors of Napa County are so fortunate to have an attorney of Kristi's skill and dedication," said Naomi Dreskin-Anderson, President of Legal Aid and the immediate past chair of Napa's Commission on Aging. "She's a tenacious advocate and a compassionate human being—a wonderful combination!"



< Senior Legal Services attorney Kristi Lesnewich (right) and Legal Aid Executive Director Diana Dorame

"I truly love my clients, and I feel very fortunate...to me, seniors truly are the 'Greatest Generation.'"

ABA Award Promotes Legal Services for Seniors

Legal Aid of Napa Valley has received a prestigious grant from the American Bar Association to launch its "Pro Bono Initiative: Community Wide Lawyering for Seniors." The new and innovative pilot project will combine the expertise of Legal Aid attorneys with that of private practitioners to work collaboratively to increase the number of Napa County seniors receiving essential legal representation and education free of charge.

In the past, private attorneys have volunteered to represent elderly clients from time to time, but not until now has there been a formalized effort to create a community-wide team of pro bono attorneys serving the legal needs of Napa County seniors.

Legal Aid's key partners in this first-of-its-kind initiative include Napa County's three largest law firms—Dickenson, Peatman & Fogarty,

Gaw Van Male and Coombs & Dunlap, LLP—as well as the Napa County Bar Association and Napa County Women Lawyers.

The \$10,000 grant was awarded by the ABA Commission on Law & Aging and the Borchard Foundation Center on Law and Aging under their 2008-2009 Partnerships in Law and Aging Program. Legal Aid is one of only six PACP grant recipients nationwide.

"We couldn't be more delighted and honored by this award," said Diana Dorame, Legal Aid's Executive Director. "It will enable Legal Aid and our partners to recruit and mentor a team of volunteer attorneys to effectively and sensitively represent and advise elderly clients." The funding will also be used to develop training materials for the attorney volunteers and for focused educational seminars to promote more effective client representation.

Thank You, Sponsors!

We are grateful for your generous support.

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October 2007 through May 2008 (partial list)

How to Reach Legal Aid of Napa Valley

We provide free legal services to seniors, immigrants and low-income residents of Napa County. Consultations and advice are by appointment. Please call (707) 259-0579 to schedule an appointment or speak with a bilingual legal advocate.

To learn more about Legal Aid of Napa Valley, including information on our free legal advice clinics and other events, visit www.legalaidnapa.org.

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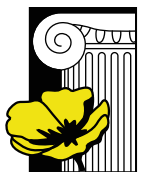
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