

## HANSON BRIDGETT "LOANS A LAWYER" TO LEGAL AID

By Lisa Goldfien

One of the first challenges Paul Cohen faced in his new job as Executive Director of Legal Aid of Marin was to fill a temporary shortage in his staff without creating a new burden on the agency's budget. Staff attorney Jenie Chang, who handles juvenile dependency cases for Legal Aid, was scheduled to go on maternity leave in October, creating a temporary need for an attorney to cover her cases. So Cohen sent out a call for help, contacting the pro bono coordinators at several firms to see whether they might be interested in loaning an attorney to Legal Aid. To Cohen's delight, the firm of Hanson, Bridgett, Marcus, Vlahos & Rudy, LLP answered the call, agreeing to provide one of the firm's associates to Legal Aid full time for two months while Ms. Chang is on leave.

Cohen's proposal was particularly appealing to Andrew Giacomini, who serves not only as the Managing Partner at Hanson Bridgett, but also as President of the Board of Legal Aid of Marin. According to Giacomini, Hanson Bridgett, with offices in San Francisco, Larkspur and Sacramento, is strongly committed to providing pro bono services. "We give back to the communities we serve in," says Giacomini, who notes that the firm has established a major pro bono partner in each of the communities in which the firm has offices. Legal Aid of Marin is Hanson Bridgett's Marin partner, and has benefited from the firm's pro bono efforts for many years.

Hanson Bridgett actively encourages its attorneys to engage in pro bono work, allowing each associate to bill up to 150 hours per year of pro bono work. But Giacomini says that Hanson Bridgett has been interested for some time in finding a "loan-a-lawyer" type program in a pro bono setting, having participated productively in similar programs with private clients. After learning of Legal Aid's need, Giacomini contacted the chair of Hanson Bridgett's Pro Bono Committee, associate attorney Julie Veit, who also recognized an opportunity to try a new type of pro bono program that could benefit both the Marin community and the firm. Veit took the lead in gathering information to present the proposal to the firm's Administrative Committee, and when the Committee approved the proposal, Veit was chosen to fill in for Chang at Legal Aid.

Veit, who has worked at Hanson Bridgett since 2000, except for a stint clerking for the Honorable Edward C. Reed, Jr. in the United States District Court in Reno, Nevada, is excited to have this opportunity, which she considers a unique chance both to give back to the community, and to experience more direct client contact and advance her own legal skills. Taking over Ms. Chang's duties, Veit will provide direct representation of clients in juvenile dependency proceedings, including hearings, trials, settle-

ment conferences, and mediations. Legal Aid handles such cases under a contract with the State Administrative Office of the Courts' Center for Families, Children & the Courts, and primarily serves as attorney for one of the parents in a proceeding. Veit underwent several hours of online and onsite training before starting her new position at the beginning of October. She expects to be working full time in-house at Legal Aid until at least early December, putting in approximately 240 to 280 hours.

Giacomini also believes that placing one of Hanson Bridgett's associates in-house at Legal Aid is a "win-win" situation for the agency and the firm. In addition to advancing Hanson Bridgett's public service policies, Giacomini knows that Veit will be in court frequently, assuming a great deal of responsibility and dealing with very difficult problems. He feels that the experience is not about learning a specific substantive area of law, but rather is a tremendous growth experience that will make Veit a better lawyer.

Giacomini says that if this project is successful, he thinks the firm will try to find another similar program in the future. Executive Director Cohen couldn't be more pleased. He says Hanson Bridgett's generous donation of attorney time means a great deal to Legal Aid, and he also hopes the firm's example will cause other firms to consider participating in such programs, and to revitalize the commitment of individual members of the Bar to participate in the agency's pro bono panel to provide needed services to the Marin community.

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