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Gary Baum gets 'Access to Justice' award Wednesday

Palo Alto City Attorney to be recognized for volunteer work with domestic violence nonprofit group

by Palo Alto Weekly staff
Palo Alto Online Staff

Palo Alto city attorney wins 'pro bono' award

Gary Baum wins 'Access to Justice' award for volunteer work with domestic violence nonprofit group

After City Attorney Gary Baum of Palo Alto is done with city claims, lawsuits, legal policies and meetings, he volunteers his time dealing with domestic violence.

On Sept. 30 he will receive an "Access to Justice" award for his work as part of the Domestic Violence Limited Scope Representation program of the Pro Bono Project, a Silicon Valley-based nonprofit organization.

Baum is to receive the award Sept. 30 at an annual recognition ceremony at Santa Clara University.

"In addition to all the day and night work Gary does for the city he also finds time to do this," City Manager James Keene said when announcing the award to the City Council Monday night.

Other recipients of awards include Judge Katherine Lucero of the Santa Clara County Superior Court and the Legal Department of Next Door Solutions to Domestic Violence.

Two years ago, Baum was recognized as "Pro Bono Attorney of the Year" by the Santa Clara County Bar Association for his work with the Pro Bono Project.

Baum has been involved with pro bono work for the group since 2000. He has participated in "Lawyers in the Library," providing free legal consultations in libraries.

He was a member of the first training sessions for the domestic violence program in 2005 and has taken "numerous cases" since then, according to the Pro Bono Project.

"Above all, what makes Gary remarkable is his willingness to make the community a better place. Despite Gary's full plate, he always makes himself available for pro bono work," the Project said in an announcement. "His can-do attitude makes us feel like we can always count on Gary to help out the neediest clients and deliver excellent results."

Baum is also on the board of the Silicon Valley Campaign for Legal Services, which supports pro bono efforts in the county and raises funds to support providing legal services to low-income residents.

Baum was named Palo Alto city attorney in 2004.

Official statement on Gary Baum by Sharon Bashan, director, Domestic Violence Representation Pro Bono Project

2009 Advocate Award recipient: Gary Baum

Since 2007, the Domestic Violence Limited Scope Representation (DVLSR) program has presented the Advocate Award to an exceptional advocate who has championed for families affected by domestic violence. This year, DVLSR is awarding the Advocate Award to Gary Baum, City Attorney of Palo Alto, for his exceptional talent and commitment to providing pro bono legal representation to victims of domestic violence.

Gary Baum has provided volunteer services through the Pro Bono Project Silicon Valley for many years. Gary demonstrates that pro bono is not just for law firm attorneys; public sector attorneys can and should take pro bono cases. Gary has avidly taken pro bono work through the Pro Bono Project Silicon Valley since 2000, participating in Lawyers in the Library, a program designed to provide free legal consultations in the library, and taking property and mold cases.

Starting in 2005, Gary has taken many cases for our Domestic Violence Limited Scope Representation ("DVLSR") program, which provides legal representation to low-income parties involved in domestic violence restraining orders in Santa Clara County. His contributions go beyond being one of the first volunteers to take cases; he has also advised Pro Bono Project on DVLSR procedures and processes. Gary's DV cases have required lots of time and involved very complicated matters that resulted in trials. As it happens, Gary's assignments have included some of DVLSR's more complex cases. Here are only a few examples:

* He represented an immigrant victim whose hospitalization caused her to miss an important hearing. Opposing counsel went after her for \$8K in sanctions, and Gary's 20 page opposition brief enabled this low-income client to avoid a potentially devastating outcome.

* Gary helped a client whose former partner was a sex-offender facing a third strike. Gary negotiated a stipulated restraining order in Family Court while the criminal matter dragged on, ensuring the client had the safety and protection she needed.

* Gary represented a victim whose husband works in the same government location, which necessitated precise carve-outs in the restraining order, balancing client safety with each party's requirement to work.

* Gary prepared points and authorities on temporary spousal support in a DV matter. Gary faced an experienced opposing counsel who argued the victim deserved no support due to the short length of the marriage. Gary's memorandum correctly stated the legal factors for temporary spousal support ("need and ability to pay") and achieved a spousal support award for his client.

Gary's judgment is excellent and his litigation skills enable him to tackle the tougher cases. He will do what it takes to achieve client-centered outcomes, and knows more about litigation than most of our DVLSR mentors; we often turn to him for advice and strategy. More importantly, all of the clients that Gary has represented have reported high levels of satisfaction with Gary's services as well as with their outcomes in court.

Above all, what makes Gary remarkable is his willingness to make the community a better place. Despite Gary's full plate, he always makes himself available for pro bono work. His can-do attitude makes us feel like we can always count on Gary to help out the neediest clients and deliver excellent results. As soon as he finishes a case, he requests another.

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