

Expanded Offices Help Bar Group Serve More Kids

Also Wants To Raise Cash For Expanded Programs

By DEIRDRE NEWMAN

The **Orange County Bar Foundation** began nearly 50 years ago with the sole purpose of raising funds for a law library. It evolved into a way for the business and law communities to help at-risk youth, and a new building it acquired this year is enabling it to serve more of them.

The association's programs help underprivileged kids develop job skills; receive health and legal education; and pursue secondary education.

"It gives local lawyers and business leaders an opportunity to make a direct and meaningful impact on the lives of at-risk Orange County youth that we probably otherwise wouldn't have," said foundation President **Dan Robinson**, a partner with **Robinson Calcagnie Inc.** "It's incredibly rewarding to see these kids successfully complete our programs and go on to pursue their dreams in college and beyond."

The foundation also helps the next generation of professionals start their careers through its academic and career development programs, said **Kyle Kawakami**, who preceded Robinson as foundation president.

The organization's annual operating budget is approximately \$2 million. Its board has 40 members, and 34 younger lawyers serve on an associate board.

Fresh Start

The foundation purchased an approximately 8,000-square-foot, two-story building on East 17th Street in Santa Ana for \$2 million via bond financing through **Farmers & Merchants Bank**. It previously leased a 7,000-square-foot building in downtown Santa Ana.

Robinson said acquiring its own offices has been "a dream in the making" for more than a decade.

"It's a big step for the foundation to be able to acquire a building that not only provides more security for the foundation itself but also provides a better home base for the kids in our programs," he said. "They kind of already have started taking ownership of the new building, calling it 'our headquarters' and 'our new building.' It's pretty exciting to hear them talk about it."

The building was obtained under Kawakami's leadership. As a corporate transactional attorney—he's a partner in the Newport Beach office of **Irell & Manella LLP**—Kawakami said he was comfortable with the work required to acquire a building and get financing because he



Elated: girl among 60 receiving certificates at recent graduation ceremony

helps his clients with that daily.

Steven Card, senior managing director of the Irvine office of New York City-based **Savills Studley**, was also helpful in getting the new building, Robinson said. Card said he joined the foundation's board in 2009 because he was impressed that it had such a direct effect on underprivileged kids. He said he scoped out more than 20 locations over two years. Using his network of relationships in the Orange County real estate market, he heard of a building that was just about to be put on the market. The property was coincidentally formerly occupied by a law firm.

"We were the first buyer to tour, and immediately we knew it was perfect," he said. A safe location at the right price sealed the deal.

The building not only has more space than the old building, but more amenities, said foundation Associate Director **Nazly Restrepo**. It has two classrooms, each with 40 seats; the old building had one classroom. It has six stations for laptops; the old building had none. Plus, the foundation provides the laptops. There's a bigger kitchen, which comes in handy as the foundation partners with local food bank **Hands of Mercy Encounter**, and gives out bags of food to families that attend its programs. On its walls are photos of beaming past program participants.

Earlier Days

The foundation started in 1969 as the philanthropic arm of the **Orange County Bar Association**. Its first incarnation was as the George A. Parker Law Library Foundation, whose purpose was raising money for a law library in OC.

Once the law library was finished, the foundation turned to educating families about the legal consequences of criminal behavior, health issues, and educational opportunities. In the mid-1970s the organization developed its first program, Legal Education for Youth. In 1985, the George A. Parker Foundation changed its name to the Orange County Bar Foundation, and three years later the organization received its nonprofit status.

Its current mission is keeping at-risk youth healthy, drug-free and in school by way of education, counseling, mentoring, and the strengthening of families.

Real-World Views

Services and programs span academic and career development, health education and juvenile diversion.

The Higher Education Mentoring Program is a six-year plan that provides Latino high school students in Santa Ana with academic, social and financial support during high school and college. The after-school program offers individualized services to youth and parents, and leadership training for volunteer mentors.

In 1995 the foundation created a project for summer employment in law firms, to reduce the risk of juvenile delinquency. It provides high school juniors in Santa Ana an opportunity to spend summers working paid internships at local law firms and other businesses. The program is a partnership with the Irvine chapter of the **Association of Legal Administrators**.

"The impact on these kids is really incredible," Robinson said. "They go in the first week, they're scared, they're wide eyed, they don't know if they'll fit in. By the end of the

program, they're running around the office getting things done and believe in their own abilities. It's pretty remarkable to watch. It's rewarding for both the students and firms who get to watch these kids gain maturity over the summer."

The program has benefitted more than 850 students over the past 22 years, Robinson said. This summer's edition culminated with a dinner on Aug. 2 where 60 participants received their graduation certificates. Ten also received scholarship awards of up to \$2,500 based on essays they wrote about their employment experiences. The scholarships were added in 2013.

One of the scholarship recipients, whose identity the foundation didn't reveal due to the personal nature of the essay, wrote, "I especially benefitted from this program because in spite of my personal challenges, like having anxiety, I was able to work through them to ensure I did quality work. I received more insight on what it takes to become an attorney and I wouldn't have been able to personally talk to [the lawyers] about their experience in law if it wasn't for this program."

A Stop Short of Addiction program was developed in 1999 in response to increasing rates of youth substance use and crime in OC.

On a recent Monday night, youth who'd committed a crime and one of their parents attended a class where a probation officer brought kids from juvenile hall to warn the attendees about the repercussions of crime.

First-time offenders are eligible to take the class in lieu of prosecution or as an alternative to incarceration, depending on the severity of their crimes, which include drug and alcohol possession and being under the influence.

One participant, 14-year-old Ana, who didn't want to disclose her last name, said she was there after getting arrested for buying Xanax from someone at her school. She said Stop Short of Addiction is "a really good program that helps you think twice before doing something."

Her mom, Fatima, agreed. She said it would help her daughter make good decisions.

"One day she won't be in my hands anymore. So it helps her see the reality of life."

Robinson said the foundation plans to launch a capital campaign by the end of the year to expand the number of youth it can serve. The foundation will determine the amount after its fall golf fundraiser.

Card said he'd like the organization to reach more people in the community by increasing awareness of its programs, especially since it's been around for so long.

"The more people that know about us, the more that will donate, the more Orange County kids we can help to live better lives." ■



Robinson: foundation president says it has 'meaningful impact' on kids



Step ahead: foundation scholarship recipients chat at ceremony