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ASK THE LAWYER

Bar service will help find lawyer

Whenever I'm at a business function or just attending a friend's barbecue, the inevitable happens: I meet someone new and am eventually asked what I do for a living. When I say I'm a lawyer, I can almost guarantee I'll be asked a legal question that's been troubling them.

I also receive phone calls from friends (or friends of friends) looking for legal assistance. Fortunately, I can direct all of these individuals to the San Fernando Valley Bar Association and its Attorney Referral Service.

What makes our lawyer referral service different from the others is that the ARS is a nonprofit. Its mission is to serve the public by helping to provide legal access to those in need.

The ARS has the ability to make connections. It seeks to introduce clients to a lawyer that specializes in their particular legal matters — whether it's a family law attorney who can help in a marital dissolution or custody problem, or a probate attorney who can help after the death of a relative.

The legal specialties represented on the ARS panel include criminal law, family law, bankruptcy, real estate, landlord/tenant issues, personal injury, probate, litigation, Social Security and disability, employment and workers' compensation.

Attorneys on the ARS panel must meet certain qualifications sufficient to demonstrate they have the experience necessary to help. They must be in good standing with the California State Bar and must carry professional liability insurance.

And if the ARS cannot help, it directs the individuals to other organizations that may be able to assist.

If you need a referral, you can check out the ARS Web site at www.sfvba.org and click on "Need A Lawyer." Or, you can call directly at 818-340-4LAW.

You'll be able to speak with a trained ARS representative who can help identify the appropriate attorney and make an appointment. If you choose to hire the attorney, you and the lawyer can agree on the fees to be charged.

The ARS has a reduced-fee referral program for low-income individuals. The ARS also might direct you to legal aid agencies that provide free legal assistance in some areas of the law.

Established in 1926, the San Fernando Bar Association is one of the nation's largest local bar associations, with 2,100 members. If you have a legal question, e-mail AskTheLawyer@dailynews.com or mail to Daily News Business Desk, P.O. Box 4200, Woodland Hills. This column appears each Thursday. It is a summary of the law and not a substitute for legal consultation on any particular case.