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Bellying Up to the Valley Bar Association

GUEST COLUMN

SUE BENDAVID

The San Fernando Valley Bar Association, one of the largest local bar associations in the United States has close to 2,100 members, many of whom volunteer their time on pro bono matters, community service and other projects benefitting the public.

As just one example, every winter during the holiday season, the association sponsors its "Blanket the Homeless" event, during which we distribute hundreds of blankets to the homeless and provide free legal advice to those in need.

Members also work on the court's jury service committee which is focused on, among other things, improving and increasing public respect of jury service.

Another committee focuses on introducing students from Valley schools to the practice of law, working with children as young as elementary school, through to college, so boys and girls of all ages and races understand they too can go to law school and succeed in the legal field.

The Bar works closely with the Valley Community Legal Foundation, the association's charitable arm that provides scholarships and grants to needy students and others.

This year, the Foundation has been working hard to raise money for the creation of children's waiting rooms for the Van Nuys and San Fernando Courthouses.

The Bar Association and Attorney Referral Service recently presented a $30,000 check to the Foundation to be applied towards the children's waiting room.

The Bar is also proud of its close relationship with Valley judges. On February 21st, the Association had its annual "Judges Night" during which we honored judges for their noteworthy contributions to the legal community.

Judge of the Year was bestowed upon the Honorable Michael Harwin who has been involved with the community and with the Bar Association for many years.

He has served on the courts for more than 20 years and is currently serving in the Van Nuys Courthouse. He is widely known to be even-handed and even-tempered in his rulings and his treatment of those in his courtroom.

Special recognition awards went to Judge Barbara Scheper and to Maureen Tighe. Judge Scheper spearheaded the VAST program at the Chatsworth Courthouse this past year. VAST is a settlement program where lawyers in the bar association volunteer to mediate select cases in an effort to reduce the number of cases pending in our courts. The Court assigned 144 cases to the VAST program and our VAST volunteers settled 35% of them.

Judge Tighe, a bankruptcy judge, established the Bankruptcy Self-Help Center, which will prove to be a significant benefit to members of the public.

Lawyers in our Bar Association do far more than just litigate cases or make deals. We give to the community as well

Sue Bendavid is president of the San Fernando Valley Bar Association and a shareholder in Lewitt, Hackman, Shapiro, Marshall & Harlan in Encino.