

RIVERSIDE LAWYER

December 2018 • Volume 68 Number 11

MAGAZINE



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2018-2019



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A LEO A. DEEGAN INN OF COURT COMMUNITY SERVICE TEAM COMBATS HUMAN TRAFFICKING

by *Honorable Nicholas Firetag*

“The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.” - Mahatma Gandhi

The Inland Empire has an amazing group of lawyers and judges who bring respect to the legal community by the way they conduct themselves inside and outside the courtroom.

The Leo A. Deegan Inn of Court’s mission is to improve the skills and professionalism of the bench and the bar. Prior to the 2017-2018 program year, the format was simple – six teams of eight to twelve people each were formed, with each team responsible for a presentation on topics relating to ethics, legal skills, and/or professionalism in the legal environment. In the 2017-2018 program year, the board changed that format by allowing two teams to deviate from the normal program by engaging in a community service project and then presenting that project during one of our monthly meetings. The teams were free to select any community service project that they wanted, regardless of whether or not the topic was directly related to the legal field.

Team John Morton collectively decided to get involved in finding ways to combat human trafficking. The team met with several professionals to discuss the impact that human trafficking had on our local community. The team was horrified to learn how predators were invading our local schools to recruit children. We knew we had to get involved.

The team was divided into two groups. The first group was focused on raising awareness in public schools. To this end, we partnered with two amazing people – Opal Singleton, who is a highly respected author and the President of Million Kids, and Nancy Aguirre, who is with the Riverside County Sheriff’s Department Anti-Human Trafficking Taskforce – to set up seminars at local middle schools and high schools to discuss the dangers of human trafficking. We were able to help Opal and Nancy meet with several hundred local students, teachers, and parents to discuss the dangers of human trafficking.

The second group partnered with a local nonprofit corporation, Rebirth Homes, to assist in its goal of helping adult survivors of human trafficking. Founded in 2008 by CEO Debbie Martis, Rebirth Homes is the first nonprofit organization in Riverside County to provide adult women with a home to escape human trafficking. In addition to


providing its residents with a place to live, Rebirth Homes also offers trauma therapy, group counseling, job skills training, and education. Together with members of the Leo A. Deegan Inn of Court, we were able to assist Rebirth Homes with multiple fundraisers and provide its residents with over \$1,000 in gifts and gift cards at Christmas. Ultimately, one of our team members joined the board of directors of Rebirth Homes.¹

The news portrays us as a country hopelessly divided along political and religious lines. While it is certainly true that Americans hold differing views on a number of issues, I firmly believe that we share far more values in common than what is reported. For those of you who see the world in a negative light, I would encourage you to get involved in your local community and serve those around you. My hope is that through serving others you will find a new sense of pride in yourself and your community, along with others who feel the same way.

Honorable Nicholas Firetag is a Commissioner of the Riverside Superior Court in Hemet where he handles family law and Department of Child Support Services cases.



¹ Team John Morton, who tackled this community service project, is comprised of the following members: Hon. Sherri Pym, Hon. Jennifer Gerard, L. Alexandra Fong, Abram Feuerstein, Nicholas Firetag, Yoginee Braslaw, Marlene Allen, Dan Mouri, Kelly Moran and Rebecca McKee. Team John Morton won the Leo A. Deegan Award for Best Team Presentation as announced at the September 26, 2018 Orientation.



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