

# People's College of Law Fosters Students' Can-Do Spirit

By Adrianna Khoo

Attorney Julie Gaviria calls herself a jack-of-all-trades when it comes to teaching evidence classes, Bar Exam preparation or picking up any other subjects the People's College of Law needs her to add to her course load each semester.

But the Los Angeles law school has turned out more than a do-everything professor and alumna in Gaviria, but she also has a do-it-yourself attitude to match.

As a member of the first class to enter the People's College of Law in 1974, Gaviria and her 50 classmates were responsible for taking up hammer and nails to convert an empty warehouse into a school. Not only did they build the school but they were responsible for cleaning toilets, dusting, painting and taking out the trash.

And the mission of the student-run, student-built alternative law school has been the same since the day it opened: It was a school "for the people," according to third-year student Magda Madrigal, who headed a recruitment session for prospective students May 17.

"I always wanted to be a lawyer, but it seemed like the doors of traditional law schools were closed to people like me," says Madrigal, a 35-year-old typist for the Los Angeles County Fire Department.

"I didn't have the best grades, I don't score high on exams, I don't have people in the family who can sit down and tutor me," she says. "I was a really hard-working mother. The school does not exclude people who don't do well on exams. The school instead tries to help students meet standards."

Madrigal encouraged working parents from low-income backgrounds to apply for

the program, which offers all of its classes at night to fit the typical student with a full-time job. Free weekend review sessions also are offered.

The school has been able to open its doors to people from all economic levels by keeping tuition low, only \$4,000 per year, and hiring attorneys — many of whom are alumni — to teach without pay.

Most teachers, such as Gaviria, are alumni or have been with the school since it began, and are willing to help out a few nights per week for free after their day jobs, Madrigal says. The school does not offer scholarships unless a community member makes a donation designated specifically for a scholarship fund, according to Madrigal.

People's College chooses not to be accredited by the State Bar of California or the American Bar Association because the bar would require tougher standards, Madrigal says.

"They would tell you, you have to exclude this person and this person because they're not scoring high enough," but People's College wants to remain open to all, Madrigal says. The college would also have to raise tuition to pay bar dues, she says.

Though the school is unaccredited, students still receive a law degree and are still eligible to sit before the State Bar Exam. They must pass the State Bar First Year Law Student Exam after their first year to continue on through the school. Students also are required to have completed 60 units of college coursework to be admitted.

"We recognize the cultural and social barriers that people have," Madrigal says of not using the LSAT as an admissions requirement. "If you grew up with a nanny and a tutor and all the comforts of life, you would

probably do better than the lady next to you who worked all her life. We would be keeping you in and her out, further marginalizing the community."

Students who may have language barriers or may be lacking in a certain area, such as writing skills, are offered tutoring and remedial courses to get up to speed before taking on typical course loads such as criminal law and legal writing.

And instead of taking the LSAT, students must prove that they are taking advantage of the low tuition and volunteer teachers to go into public service in order to be admitted to the school.

But they are no slackers.

Past alumni include Los Angeles Mayor-Elect Antonio Villaraigosa, State Senator Gilbert Cedillo and Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Teresa Sanchez-Gordon as well as attorneys from the American Civil Liberties Union, the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles and the UCLA Labor Center.

Madrigal says she wants to start her career in housing law while Gaviria started her own practice, Your Neighborhood Law Office in San Gabriel, that deals with consumer law and medical malpractice.

Prospective student, Vickie Morales says she just wanted a place to finish where she left off. Morales put her full-time education on hold at the University of La Verne in 2001 when her sister left for the Navy and Morales decided to take care of her children.

"Now here I am a working adult, and I don't have time to go to school," Morales says.

In addition to proving a commitment to public service and balancing full-time jobs with night classes three days per week, there's one more requirement.

For everything students get out of the school, they have to put something back. The school has a 40-hour accountability requirement, which means doing anything from scrubbing bathrooms to recruiting students, or in Gaviria's case, building libraries and classrooms.

"Tuition consisted of money and 40 hours of labor," Gaviria says. "What is really beautiful is that we never paid the teachers, and they also came out to clean on the weekend."

The school was founded by community leaders and the Asian Law Collective, the La Raza National Lawyers Association, the National Conference of Black Lawyers and the National Lawyers Guild. With little funding to go around, graduations even were held in professors' backyards, Madrigal says.

But that was the fun of it for Gaviria.

"People putting the school together met at Lee Solomon's kitchen. She was a fantastic pro-worker pro-union leader, and she housed probably 30 students at night that didn't have a place to sleep," Gaviria says. "We slept in her kitchen. And even though I came from another area, I slept there just to be with them."

The People's College experience fosters the same spirit of a true collective effort necessary when fighting legal battles for the underprivileged, according to professor and alumnus Mike Love, who serves as the school chair.

"We're producing lawyers that are not afraid to go into a house with cockroaches and say this is wrong," Love says. "If it takes lying in the street to get your point across, we encourage that."

"We encourage group work here. We don't want competition here because we have a big fight ahead of us. If you have a tool, share it."

## With Honors

Attorney Ted Green was given the 2005 Outstanding Attorney Volunteer award for his work as a mentor with VIP Mentors in Sacramento and Yolo counties.

Green, of the Law Offices of Ted A. Green Inc. in Sacramento, received the 2005 award for his work as a mentor with a parolee named Joe.

"Ted has just helped Joe achieve his goals, and yet the two have also become best friends. Ted doesn't give Joe legal advice but discusses everyday matters with him and treats him as an equal," says program director Angela Tillotson of Green.

Green says that his work is "really just about being a friend to someone, just being someone to talk to."

The seventh annual award luncheon took place May 12 at the Delta King Paddlewheel Room in Old Sacramento.

The Sacramento and Yolo offices are two of 13 local VIP programs throughout the state.

VIP Mentors, formerly Volunteers In Parole, was founded in San Diego in 1972. The Sacramento-Yolo office opened in 1998. The group arranges for local attorneys to mentor California Youth Authority and Department of Corrections parolees.

Attorneys generally are assigned to mentor one individual. However, if an attorney is able to volunteer more time, he or she may mentor several parolees. The mentors act as role models, friends,

and advisers to the parolees.

"The recidivism rate in California is very high, and so the personal attention paid to parolees by VIP Mentors is so important," Tillotson says.

VIP Mentors is the only group of its kind in California and is independent of any similar organizations in the United States.

"Through the one-on-one mentoring, the attorneys build the parolees' self esteem, ... and they, in turn, begin to chase this positive way of life. ... It works like a domino effect in that the parolees then go speak at prisons and correctional facilities and inspire people to turn their lives around," Tillotson says. "And the community benefits because it no longer has to pay for these men and women to be institutionalized."

■ ■ ■

Ventura County has received a \$188,264 federal grant, Ventura County District Attorney Gregory D. Totten announced April 25.

The grant is one of 38 given nationwide as part of President Bush's DNA initiative, Advancing Justice Through DNA Technology. The money is meant to help Ventura County solve "cold" homicide cases using DNA evidence.

The president's DNA initiative includes the National Institute of Justice, which is responsible for giving Ventura County the one-time grant.

"We are very happy about it. It allows us to form a task force with local law enforcement agencies and four homicide investigators to review past cases looking for DNA evidence that will hopefully result in a DNA match and skip traces on witnesses," Ventura County Deputy District Attorney Michael Jump says of the grant.

Together with the Ventura County Sheriff's Department, Ventura Police Department, Simi Valley Police Department, Santa Paula Police Department, Oxnard Police Department, Port Hueneme Police Department and the California Highway Patrol, the district attorney's office submitted the grant application last fall.

"If we can even resolve one unsolved homicide, our work together will be a great success and will bring justice to at least one victim and peace of mind to their families," Totten says.

■ ■ ■

Stephen Claman, a name partner in Los Angeles-based Greenberg Glusker Fields Claman Machtinger & Kinsella, received the Outstanding Real Estate Lawyer Award from the Los Angeles County Bar Association at the group's annual installation and awards dinner on May 25 at the Riviera Country Club in Pacific Palisades.

The group presented Claman with the award for his work in building Greenberg

Glusker into one of the leading real estate firms on the West Coast.

Seth Horowitz, director of marketing for Greenberg Glusker, says, "Steve's been in the industry for almost 50 years. He's helped build the landscape in California. He's still really involved in his work, and I think that they're honoring him and recognizing him for everything that he's done."

Claman, a graduate of UCLA, represents commercial and real estate brokerage firms, commercial, retail, industrial and residential developers, and resort condominium-golf course developers. Among his more well-known clients are the Sunrise Cos., Transpacific Development Co., Monrovia Nursery Co. and Miller Automotive.

Claman says he feels "fabulous" about the award.

"Aside from the fact that it was a great honor to be respected by my peers, it's astonishing to see how far this business has come," Claman says. "When I first started, there were only typewriters, no Prop. 15, no [California] Coastal Commission. ... We've come a long way."

"We really have a terrific group in Southern California, and I am honored to be a part of that."

Greenberg Glusker has 115 attorneys in Los Angeles, 25 of whom are in the real estate group.

— Maggie Guerin