

A Light Touch

This year, the Law Foundation of Silicon Valley held its annual Legal Advocates for Children & Youth honors during the day, and the move was a resounding success.

By Erik Cummins It was like night and day for the Law Foundation of Silicon Valley. For six years, the organization has presented its annual Legal Advocates for Children & Youth, or LACY, awards at a gala, nighttime event. This year, the 25-year-old foundation departed from tradition and gave its LACY awards in the light of day. Clearly, the departure works. Attendance at the Hyatt Rikeys in Palo Alto was nearly twice that of past years, leaving event organizers expecting a record \$30,000 net return from the event. "What a terrific turnout," law foundation president Norman Blears says, referring to the 180 attorneys, judges and high-tech folks who attended the Dec. 6 luncheon and fund-raiser. "It's fantastic to see this many people coming out to support LACY and the foundation." Noon "seems to work for folks," adds Blears, who is a partner with Heller Ehrman White & McAuliffe in Palo Alto. Randolph Rice, a partner with San Jose's Skjerven Morrill MacPherson Franklin & Friel, agrees. But he is quick to acknowledge the hard work of the foundation's new executive director, Jim Bower. Bower, he says, reached out to in-house counsel and Silicon Valley's high-tech community for support. "More and more people are employed in in-house positions," says Rice, who is on the foundation's board of directors. "If you're going to [make it work], you've got to reach out into the in-house community. Jim Bower really made that a focus of his efforts." The results of Bower's efforts are apparent. The Silicon Valley Association of General Counsel sponsored a table at the LACY awards, while businesses like Synopsis, Intel, Applied Materials Inc. and Silicon Valley Bank also opened their wallets. One of LACY's biggest sponsors, the Steven & Michele Kirsch Foundation, best represents this convergence between law and technology. Steven Kirsch created the Infoseek search engine, while Michele Kirsch is a third-year law student at the Santa Clara University School of Law. Both, Bower says, deeply believe in Legal Advocates for Children & Youth's vision.

After a light meal, Michele Kirsch presented the LACY award to Santa Clara County Superior Court Judge Eugene Hyman. The juvenile dependency judge, she says, is "committed to making a difference in the lives of the families he sees before him." Hyman created the state's first juvenile-domestic-and-family-violence court. He also chairs the special committee for education of children of the juvenile court, which seeks to improve educational opportunities for wards of the court. The judge says he accepted the award on behalf of many stakeholders in the juvenile justice system. "I'm just one person of many," he says, acknowledging the county's juvenile probation department, deputy district attorneys and public defenders, and mental health professionals for their work in creating the Wednesday afternoon calendar. LACY, he says, is another important collaborator. Staff attorneys with Legal Advocates for Children & Youth typically represent teen-age women who have children with their accused batterers. He says legal advocates staff attorney Roy Bennett also works with the court's education committee. Bennett, he says, "helps us get what our wards need." For the last two years, Legal Advocates for Children & Youth's staff has also honored an agency that has made a positive impact on the lives of children in Santa Clara County. This year, that agency is Family Court Services.

Kirsch says Family Court Services empowers parents to resolve their child custody and visitation disputes by offering them services such as mediation, intervention, counseling and referrals. This year, Family Court Services has served 6,000 Silicon Valley parents and children, according to director Sandra Clark. "So many families have learned to use this system to resolve their disputes," Clark says. "Children suffer greatly from high-conflict. ... [Children of divorce] can survive if their parents can manage their relationships with each other."