

Attorney takes pro bono work seriously

By **DOUG SHERWIN**
The Daily Transcript

Jeff Isaacs can be quite the comedian, never afraid to put his colleagues or opposing counsel at ease with his trademark dry sense of humor.

He's also a serious attorney, especially when it comes to helping the underserved.

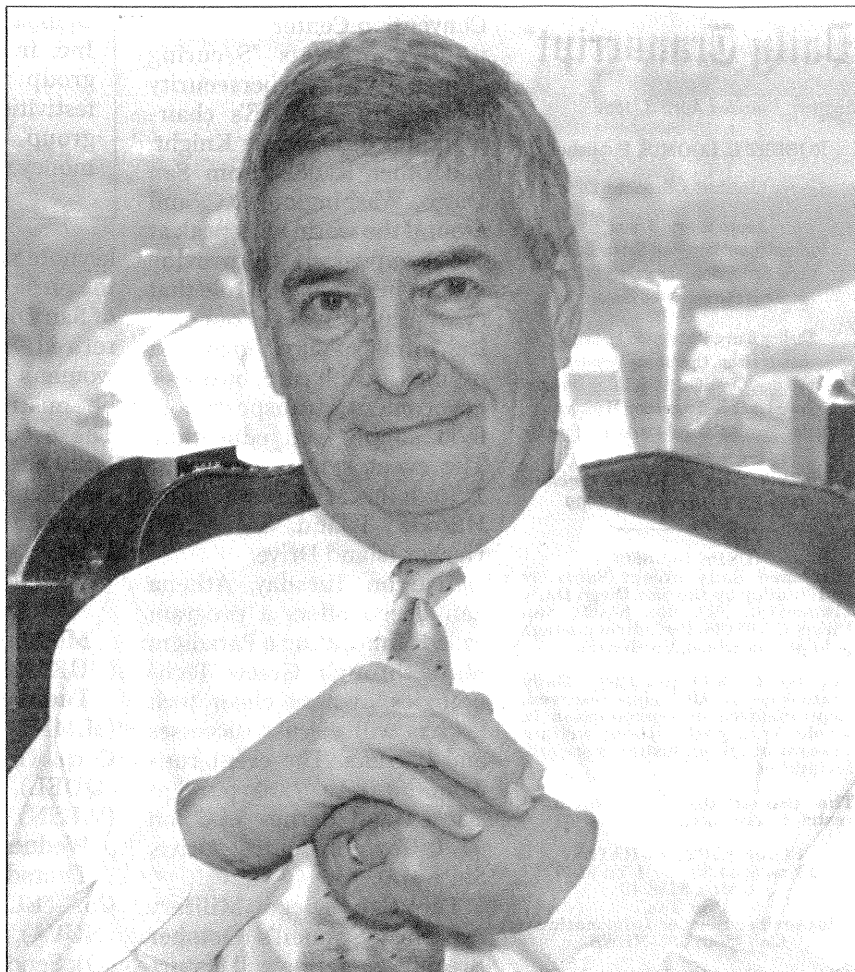
A longtime partner for the San Diego law firm **Procopio, Cory, Hargreaves & Savitch**, Isaacs spends much of his time lending support to, and raising the profile of, the San Diego Volunteer Lawyer Program (SDVLP) as president of the non-profit organization.

"He is committed to the work SDVLP does," said Amy Fitzpatrick, the organization's executive director. "He is willing to dedicate a lot of time each month to work on SDVLP issues despite his very busy law practice.

"He is known by many, many people in the legal community and has utilized this wide network of colleagues and friends to garner greater support and visibility for the organization."

Isaacs has been president of SDVLP for two years, has served as its treasurer and has been on the board since 2007. He's also the organization's biggest cheerleader.

"It's just a genius program," he said. "Putting completely aside that you're doing good, with this volunteer model we use and a mere 20 employees — 10 of whom are lawyers — we can service 6,000 clients a year for a budget of \$1.5 million. We're able to deliver legal services having a value of about \$5.5 million. It's just



Staff photo by Sarah Strong

Jeff Isaacs, a partner at Procopio, Cory, Hargreaves & Savitch, is also president of the nonprofit San Diego Volunteer Lawyer Program.

incredible."

SDVLP is the county's largest and oldest provider of pro bono legal services. Its clients are among society's most vulnerable — abused children and elders, domestic violence victims, the homeless, veterans, immigrants, and those suffering

from HIV/AIDS.

More than 75 percent of SDVLP's clients are women and children.

Isaacs is convinced the program can be just as rewarding for the participating attorneys as it is for the

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needy clients they are helping. Litigators engaged in high stakes patent disputes can find themselves working a domestic violence case for SDVLP.

"They get to experience practicing law in a fashion that would be otherwise unattainable to them for their entire career," Isaacs said. "And once you produce a result, you get the feeling of gratitude that the client has, it's addictive, and you keep wanting to do more of it. I get a lot of satisfaction out of it."

"Amy Fitzpatrick is just a force of nature. We're so fortunate to have her. She is one of the most driven people in trying to serve public interest causes I've ever encountered. It's a pleasure to work for her."

Isaacs, a bankruptcy attorney, also sits on the board of the San Diego County Bar Foundation, which awards grants to various nonprofit organizations, including SDVLP.

And he's a longtime board member and vice president of the California Metabolic Research Foundation, which is searching for a diabetes cure.

"He's always kind of followed our founding partner Alec Cory's mantra of, 'Giving back to the community is not something a

lawyer should do, it's something he must do,'" said Procopio's managing partner, Tom Turner. "He's always taken it upon himself to make sure legal services for the underserved are available.

"It's in his heart to do it, and he does a fabulous job. From everything I hear (from SDVLP), he's set a new standard for rolling up his sleeves and getting directly involved in all their programs."

Additionally, Isaacs volunteers for the local bankruptcy court mediation panel and was named mediator of the year for 2007-2008.

Isaacs realized early in his legal career that he didn't want to be defined by his billable hours and reorganization cases. His philosophy is that the license to practice law provides many avenues to do something good, and he's determined to take advantage of those opportunities.

"When I came to the firm, I think the dominating moral force in the firm was Alec Cory, and his thing was giving back to the community," he said. "If Procopio has a culture, it's that."

Isaacs has been practicing at Procopio — the only law job he's ever known — for more than 40 years. Previously, he sold real estate in Los Angeles — not

terribly well, he admits — and decided there had to be something better.

So, he traveled to San Diego, graduated from California Western School of Law and landed a job with the small downtown firm in 1968.

"We were a very tight little energetic bunch of 10 lawyers," Isaacs said.

He likes the intellectual challenge of the bankruptcy practice, which features cases that can take on the scope of an aircraft carrier, with myriad and complex issues. He mainly handles corporate bankruptcies, representing secured creditors, trustees, debtors in possession, and creditors' committees.

"He's kind of an institution in the bankruptcy community here in San Diego," Turner said. "He's been with the firm for 42 years now, and he's certainly made his mark in the firm and throughout

the legal community in general.

"He's extremely bright and analytical. He's exceptionally quick on his feet, and he's always able to articulate points in a fashion that is both effective but also often amusing."

Isaacs jokes about how he routinely gets mistaken for "The Lawyer in Blue Jeans," a local radio and TV personality who is known for providing "down-to-earth, affordable legal services."

The two share a similar name — Jeff Isaac, "The Lawyer in Blue Jeans," spells his name without an "s."

"We don't steal each other's clients," Isaacs quipped. "I don't want to do any wills or trusts, and he doesn't want to do any court-ordered reorganizations, so it's not like we're in mortal competition."

doug.sherwin@sddt.com

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