

Loren Miller Legal Services Award

2005



Carl R. Poirot

Carl Poirot has been the embodiment of pro bono legal services to the San Diego Community. Throughout his nearly 20 years of service as Executive Director of the San Diego Volunteer Lawyer Program (SDVLP), Mr. Poirot worked tirelessly to implement services that meet the legal needs of San Diego's most vulnerable populations. He succeeded in doing so by developing effective collaborations with the bar, judiciary, law schools, public agencies, professional associations, and others. In addition, he contributed extraordinary efforts locally, statewide and nationally to extend legal services to the poor.

In June 1986, Mr. Poirot became Executive Director of SDVLP when it was a fledgling office with three staff and about 500 volunteers. Due to his resourcefulness and commitment, today the organization is staffed by 20 employees housed in one main office and two outlying offices. In 2004, more than 3,500 volunteer attorneys, paralegals, law students and others contributed 27,000+ hours of pro bono service that benefited more than 7,000 low-income San Diegans.

Identifying, developing, implementing and sustaining innovative and effective service delivery models that address the legal needs of specific client populations is one of Mr. Poirot's hallmarks. He demonstrated remarkable initiative and skill in cultivating partnerships with the courts, local bar associations, county law library, public agencies and other service providers to develop numerous delivery models. These models include court-affiliated projects, general advice clinics, community outreach events, direct representation and other models in the following areas: domestic violence, guardianship, federal civil rights, services to children (immigration, special education, healthcare needs), women's issues, healthcare, immigration, veterans issues, political asylum, HIV/AIDS, assistance to non-profit organizations, family law, elder law and disaster response.

Locally, Mr. Poirot has been recognized as an energetic and imaginative leader in the development and delivery of pro bono legal services and for creating a pro bono culture in the San Diego area. He received the San Diego County Bar Association's most prestigious honor as their Outstanding Attorney of the Year for 2005.

On a statewide level, Mr. Poirot was active as a board member of the Legal Aid Association of California and a long-time leader within the State Bar of California. Participating in both the former Legal Services Section as a member of the Executive Committee and as a founding member and chair for two different terms with its successor, the Standing Committee on the Delivery of Legal Services (SCDLS). Mr. Poirot provided effective leadership for developing policy statements and creating opportunities to promote and enhance pro bono legal services throughout the state. Most notably during his first term as chair, he spearheaded the committee's efforts that resulted in amendments to the State Bar's Pro Bono Resolution in June 2002 that reflect a renewed and strengthened commitment to pro bono. In addition, Mr. Poirot has generously shared his successful strategies and resources with others and acquired a reputation for helping other pro bono directors. He is a gracious and well-respected role model in the California legal services community who has devoted his career to bringing equal access to justice.

The Loren Miller Legal Services Award was created in 1977 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the State Bar of California. The award is given annually and honors an attorney who has demonstrated long-term commitment to legal services and who has personally done significant work in extending legal services to the poor.

"I have known and admired Carl for nearly two decades and am keenly familiar with the invaluable contributions he has made to legal services during that time. He has been my champion, as well as the champion of many others, for the efforts he has undertaken to provide and improve pro bono legal services to those in need here in San Diego."

— Marc D. Adelman, Past President, The State Bar of California