

# BUSINESS TIMES<sup>®</sup>

October 20, 2023

Proudly serving Santa Barbara, Ventura and San Luis Obispo counties

Vol. 24, No. 32

## Top Ventura County attorneys offer free legal education

**By Mike Harris**

In honor of her grandmother, who was a teacher in Ohio from roughly the 1940s-1980s, former Ventura County Bar Association President Jacqueline Ruffin started a free legal education outreach program for the group last year.

"My grandmother was known for helping her students overcome significant challenges, working towards positive changes in the school system and participating in various volunteer programs," Ruffin wrote in an article for the association's monthly magazine, Citations.

"I admire my grandmother's vision, bravery and worth ethic," wrote Ruffin, who was the association's 2022 board president.

Launched in January 2022, the organization's Attorneys Sharing Knowledge – A.S.K. – program aims to fulfill the group's mission to "improve access to legal services for all people in Ventura County."

Through the program, lawyers, judges, and other legal professionals, all volunteers, provide free legal presentations to underserved parts of the community, and educational talks to the broader community.

"Our goal is really twofold," said attorney Kristine Tijam, chair of the association's Community Outreach Committee, which spearheads the program.

"One, it's to provide information to the general public about legal issues that they wouldn't otherwise have access to," she told the Business Times on Aug. 31.

Such issues include estate planning, wills, trusts, workplace rights, immigration rights and more, said Tijam, an associate at Procter, Shyer & Winter in Camarillo.

The program's other goal is to reach out to students who are statistically underrep-

resented in the legal community to encourage them to consider a career in the law, said Ruffin, a partner at Myers, Widders, Gibson, Jones and Feingold in Ventura.

Tijam said the program tries to clear up for students misconceptions about what it is to be an attorney.

For instance, she said, attorneys are frequently portrayed on TV and in the movies as trial lawyers arguing their cases in courtrooms.

But many attorneys never step foot inside a courtroom, instead working in other areas of law such as estate planning and real estate, she noted.

Apart from presentations about legal careers, young people of all backgrounds are given access to free legal information they may otherwise not be aware of.

"So, You're Turning 18?" presentations inform youth about the implications of turning 18 from a legal perspective, including employment, immigration and criminal law, voting rights, and other matters.

Since its inception, the A.S.K. program has put on about 10 events at area schools and other venues.

Its first presentation, on legal issues for artists, was held in January 2022 at the Museum of Ventura County in Ventura.

Subsequent events were held at Pacifica High School in Oxnard, Anacapa Middle School in Ventura and elsewhere.

The program's most recent presentation was in May, also at the museum, on employment law.

Tijam said she hopes to resume the events in the fall.

Discussions with local school districts to have presentations over the summer were hampered by scheduling and availability, she said.

Ruffin said she's pleased with the development of the program.

"It's been going fantastic," she said. "Especially for something that's only been in existence for a year and a half."

Tijam agreed.

"We're excited about this program and we'd love to continue serving the community," she said.

Attorneys, judges and other legal professionals who would like to volunteer for the program can contact the bar association. So can schools and others requesting a presentation.

"The possibilities for future presentations are endless," Ruffin wrote in her article.

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