

Legal Aid Society Helps Keep Check On Government



Norman Nayfach, director of the county Legal Aid Society, stands in front of the Santa Cruz office on Locust Street. The Watsonville office is in the Lettunich Building.

By JAY SHORE
Sentinel Staff Writer

"There is no country to my knowledge that has a legal system as advanced as ours," said the director of the county's Legal Aid Society, Norman Nayfach.

And to give his statement validity he showed how the county Legal Aid Society, federally funded this year at \$88,000 through the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), has served to check illegal government activity.

For example, last year the California Department of Motor Vehicles would have seized a county resident's car without giving him a hearing because of \$12 in unpaid registration fees had not Legal Aid taken action.

Nayfach said the man would not pay the registration fee because it had been accrued from the car's previous owner. But that was beside the point. The problem was that DMV was not giving the man a hearing.

Legal Aid got DMV to change its policy, giving people the right to a hearing prior to any seizure.

What makes Legal Aid's action so significant is that DMV's change will effect at least 20,000 people, according to Nayfach.

What makes Legal Aid special is that a private attorney would probably never have handled the case, because all his work would exceed the \$12 saved by his client.

And what the government has done by creating and funding Legal Aid is to provide another of the many checks against imbalances in the system.

Nayfach offered another example. For about three weeks last fall striking lettuce growers were denied U.S. department of agriculture surplus foods by county welfare.

The basis of the refusal was that applicants did not sign up with state office of Human Resources Development (HRD), indicating they were looking for jobs, according to Nayfach.

The strikers refused to register because they didn't want to dilute the strike's efforts, said Nayfach.

The important thing to note is that the law did not require registration, but county welfare did.

Nayfach's option was clear. "We sent a telegram to the state to tell the county to shape up." But the state took no action. So Legal Aid took the state and county welfare to federal

court in San Francisco. And won.

An injunction was issued immediately telling county welfare to give the striking lettuce growers the surplus food.

"We gave the county every chance to change its mind before we went to court," Nayfach said.

Most private attorneys would not have handled the case because most have no welfare background. "And where would they get a fee from a class action of this type?" asked Nayfach. "There was no fee available. We must have spent 100 manhours on this in three weeks," he said.

Legal Aid handles about 3,000 cases a year, 40 per cent of which involve domestic relations—divorce, adoptions, custody problems in general.

Landlord-tenant problems comprise about 20 per cent of Legal Aid's case load; consumer problems (car frauds, repossessions) about 15 per cent; administrative law (welfare, social security, internal revenue) about 15 per cent; and about 10 per cent miscellany (immigration, setting up low income housing and school problems).

Legal Aid is presently working with school problems in the Pajaro district. The Title I grant was supposed to have been signed by the chairman of the parent advisory committee, Blasa Leon; but was not, so it's not certain whether the grant will be given.

Mrs. Leon and members of the parent committee claim the district did not listen to them when the budget was drawn up. Superintendent John Duncan claims the opposite, indicating that only two of the committee's recommendations were not included in the budget—a community advocate and more teachers aides.

Legal Aid represents the disaffected members of the parent committee. It will be at least a month before a decision is made.

The financial requirement for Legal Aid assistance is that the person can not have an income in excess of \$2,500 annually. He is allowed \$500 per dependent beyond the \$2,500.

But the program is flexible so if a person is making more than \$2,500 but in great debt and/or has medical considerations adjustments can be made, according to Nayfach.

The Pajaro group is an exception to the \$2,500 requirement. Helping them is a class act. "We are helping poor people," said Nayfach.

With all this work Legal Aid

has two offices—one in Santa Cruz, the other in Watsonville—and two full-time attorneys operating out of each office with Nayfach running back and forth.

"We all work about 50 hours a week," said Nayfach who makes \$17,500 a year.

Nayfach described a typical client and an emergency situation a Legal Aid attorney must be able to respond to.

"The guy who sits across from you will typically not get any compensation for his lost time at work. He'll be worried about losing his job. He's almost as afraid of his attorney as he is of his landlord because of the real distance that exists between the average lawyer and the poor.

"He could be seeing you Monday with an eviction complaint from his landlord which he received Friday. This is an emergency because he has three days to file and answer with the court starting from the day he receives the papers, and Monday is his first opportunity to see an attorney.

"He may be one of 10 people seeing one of us in the morning. We have to act fast."

And if the man speaks only Spanish the problem is further complicated. "To the best of my knowledge, I'm the only Spanish speaking attorney in the county," said Nayfach.

But the Legal Aid program manages, despite a budget of "barely adequate to run one office, let alone two," said Nayfach.

"I feel we're being nickle and dimed to death," he said. "The lack of money cripples the program more than anything else. The financial situation is farcical. We don't even have enough to pay one receptionist. If we don't get more money by November, '72, the program will have to undergo radical changes." Nayfach said all the other problems would be solved with money.

All things considered, Legal Aid's operation is pretty smooth. "We do get cooperation from the Santa Cruz Bar Association on handling a aggravated individual cases," Nayfach said.

He said the staff worked well together. "We also have good working relationships with local agencies and attorneys. They respect us.

"The communities, particularly Watsonville, are becoming aware of us," he said. Legal Aid's office in Santa Cruz is at 238 Locust St. and is in the Lettunich Building in Watsonville. Hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Aptos Chamber Seeks 1890s Motif For Business Houses

If the Aptos Chamber of Commerce has its way, a visit to that community is going to be a little like taking a step through a time-door to the era of bustles, handlebar mustaches and nickle beer.

Concerned that the unique qualities of the community are falling by the wayside in the business and residential rush which has overtaken Aptos, the chamber has set up a committee to attempt to establish

standards for signs and architectural styles for new businesses. The committee has selected an 1890s motif as its ideal for business development.

Chamber President Mike Bungay said the committee still is working on specific guidelines for sign and architectural styles, but is agreed on the turn-of-the-century general theme.

An eight-member chamber committee headed by Lucile Aldrich was formed to bring the central theme and controls to merchants have agreed to alter, or have already modified their signs.

Bungay said the chamber considered The End Zone cocktail lounge and Crocker's Restaurant signs as farthest out of line with the desired Aptos atmosphere. He noted the committee has talked to owners of both establishments and they have agreed to consider the chamber's suggestions.

"We want to keep a continuity to Aptos development that is acceptable to the majority of the people," Bungay commented. "The people have come here because the area is unique. If the signs and commercial development eliminate that quality, we will have lost the whole attraction that brought our residents here in the first place."

He added the chamber is encouraged in its efforts because the residents themselves — usually the last ones to speak up — are coming forth with comments.

"There's no reason why we can't keep the atmosphere of Aptos and have development at the same time," Bungay observed.

One of the group's big problems is a lack of expertise to deal with the difficulties Aptos is experiencing in its period of rapid growth.

"We're probably in a transition period like Santa Cruz 10 years ago," Bungay noted. "We don't have the necessary volunteer experts."

The chamber president noted his group intends to get out and beat the bushes to see if it can come up with some expertise. He noted that persons new to

Santa Cruz High School for an ing the six school desks.

We were honored to have guests at the party Don Sele and R. A. Belleco, manager of the new Sears store, and were happy to have the opportunity to thank them for their kindness in providing coffee for those of our seniors who attended the county fair senior citizen day.

We were also pleased to be our dear friend, C. M. Doug, in attendance even for a short time. He has been a most dear friend and benefactor to our center since it was opened in 1968.

This Friday card buffs at

Mid-County Seniors On The Go

By Violet Battistini

More than 125 faces were wreathed in smiles for more than an hour last Friday during the comical show put on by Terry George "and company" for our monthly party.

The skit, entitled "School Daze," was written and directed by Terry, who also portrayed Freddie, one of the seven fractious students whose unruly behavior completely unnerved their teacher, Miss Crabapple, who was most ably played by Mabel Ewing.

The hall rang with gales of laughter from the appreciative audience as it recognized some toward her ambition of being a dancer and a "bunny girl."

Edie Churnside, as Petulia, the teacher's pet, was something to see in her short yellow frock and long red print bloomers billowing below her knees. They were almost as startling as the long white lace ones on Bertha Brown, who perched high on a stool as the dunces of the class, making faces at those who were throwing beans at her or throwing spit wads her way.

Claude Brown was a perfect "Buster Brown," who, of course, had his dog, Tige, by his side. Brownie's wig with bangs,

"school bored," Esther Groth, Bess Bihn and Helen Piggott, brought down the house as they sadly announced the failure of the school bond election, then silently mouthed the words of the song "I'll Never Smile Again" while a male voice came from a record of the song off stage.

Our thanks to Terry George for another enjoyable program made even more enjoyable by his beautiful trombone selections, the lovely piano accompaniment of Olga Smith, and the incidental music of the Rhythm Band.

Our thanks to our fine friend,