



» Pima County Outstanding Attorney of the Month



Peter Akmajian

July 2008

The Attorney of the Month for July is Peter Akmajian. Peter has been providing pro bono legal assistance to VLP clients in Pima County for nineteen years. Peter accepts tort cases from the Volunteer Lawyers Program for direct representation. Recently, Peter accepted a case for a client whose only mode of transportation is a bicycle. The client mistakenly believed that he was to meet Peter at the Legal Aid office to discuss his case. The client peddled to Legal Aid only to discover that his appointment was scheduled to take place several miles away at Peter's office on east Broadway. VLP staff contacted Peter and he immediately, and without hesitation, got in his car and drove to the SALA office to speak with the pro bono client.

Not only does Peter assist VLP clients, but he also serves as the President of the Board of Directors of Southern Arizona Legal Aid. He is generous with his time and his expertise, and is a champion for legal services in the community.

Q&A with Peter Akmajian:

Where are you from?

I am a Tucson native. I went to Rincon High School and the U of A undergrad and law school. My dad was a U of A professor, so I basically grew up on campus, and, of course benefited from the faculty dependent discount to attend the University. After law school, I moved to Phoenix and clerked for Justice Gordon on the Arizona Supreme Court. I then practiced for 4 years in Phoenix with O'Connor Cavanagh. I moved back to Tucson in 1989,



working with OCC and then OCC/Molloy Jones until 1999. I've been with my present firm, Udall Law Firm, since 1999. My office overlooks my old high school. I've come a long way!

What are your current practice areas?

Much of my practice is devoted to representing doctors in malpractice cases. I enjoy this work immensely because the clients are fascinating, the cases are complex and challenging, and the issues and disputes important as they relate to health care. In addition, many of these cases go to trial, and I am happiest as a lawyer when I am at the court house in a jury trial.

Best thing about being an attorney in Tucson?

I've enjoyed practicing law in Tucson. The legal community is close-knit and collegial. I think I was able to become a trial lawyer here whereas I was concerned that in Phoenix, I would have become a "litigator".

What drives you to volunteer with VLP?

I have been doing VLP work from the beginning of my career. I still remember my first VLP client, an old fellow in Phoenix who had lived many years in Israel. When he returned, he found that a bank account that he thought he had here was gone. It turned out the bank made a mistake and lost his money. It wasn't a ton of money, but I was able to help him recover it. He was so grateful, and he insisted on taking me out to breakfast at Denny's to celebrate. He kept in touch with me for years afterwards. I always keep two or three VLP cases going, and I'm proud to say I've never turned down a VLP case. Why do I do VLP work? Because I think all attorneys have an obligation to carry pro bono cases. And I've found over the years that I've enjoyed the cases and the diversity of clients. I've also learned a lot because the cases often present interesting issues. I of course feel good helping someone who needs legal assistance to secure his or her rights. I would encourage everyone to volunteer because it is truly an enriching experience.

A great anecdote from your VLP experiences?

In terms of an anecdote, I have a client right now I'm helping to get his driver's license. There's an old judgment on the books that is causing problems, but the judgment was never renewed, so we're working with DMV to authorize the license. He really needs it to build up his landscaping business. Anyway, he told me the other day that he was talking to one of his landscaping clients about his case, and this client asked who his lawyer was. It turned out his landscaping client is one of my doctor clients.

Any hidden talents?

I love ping pong and had not lost a game for years until one of my old high school buddies came to town just this week and took me on my home table. Ouch. I've also discovered I love playing conga drums, and maybe some of you saw me playing with Los Big Grandes at the recent PCBA 75th

anniversary party.

If you ever retire from private practice, it will be to start a new career as a _____?

I don't know about retirement right now. I'm enjoying myself too much to worry about that. But I'll stay in Tucson.

The VLP's monthly award is a distinct honor: of the 1,220 attorneys who volunteer their time with VLP, only 12 receive the VLP's Outstanding Pro Bono Attorney award each year. To find out how you can become involved in the VLP, call Michele Mirto, VLP Program Director at 623-9465, extension 4171.

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