

Fresno Attorney Wins Trial Lawyers' Award With Big Verdict in Title IX Case



Fresno attorney Warren Paboojian won the Consumer Attorneys of California's 2008 Trial Lawyer of the Year Award.

By Dhyana Levey
Daily Journal Staff Writer

Many of Warren Paboojian's colleagues warned him against taking on the case of Stacy Johnson-Klein, a women's basketball coach fired from Fresno State University.

"They said, 'it's crazy, it's wrong,'" said Paboojian, 51, a partner at Baradat, Edwards & Paboojian in Fresno and a former Fresno State student.

The Consumer Attorneys of California did not agree. The organization presented Paboojian with its 2008 Trial Lawyer of the Year award for his success with Johnson-Klein's high-profile gender discrimination trial.

He is the first San Joaquin Valley attorney to win the award.

The group of trial lawyers said Paboojian was recognized for shining a light on the school's violation of Title IX, the federal anti-discrimination law.

After being hired at Fresno State in 2002, Johnson-Klein complained to school officials that her female athletes received less funding, radio time and practice time than their male counterparts.

After she submitted her complaints in writing, the school put her under investigation and fired her in 2004 for "endangering the health of her students," Paboojian said.

She won an initial verdict of \$19.1 million in 2007, one of the highest amounts recorded given to a Title IX case. The entire judgment was later reduced to \$9.3 million, *Stacy Johnson-Klein v. the Board of Trustees of the California State University*, 05CECG02645.

The trial lawyers' award seeks to recognize more than an eye-popping verdict, though. "The purpose is not only how big the verdict was, but did your case affect society, did it make a change?" Paboojian said.

Rene Sample, incoming president of the Central California Trial Lawyers Association, said Paboojian's case set a precedent that makes athletic programs all over the country re-evaluate their commitment to Title IX and gender equality. "It makes other schools say 'are we complying?'" she said.

Paboojian has represented plaintiffs in wrongful death, personal injury, employment and medical malpractice suits since 2000. His private Fresno practice merged with 32-year-old firm Baradat & Edwards in May.

He competed with 11 other attorneys from such firms as Cotchett, Pitre & McCarthy, Waters & Kraus and Hersh & Hersh to win this year's award. "There were a lot of good cases," Paboojian said.

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as Chavez Ravine. They were tossed out to make way for a new major league ballpark that would be called Dodger Stadium.

For Cantu, who works for a real estate agency, the memories are particularly painful. She was 10 when her mother, Aurora Vargas, was dragged by sheriff's deputies down the steps of her home of nearly four decades and taken to jail. Minutes later a bulldozer knocked the house down, and the rubble was buried under what is now the stadium parking lot.

"I don't have anything against the Dodgers. They're our team," said Cantu, 59, who still gets choked up when she talks about that day in May 1959. "It's just the process by which they got here. My mom is the one they carried out of her house."

Photos of Aurora Vargas holding a baby in her arms as tearful children watch her struggle with deputies have frozen that moment in time for many. She was sentenced to a month in jail and fined \$500 for disturbing the peace.

To some, the name change is one more insult.

"I think 'Dodgertown' further eradicates the memory of the community that was lost to the construction of Dodger Stadium," said Eric Avila, a Chicano studies and history professor at the UCLA.

Nine years before the team arrived from Brooklyn in 1958, local officials put forth a plan to raze the poor, semi-rural neighborhoods of Chavez Ravine and replace them with low-income public housing. Residents forced to sell their homes for what they complained were below-market prices were promised first crack at the new housing.

But after much of the land was acquired through eminent domain, Mayor Norris Poulson was elected in 1953 on an anti-socialism platform and the public housing plan was scrapped.

A few years later, as an enticement to come to L.A., the land was offered to the Dodgers. The

On the Move

Townsend and Townsend and Crew Attorney Rejoins Firm

A. James Isbester will rejoin Townsend and Townsend and Crew as a partner in its San Francisco office. Isbester left the firm in 1996 to join Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher. He then left Gibson to form Isbester & Thackray in Berkeley. Now, back at Townsend, Isbester will practice in the firm's litigation department, concentrating on patent litigation and prelitigation counseling. In addition to his practice, Isbester also mediates and is a member of the Northern District of California District Court's panel of mediators. He earned his law degree from Osgoode Hall Law School, Toronto, Ontario.

member of the litigation and enforcement practice group. With the addition of Forman, WilmerHale's Los Angeles office now has four former Heller attorneys. Forman earned his law degree from Harvard Law School.

Jones Day's Irvine Office Lands Former Latham Partner

Jones Day's Irvine office has landed another partner as Kevin Espinola joins the firm's corporate practice. With the addition of Espinola, previously with the Orange County office of Latham & Watkins, Jones Day's Irvine office now has 48 attorneys. Espinola's practice is centered on mergers and acquisitions, corporate finance and general corporate and securities matters. He earned his law degree from the University

U.S. Attorney's Office Names Special Assistant for Victims

The U.S. attorney's office for the Eastern District of California has appointed a new special assistant U.S. attorney for victim asset recovery. Saralyn Ang-Olson has been assigned to the civil affirmative unit. Since 2000, Ang-Olson worked as a senior associate at Baker & McKenzie in San Francisco. She earned her law degree from UC Berkeley School of Law.

Theodora Oringher Miller & Richman Adds Attorney

Theodora Oringher Miller & Richman has added Eric T. Jorgensen to its Los Angeles office. Jorgensen, who comes on

finance group of Halliwells, joins Bingham as a corporate partner. He has worked on a range of corporate transactions, including the \$500 million fundraising for China Central Properties, a large real estate group in Hong Kong, and has experience in real estate funds formation and investment deals.

Miller Starr Regalia Elects Four New Shareholders

California real estate law firm Miller Starr Regalia has elected four new shareholders effective Jan. 1. Kristina Lawson, Tara Castro Narayanan, William "Fritz" Pahland and Dana Tsubota are slated for partnership. Additionally, Ethan Friedman will become senior counsel.