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## **Promoting the San Francisco Law Library**

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In a world that appears to be replete with legal resources available to all, the role of the public law library may appear to be, at the worst, unnecessary, and at the best, redundant. However, to those who work on the front lines of public legal access, the presumption that public law libraries are in any way past their time is quickly and totally put to rest. All types of people come in to make use of our resources, our expertise and our assistance. Like other county law libraries, we have print materials that serve our patrons, from the practiced attorney to the neophyte pro per. Additionally we have access to online materials that supplement and enhance our printed collection. Some of these are databases that can only be accessed in the library or by the librarians themselves, but we also have an extensive collection of web links for our patrons. I do not believe that any of this sets the San Francisco Law Library apart from our colleagues to the north, east and south.

However, San Francisco politics are rather unique, and unfortunately we are at something of a crossroads. Our present location for our main branch is adequate for only one third of our whole collection, and our financial district branch is due, as of this writing, to lose its lease in July of 2002. We are in dire need of more space, and the only way this can be done is if the City and County of San Francisco builds us a new building. Our resources and staffing will stretched to the breaking point by the absorption of the hours and patronage of the possibly-soon-to-be-closed branch location, and this does not take into account the issues of growth and access to our collection that sits idle in storage, among other issues.

It was in this environment that San Francisco changed its political structure, by moving to district elections for our Board of Supervisors. Instead of a citywide pool of candidates for the Board of Supervisors, we had candidates for each of 11 districts, and in each district only the district residents could vote for their pool of candidates. The results of the election were such that we had seven new Supervisors, and of course seven completely new staffs.

This appeared to us as an opportunity to demonstrate to both the old and new Supervisors, and their staffs, the resources at our command. This opportunity presented itself in a number of ways: first, to promote our library and resources, in the interests of assisting the Supervisors and their staffs in the course of their duties; second, to promote our library as a community necessity, so that our value to their constituents could be seen clearly; and finally to indicate our growing crisis of decreasing space and resources. This last we hoped would galvanize the Supervisors in facilitating necessary improvements.

We created a library orientation tour that would demonstrate our resources, both in print and on computer, and that would show those attending our value as researchers and our importance to the community. We tailored the presentation to a municipal legislative orientation, and the invitations were sent out. We have had two such tours so far, and both times the attendees were small groups, enabling us to work one on one with the attendees, and to answer all questions they may have had. We began by presenting an overview and summary of the collection, emphasizing the connection between the various layers of legal materials. In this portion of the presentation we emphasized federal and state codes and

regulations, secondary materials, reporters, and law reviews, and finally federal and state legislative materials. This last was of particular interest to the attendees, showing the connection between the type of work they do for their Supervisors and the higher levels of government where similar work is being done.

Next, we focused on the local San Francisco municipal materials, in an effort to show how the SF codes supplement and amend the state codes, and how the state codes serve the same function to the federal codes. We also tried to show how our collection differs from and expands upon what the Supervisors and their staffs have access to in the citywide Legislative Database, Legistar. In this effort we showed off our historical collection of old city and state codes, and our ballot initiatives archive. In an attempt to impress upon the attendees the nature of our work, we presented a representative patron question, in this case dog bite law, and used both the local materials and self help materials, such as Nolo Press, to show how we would answer this question. This was a particularly popular portion of the tour, as many of the attendees are not attorneys themselves, and the idea of a non-attorney being able to find an answer to a legal question on their own through the use of our services hit a note of recognition. In the context of their constituents, it was made clear at this point how we can be and are of service.

Finally, we showed the electronic materials at our disposal. We tried here to emphasize two main points: first, that we have electronic versions of many things that we have in print, such as Judicial Council Forms and California Legislative materials; and second, that we have many electronic resources that exist as tools unto themselves, such as our library catalog, access to the LoisLaw database of case law, and our extensive collection of helpful, librarian-approved links. This was also a popular portion of the tour, as the attendees were able to see what they could do from their end, without coming in, and also what our expertise could help them to find.

Already, we find that the Supervisor Staffs use our services, ask for our assistance and our expertise, and they have been able to assist us when we request their help with something.

Many people who were invited but unable to attend have expressed interest in scheduling another such orientation, and those who have come have returned to do research or to seek our help. While the Supervisors themselves have not come for the tour, we still feel as if this exercise was a success, as the awareness of our services and our plight has been increased. Additionally, our feeling of participating in the community has been heightened, and our understanding of the nuances of the City government have grown considerably.

We have plans to make this an ongoing project, making it a learning process for both the attendees and for us, the presenters. We feel as if our public image is both brighter and bettered.

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