

They Can't Leave California Behind Expatriate Bar Group Links Lawyers

By Pat Broderick

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San Diego attorney Samuel Jefferson Frazier III had just enough time to grab some client files from his home office near Ramona before the devastating Witch Creek fire of 2007 consumed all that he owned—his three-story house, surrounded by 200 prized rose bushes, a collection of personally restored French cars, two handmade boats, and his entire library.

"I thought that, basically, my life was over," said Frazier, who considered walking away from his practice, where he focused on personal injury, civil and labor litigation.



Heartbroken and in need of replenishing themselves, Frazier and his wife, Pamela, drove their RV to Prescott, Ariz.. There they stayed for a few months, and looked up their former Ramona colleague and friend Clay Seaman, who still managed a practice in California.

Explaining how he juggled life in two states, Seaman helped sow the seeds for Frazier's brainchild: the newly launched Expatriate Bar Association of California.

Now living in Colorado Springs near one of his sons and his family, Frazier wants to help other lawyers learn the finer points of practicing as expatriate lawyers, and, with the aid of a cadre of like-minded souls, is casting a wide net to find them. So far, the group has only six members but Frazier said that he's already been hearing from many attorneys interested in the group.

"We anticipate a pretty strong response," he said.

The availability these days of Court Call, which enables attorneys to make court appearances via telephone, along with online filing, legal research and document preparation, has made physical borders less important, he said.

"It's worked out absolutely wonderfully," said Frazier, who also takes work as a pro tem judge in San Diego county. "If I sit in my law office and deal with a client, it doesn't matter if I'm in Colorado or San Diego, unless they want to see me."

In that case, Frazier can hop on a plane, or, as a licensed pilot, fly himself to meetings. Frazier, who travels to San Diego about once a month and keeps a boat docked at a local marina, also employs a San Diego-based secretary to schedule his appointments and handle other clerical duties.

Attorneys who have developed strong relationships with their clients over the years usually are able to take their business with them when they leave California.

Seaman, who handles death penalty appeals, travels from Prescott to California about a half-dozen times a year to meet with clients on San Quentin's death row.

"It's relatively easy for me to do," Seaman said. "I sit at my computer, write and file briefs by mail. I do have to come back for oral arguments before the Supreme Court, but I'm not at the trial judge's mercy. I have time to plan my travel."

One mission of the new expatriates group is to provide a one-stop shop for lawyers looking for contacts and information.

"Every jurisdiction has unique local wrinkles, and you don't want to do something stupid," Seaman said. "For me, I'll be able to provide a perspective to those who need appellate advice. Or, if I want to know about local judges, I can go to some other members of the expatriates association. There is a lot of synergy from all areas of California."

Another service of the no-fees group will be helping to keep out-of-state lawyers up on new California laws.

"When you live outside the state, you're not privy to the small things that can happen," Seaman said. "You can read the laws, but you don't always know how they might affect another area. It's a way to find out what's going on and get a little local flavor."

Seaman is in the process of forming a partnership with Steve Carroll, who retired last year as San Diego County's longtime public defender. But while the new partnership might bring Seaman to California more often, his beachhead will remain in Arizona.

"With people like Clay, you don't need to be within the state, but you still need connections," Carroll said. "This allows them to have their camaraderie and mutual problem solving, and still allows them to live where they want to live."

Another Ramona expat is Brian Stolliker, who moved to Florida's Marco Island-two-and-a-half years ago. Since then, he has downscaled his legal practice in California, and has been selling real estate with his wife, Nancy, who used to have a thriving real estate business in San Diego.

Now Stolliker, who focuses on real estate, civil litigation and personal injury cases, is poised to rev up his practice in California with the help of the expats group's all-for-one and one-for-all spirit.

"I'm almost 3,000 miles away, and somebody out there can make an appearance for me, or it's something I can do for them when I'm out there," he said. "It eases the burden."

And, he added, "For me, I'm hoping it will give me exposure to people in Florida looking for somebody to represent them in California."

Karl Griesbaum, a former La Jolla attorney who now lives in Henderson, Nev., and practices out of Barstow, has been an expatriate lawyer since 1996, and plans to share his wisdom as a member of the group.

"I have a cadre of people in California, and get steady referrals," said Griesbaum, who focuses on real estate and business law, and maintains both an office and secretary in Barstow, where, he said, "I've gotten some of the largest verdicts of my life."

Practicing throughout Southern California, last summer he returned for a three-week jury trial in Pomona, where he successfully represented a woman in an elder abuse case.

But when he's home in Henderson, Griesbaum said, "**With Court Call** and the Internet, you can do a lot."

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