



Santa Monica Daily Press

LADIES KNOW WINE
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THE WHAT THE HECK ISSUE

Legal advice at a nice price

BY KRISTIN MAYER

Special to the Daily Press

CITY HALL Professional legal help and live entertainment intersect in the form of senior partners at Solomon, Saltsman & Jamieson law firm.

At work in Playa del Rey, they handle clients as notable as the Catholic Church and

the Getty Villa and recently won a case in the California Supreme Court.

But the fun really kicks in when the time clock stops and pro-bono begins. Ralph Saltsman and Stephen Soloman, senior partners at the law firm, co-host a live legal help television show Wednesday afternoons, broadcasting from the council chambers deep within Santa Monica City Hall.

knows, viewers may just be able to learn a thing or two that can potentially get them out of a sticky legal situation.

"There's some place to put in a little humor," Solomon said. "We're not 'House.' We're not 'American Idol,' but we fill a big void."

Solomon and Saltsman represent opposite ends of the political spectrum and aren't afraid to voice their opinions, a dynamic that is a real crowd pleaser.

"As we discuss things from our opposing perspectives, it's like a fireworks show," said Saltsman, who has worked as partners with Solomon for 30 years.

CALLER-DRIVEN

The show broadcasts to a potential audience of over 1 million people, but on any given Wednesday 10,000 to 20,000 viewers might actually tune in after watching "The Oprah Winfrey Show."

The audience is as diverse as Los Angeles, with viewers ranging from teenagers to millionaires to the unemployed. Viewers who aren't in the market to pay hundreds of dollars per hour for a lawyer can call in for free practical advice. Legal assistance at a better price just doesn't exist.

was discrimination for her restaurant to add chicken sandwiches to the menu. Presumably, the chicken does come before the egg at this eatery.

In another memorable instance, a man called "Legal Help Live" just after being busted for having cocaine all over his face. Apparently he phoned in to inquire if the cops had a case against him considering the fact that he hadn't called them to begin with. It seemed that his initial call for help went to the Fire Department and didn't appreciate the fact that police officers horned in on the action without his invitation.

Attacks by cute, fuzzy animals aren't usually grounds for litigation, but apparently one caller seemed to think so. A minor league baseball pitcher, traumatized by such an attack, wanted to know if he could sue a golf course because a squirrel had bitten his hand while he was playing, and now he couldn't throw.

Self incrimination seemingly knows no candor either. A shop-a-holic once called in and admitted that she had written \$1,000 in bad checks and didn't seem to understand the right to remain silent.

Another caller wanted to sue the Italian government because if the Roman Empire hadn't fallen and set science back 1,000 years, there would be a cure for his diabetes by now.

Aside from the occasional wackiness, the show sometimes takes a turn toward serious social issues as well. Topics as diverse as Walmart expansion and building a rapid transit line along Exposition Boulevard help steer the show back into the realm of standard-issue help seeking.

"Sometimes we point them in the right direction and give them a boot," said Stephen Jamieson, who occasionally fills in as host. "Most of the people that call in are frustrated but are not able to get answers in their everyday life. They get their questions answered, and they go away happy."

Most of the callers are just plain frustrated with their circumstances.

"Some people are really stuck in the system, and you help them untangle," said Robin Green-Parkinson, associate producer of "Legal Help Live."

During a recent show, Solomon and Jamieson suggested that callers join a homeowner's association, call the city's rent control board, look up building permits online, change lawyers if they're uncomfortable, visit the State Bar of California Web site, testify in front of the City Council and check out the rapid transit in Pasadena. These legal

The result is a controversial and entertaining hour of legal advice intermixed with spirited banter and commentary, all with the hope that the audience will actually pay attention and absorb information that otherwise may be indecipherable when dispensed in a more staid environment. Who



ON THE AIR: The logo of the call-in advice show, "Legal Help Live."



Christine Chang news@smdp.com

TO THE RESCUE: Stephen Soloman and Stephen Jamieson co-host "Legal Help Live."

eagles seemingly know no bounds.

Jamieson said pro-bono is the best way possible to help people because they can reach thousands of people per week doing something enjoyable.

"Most people who call don't have access to a lawyer," Solomon said. "Number one, they're going to charge them and, number two, they don't know who to call."

THE SHOW

A call screener sat in an unseen booth monitoring the six listener call-in lines. A man crouched in front of the gallery sits just out of view of the cameras to cue the hosts when to address the on-air callers. Producers, directors and floor managers worked quickly on their feet, taking care of behind-the-camera logistics.

Jamieson and Solomon added finishing touches to their stage makeup before silently sitting down on-set at a table surrounded by books in the City Hall council chambers.

"We don't talk to each other before we walk in so it's fresh," Solomon said.

Each host prepares an hour's worth of legal-related current event discussion material in case the phone lines stop ringing. During a recent broadcast, for instance, Solomon commented on the I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby

trial in his opening segment.

While he spends several hours researching material that he often doesn't have time to discuss on air, Saltsman said the intriguing nature of the subjects touched on keeps him from feeling drained.

"Legal Help Live" airs on Channel 16 in Santa Monica and Channel 36 in Los Angeles every Wednesday from 4 to 5 p.m. Repeats also air daily at 4 p.m. in Santa Monica and on Thursdays from noon to 1 p.m. in Los Angeles.

The show ran for five years on radio based out of Glendale and has appeared on television for the past two years with an overlap year of both radio and television broadcasting in between.

"In seven years, we've never had anybody complain. They appreciate it," Jamieson said.

When a caller stumps the hosts with a question, they invite him to call on the 24-hour phone line so the lawyers can research the topic and follow up, Saltsman said. They even send thank you notes.

"In the end, we're doing it because we love it," Solomon said. "If you can help one person or a thousand people it's gratifying."

Free legal advice, what a concept!

**SOMETIMES WE
POINT THEM IN
THE RIGHT DIRECTION
AND GIVE THEM A BOOT."**

Stephen Jamieson
lawyer, 'Legal Help Live' host

The show provides a place where anyone can pose a legal-related question — no matter what the topic. Callers will ask about everything from landlord-tenant issues and serious felony arrests to child support and worker's compensation cases.

"Because the shows are caller-driven, the callers direct which take the show has, and generally it will twist and turn," Saltsman said. "It's very exciting switching gears that fast."

Certain calls stand out in the hosts' memories and sometimes forced them to struggle to keep a straight face.

An employee at a vegetarian restaurant called a couple or years ago to find out if it