

Firm Decides to Spend on Students Instead of Clients

Note: With this issue, the Business Journal begins a feature called Good Works. It highlights businesses or business people in Los Angeles County who have made a significant and noteworthy contribution to the betterment of the community.

By **AARTHI SIVARAMAN**
Staff Reporter

LINER Yankelevitz Sunshine & Regenstrief LLP used to spend nearly \$100,000 each year on Christmas gifts for clients. But that didn't sit well with the wife of managing partner Stuart A. Liner.

Shortly before the 2004 holiday season, Liner's wife, Stephanie, pointed out that that kind of money could easily go toward sponsoring a full college scholarship to one or more deserving students.

"It's crazy to spend so much money on gifts," she said.

And so was born the LYS&R Scholarship fund.

Originally, the Los Angeles-based law firm donated \$100,000 to six charities that parceled out the funds to needy recipients on their own. But while that was a nice thing to do, the firm didn't find it very fulfilling.

"It was a typical feeling of giving to a bottomless pit," Liner said. "We could not see it, feel it or taste it and simply didn't know where all that money was going."

So the firm decided to get even more involved.

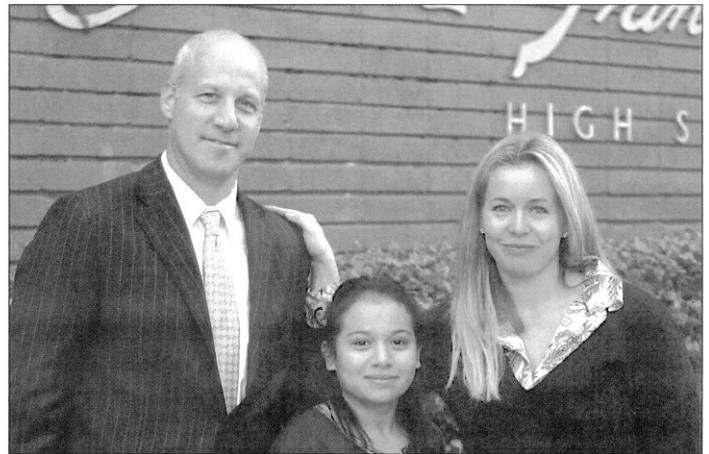
It approached the county's foster care system about locating minors who had been identified as capable of going to college.

Good Works

The minors often leave the foster care system with \$100 in hand and nowhere to go. With more than half a dozen applicants in hand, the firm had them send in essays, and it set up a Web site for people to read the essays and vote for winners.

One of the winners was Aroya Summers. Having spent most of her childhood moving around in the foster care system, she had taken to shoplifting and performed poorly in school before being placed in foster care. Realizing that it was not late to turn her life around, she started working hard at school and was just leaving the foster care system when she was identified by the law firm as a full-ride scholarship candidate.

Summers was the first student to win the scholarship and went to Mount St. Mary's College in Los Angeles, an institution of her choice. She aspires to be a criminal psychologist some day.



Contribution: Ingrid Paredes, center, with the Liners.

Also last year, the firm asked Beat the Odds, a program of the California Defense Fund, to pick a candidate for the college scholarship. The recipient was Ingrid Paredes.

Originally from Guatemala, Paredes had seen her mother murdered on her 12th birthday. However, the Los Angeles resident maintained high grades throughout school and even worked on the side to support herself.

"I did some babysitting and did all kinds of Excel and computer work for my teachers to make money," Paredes said. "There was no way I could have gone to college without a scholarship."

Now, though, she has gained admission to an elite school, Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania, where she wants to earn a degree in chemistry and political science and eventually become a lawyer.

All finalists of the scholarship are offered internships at the law firm and are mentored.

The full scholarship winners are awarded about \$80,000, depending on their college costs, and five other finalists are given \$10,000 each toward their education.

Liner said he treats the winners like his own children, taking them out on dinners, vacations and providing for everything from rent to cell phone bills.

The firm plans to keep the scholarship going as long as it can financially and emotionally handle it.

"To watch these girls literally blossom before your eyes is an indicator of how their lives have changed forever," he said. "Now they feel safe and don't have to worry about survival, but can focus on learning and giving back to the society."