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## **Valley Bar Ends Explorer Program, Cites Ties to Boy Scouts**

*An Advisor Accuses SFVBA of 'Abandonment' of Young People*

By KENNETH OFGANG, Staff Writer

San Fernando Valley Bar Association trustees have decided to end ties to a group for young people interested in law and government, citing the parent organization's affiliation with the Boy Scouts of America.

The decision was made last Thursday, and the association's affiliation with Law and Government Post 1926—the number was selected because it corresponds to the date of the SFVBA's founding—will end by October, according to the post's website.

A co-advisor to the post, Van Nuys attorney/mediator David I. Karp, declined to discuss the matter yesterday but wrote about the controversy on his website.

The cause for concern, he explained, is that the post is part of the Exploring program of Learning for Life, a subsidiary of the Boy Scouts of America.

Learning for Life says its focus is on "character development and career education." While it is open about its affiliation with the BSA, it does not use ritualistic practices such as the Scout Oath and Scout Law, and does not follow the parent group's prohibition against having gay adults serve as leaders and does not limit participation on the basis of sexual orientation, religion or gender.

### **Policy Called 'Repugnant'**

In his web post, Karp—who has been involved with scouting and exploring programs for years and describes himself as "a volunteer for change in BSA's policies from within"—called the BSA's prohibition of gay scout leaders "repugnant."

But the SFVBA program, open to young people ages 14 to 21, has served a valuable function, he said.

"The youth[-]led SFVBA Explorer Post took guidance from Exploring's five areas of emphasis—career opportunities, life skills, citizenship, character education and leadership experience—to create its program and support its goals of youth development, leadership, diversity and fun," Karp wrote, concluding:

"Now, with the severance from Learning for Life, two questions remain for the Bar Association: 'What has it achieved for itself, for its teens, and for its goals, by this decision. And what will be the result for each?'"

### **Activities Canceled**

The post announced on its website that a number of scheduled activities have been cancelled. They include an outing to the Hollywood Bowl to see the concert version of "Rent," a summer campout at Malibu Creek State Park, a trip to the Museum of Tolerance to see its exhibit "Courage: The Vision to End Segregation. The Guts to Fight for It"—highlighting anti-racism efforts by African Americans in the South and Latinos in California—and participation in the AIDS Walk scheduled for October.

Donna Laurent, a Studio City family law attorney who was an advisor to the group, said the

decision to sever ties was “extremely unfortunate” and “an abandonment of the young people that we committed to assisting.”

The program is nearly two years old, she noted, and drew rave reviews until the gay advocacy organization Lambda Legal questioned the relationship between the bar group and Learning for Life.

The attorneys and others who worked with the post, she emphasized, did it out of a strong commitment to diversity.

“We were a completely inclusive group,” she commented. “We would never agree to have any...program that discriminated against anyone. [I don’t believe] this remote association [with the BSA] warranted shutting down this program.”

#### **Funds, Staff Shared**

Jon Davidson, legal director for Lambda Legal, was not available yesterday for comment. In the past, however, he has referred to Learning for Life as a BSA “shell” and said the supposed separation of the two is a “sham” because the groups co-mingle funds and share offices, staff, and management.

Other entities, such as the Los Angeles police and fire departments, have ended or are ending their relationships with Learning for Life, and are moving toward creation of similar programs not tied to outside groups. But its not clear that will happen in a private association like the Valley Bar, Laurent told the MetNews.

“I don’t think I’m going to be involved in any successor program,” she commented. “I don’t know if the bar is going to find enough good committed people to replace [Post 1926].”

Phone calls to the SFVBA’s president, Robert Flagg, and president-elect, Seymour Amster, were not returned.

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