

## 2004 Loren Miller Legal Services Award



### Bruce G. Iwasaki

*"Bruce is a true leader and beacon for those of us yearning to help those less fortunate than ourselves. There are few like him that are willing to dedicate their personal and professional lives to the provision of legal services to the poor."*

*Ronie M. Schmelz, Partner, Sidley Austin Brown & Wood LLP and President, Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles*

Throughout his career, Bruce Iwasaki has been actively involved in the provision of legal services to the poor, as a lawyer, manager and national leader. For more than 19 years, he worked in legal services programs, twelve as an attorney and seven as Executive Director of the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles (LAFLA), the largest federally funded legal services program in California. During a nine-year period at O'Melveny & Myers, Mr. Iwasaki handled pro bono cases, served on the board of a national legal services support center, served on the Legal Services Trust Fund Commission, and helped create the California Commission on Access to Justice. Today, he serves on the American Bar Association's Standing Committee on Legal Aid and Indigent Defendants (SCLAID) as the sole representative from a civil legal aid program. Mr. Iwasaki also serves on the boards of the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, the Center for Law and Social Policy, the Management Information Exchange and the Board of Trustees of the Los Angeles County Bar Association.

Upon his return to LAFLA as the Executive Director, Mr. Iwasaki helped restore the firm to national prominence. He has overseen an increase in funding and support, an expansion of the attorney staff and a strengthening of the organization's litigation work, community lawyering, publications, website and administration. As a result, the quality and depth of services provided to LAFLA's clients have been improved.

On a statewide level, Mr. Iwasaki has helped to strengthen the delivery of legal services in California. As a member of the Access to Justice Working Group (predecessor to the California Commission on Access to Justice) from 1993 to 1997, Mr. Iwasaki helped draft the ground-breaking 1996 report that focused critical attention on the unmet legal needs of California's low-income community and launched a new era of bench-bar collaboration toward the common goal of equal justice. From 2000-2002, he also was an active member of the

committee that wrote the update to the report, *The Path to Equal Justice: A Five-Year Status Report on Access to Justice in California*. In addition, Mr. Iwasaki lends his experience and knowledge as a trainer and panelist on issues of management, fundraising, media advocacy, communications, and technology, and as a mentor for new leaders in the legal services community at the local, state and national levels.

During his career, as a legal services attorney and as a pro bono attorney, Mr. Iwasaki worked on numerous cases that benefited the poor. Among the more notable cases were:

- \* *Lopez v. Heckler*, 725 F.2d 1489 (9th Cir. 1984). Lead counsel among several legal aid programs challenging the Secretary of Health and Human Services' non-acquiescence to Court of Appeals precedent. Resulted in the restoration of Social Security disability benefits to tens of thousands of people.
- \* *Etter v. Board of Supervisors*. Los Angeles Superior Court, 1985. Co-counsel with the Western Center on Law and Poverty. Resulted in settlement establishing County of Los Angeles Ability-to-Pay program, permitting low-income people to obtain medical services on a free or sliding scale basis.
- \* *Sanchez v. Board of Supervisors*. Los Angeles Superior Court, 1987. Lead counsel in a suit to stop Los Angeles County health care cuts that resulted in a successful injunction against service reductions.
- \* *Gregorio T. v. Pete Wilson*. While at O'Melveny & Myers in 1994, filed federal class action in conjunction with the American Civil Liberties Union and Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund challenging the constitutionality of Proposition 187. Resulted in an injunction against implementation of a ballot measure that would have denied undocumented immigrants health services and education.