

Trying Comfort

With stylish digs and hearty meals, Patricia Tweedy aims to put parties at ease

By Emily Green
Daily Journal Staff Writer

SACRAMENTO — Patricia Tweedy's offices are nicer than many homes.

A stylish and airy three-story Victorian house in the heart of midtown Sacramento, the building — which is not Tweedy's home — inspires confidence. With five converted offices, a full-fledged kitchen and tasteful decorating, the house seems an extension of Tweedy's style: elegant, comfortable, inviting.

"I mediated lots of cases as a litigant," Tweedy said. "And I found myself in a very small area with my clients hours upon hours and hours and found myself hungry and angry. And so part of my goal here is to make things a little more comfortable for people, so they don't find themselves in that situation, so they don't want to bolt."

A Sacramento native, Tweedy is a one-woman shop — a prominent defense litigator turned mediator, a small-business owner, and a do-it-yourself kind of person who uses an all-encompassing, mild-mannered approach to get clients to settle. She sold her current office building when she closed her solo law practice. But then the new owner couldn't make the payments, and Tweedy bought it back. It was meant to be, she said. Her clients range from her former adversaries in cases to high school friends.

And in a field dominated by men — and where women mediators often focus on family law issues — Tweedy brings a unique perspective as a woman. She is quick to point out that she doesn't market herself as a woman mediator, but she acknowledges that fact alone brings in many clients.

She said that when she mediates sexual harassment and hostile work environment cases with female plaintiffs, she assumes the lawyers selected her in part because the plaintiffs "are more comfortable telling their stories to another woman." Tweedy is also

sought after to mediate claims involving injuries to sensitive body parts.

"I get a lot of breast injuries, I had a colon injury, I had a rectal injury, I've had vaginal injuries," Tweedy said. "I've had breast burns where people want me to see what the scar looks like."

Once, a litigant asked Tweedy to feel her breast, which had turned rock-hard after an auto accident messed up her breast implant. "She wanted me to be able to tell the other side," Tweedy said. "She didn't want to hug people because she was afraid of how it would feel when she hugged them."

Retired 3rd District Court of Appeal Presiding Justice Arthur Scotland, who has collaborated with Tweedy at the Anthony M. Kennedy Inn of Court, said she knows how to make people comfortable.

"She just has this very gracious, warm personality that is inviting in the sense that she puts people at ease," he said. "She is a person that can bring people together in any context."

"She has a quiet demeanor," said Sacramento plaintiffs attorney William M. Lyons, of Wilcoxon Callahan LLP, who has mediated five cases in front of Tweedy. He said Tweedy is open to "full disclosure and discussion" but will withhold certain sensitive information from the other side. "She is highly regarded and she is terribly efficient, so that's about the best that you can do."

Plus, he added, "she has great lunches."

The lunches are part of Tweedy's all-encompassing approach. In an effort to have litigants feel relaxed and open-minded, Tweedy provides an array of snacks and hearty meals for the participants to eat. They can wander in and out of the kitchen as they please. Ideally, she said, litigants don't leave for lunch — because sometimes they return having thought twice about how much ground they are willing to yield.

"The whole setting is conducive to a congenial approach to mediation,"



Emily Green / Daily Journal

Patricia Tweedy

Affiliation: Tweedy ADR

Location: Sacramento

Areas of specialty: Personal Injury, Medical Malpractice

said attorney George E. Murphy, of Murphy Campbell Guthrie & Alliston in Sacramento, who had a bad-faith insurance dispute before her. "It's just comfortable."

Murphy said Tweedy's techniques are similar to that of other mediators — exposing the weaknesses of the respective sides and encouraging compromise — and that her effectiveness largely stems from her "whole demeanor."

"She can be critical in a way that doesn't offend or doesn't cause your clients to become angry or want to leave," Murphy said. "It's very subtle."

Tweedy graduated from McGeorge School of Law in 1981 and joined a general-practice firm. In 1991, Tweedy opened her own firm, eventually hiring five associates. She specialized in representing hospitals in malpractice cases — including several major hospitals in the Sacramento area. She also occasionally represented plaintiffs. In 2008, Tweedy served as president of the Association of Defense Counsel of Northern California and Nevada. She is currently a member of the American Board of Trial Advocates.

In 2006, Tweedy closed her practice and joined the firm Schuering Zimmerman & Doyle LLP. On Jan. 2, 2010, she became a full-time mediator. Her work representing hospitals gave her a strong understanding of medicine, testing procedures and brain and body injuries — an under-

standing lawyers who appear before her said makes her especially effective in personal injury and malpractice claims. Tweedy also mediates disputes in almost every other area besides family law.

Noting that it's not in her nature to self-promote, Tweedy was reluctant to expound on what distinguishes her from other mediators. She said she cares deeply about helping people mend their relationships and that, at the very least, the litigants who walk in her door "will find a person they can trust with their stories."

"Really it's that little extra added — her personality — that differentiates her from the pack," said defense attorney Julie Clark Martin of La Follette Johnson in Sacramento. Mediation is all about building consensus, Martin said, and Tweedy "is particularly good at that."

Here are some attorneys who have used Tweedy as a mediator:

William M. Lyons, Wilcoxon Callahan LLP, Sacramento; David P. Mastagni, Mastagni, Holstedt, Amick, Miller & Johnsen, Sacramento; George Murphy, Murphy Campbell Guthrie & Alliston, PLC, Sacramento; John Vrieze, Mitchell, Brisso, Delaney & Vrieze, Eureka; Michael Burke, Vogl Meredith Burke LLP, San Francisco; Ralph A. Lombardi, Lombardi, Loper & Conant LLP, Oakland; Jeff Goodwin, Goodwin Law Corp., Folsom; Julie Clark Martin, La Follette, Johnson, DeHaas, Fesler & Ames PC; Steve H. Schultz, Law Office of Steven Schultz, Sacramento; Robert Zimmerman, Schuering Zimmerman & Doyle LLP, Sacramento

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