

Legal Aid Society Inaugurates Courthouse Office

By Dan Morgan
Staff Reporter

The Legal Aid Society of Washington, friend of the poor man with a problem, marked another milestone in its 32-year history last week with the opening of an office in General Sessions Court.

The Society's new branch took over the second floor of the civil building in a merger

with the D.C. Bar Association's legal assistance bureau, which formerly was the sole tenant.

Though the organization set up shop with barely a murmur, the foothold in the strategic location is an important step for the Society, director Allan Fisher explained.

Most important, Fisher believes, is the fact that there now will be a paid attorney on hand every weekday from 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. to help with just about any type of civil matter. Ten volunteer lawyers will operate part time.

Canada Wheat Sales Outpace Newsprint

OTTAWA, (AP)—Canada's wheat sales in the first quarter of 1964 topped exports of newsprint—the country's traditional leading export—by more than \$20 million, the Dominion Bureau of Statistics has reported. The change was the result of a huge increase in wheat sales to Russia, Communist China and Eastern European countries. In the first three months of 1964 wheat exports were valued at \$191.8 million compared with newsprint shipments of \$171.4 million.

Judges and court workers in the domestic relations, small claims and civil branches downstairs can send indigent persons upstairs for "almost instant" assistance, James F. Temple, attorney in charge, points out.

The branch is expected to boost the number of persons served by the Society from the current 7400 to about 10,500 annually, Fisher estimates.

During the first week of operation, 55 persons walked in with a variety of troubles. As already is the custom at

the Society's Howard University branch and at the main office, at 805 G st. n.w., legal aid attorneys do not promise any miracles.

What they do is listen to each person's story to see if his rights have been abridged, and if so, seek a solution. The files at the main office are full of stories of righted wrongs.

Last week at the new unit a woman who refused to pay her gas bill because her gas pipe leaked was told she would have to pay, since she had responsibility for maintenance of the pipe.

Another person who signed a promissory note with a friend for the purchase of a ring wanted to know if she could be held liable for the note now that the co-signer had lost the ring gambling.

More typical of the hundreds of family problems that come to the Society's attention was the case of a woman who desperately needed support for her children.

A volunteer at the new office agreed to search court records downstairs for proof that she was married to her

husband and was entitled to his support.

"We don't try to compete with the legal profession when the recovery on a civil suit can pay the fee," Temple explains.

At the same time, Fisher says, the Society takes many tedious, nonpaying cases off the hands of attorneys in private practice.

"This work is not for the impatient or excitable lawyer," he comments. "A legal aid attorney must be able to listen to someone talk in circles for half an hour and still be able to go to the heart of the problem."

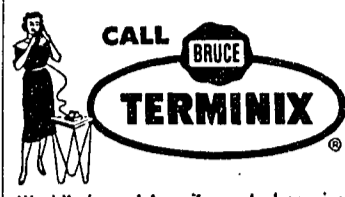
Because of its value to the profession, lawyers contribute about two-thirds of the funds to support the Society. As a member of the Health and Welfare Council, sharing in United Givers Fund, the organization gets the rest of its support from the public. This year the organization has a budget of about \$100,000.

But money problems may confront the Society next spring, Fisher points out, when Bar Association support for the Court office ends and

funds for the new unit must come from other sources.

Unlike the Legal Aid Agency, which assists accused criminals, the Legal Aid Society does not draw on congressional funds.

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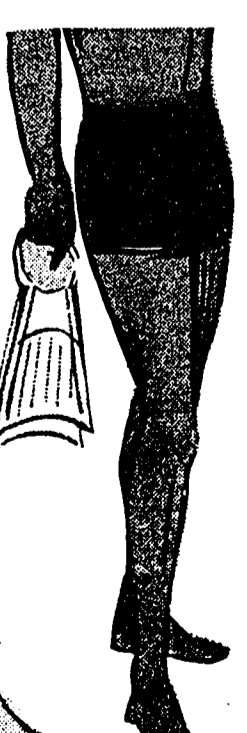
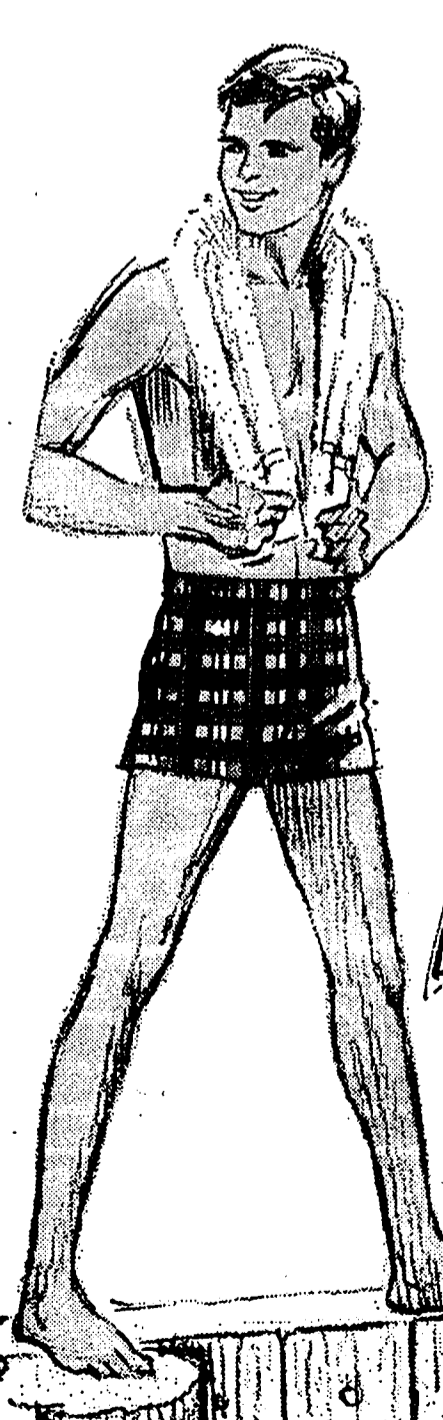
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