PHOTO BY LINDA SANDSMARK

Longtime San Leandro Attorney Matthew J. Gonsalves (center) with his legal secretary Carolina Martinez (left) and bookkeeper Diane Madden.

By Linda Sandsmark
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Longtime family lawyer and San Leandro native Matthew Gonsalves has moved his office from the Bal Theatre neighborhood to a newly-remodeled location on Estudillo Avenue.

Over the years, Gonsalves has used legal expertise and gentle humor to build up a successful practice in family law.

“Where there’s a will, there’s a relative,” he jokes. “People like to fight with their family— I’m in court a lot.”

Kidding aside, Gonsalves’ new office offers a roomy, calming atmosphere, where he and his staff specialize in family law, divorce, child custody, spousal and child support, domestic violence, contract law, probate, wills, and more.

One specialty that sets Gonsalves’ law office apart from others is “Marvin Cases,” meaning non-marital cohabitation cases. (The name is taken from actor Lee Marvin, whose live-in girlfriend sued for spousal support when the couple split up.)

Gonsalves assists non-married partners from being “thrown under a bus” when one person leaves or dies. Often there are as many children, property items and problems to sort out as with married couples.

“We want to continue combining small-firm personal attention and service with the technology and experience people associate with larger firms,” says Gonsalves.

Gonsalves himself was raised in San Leandro’s Floresta Gardens neighborhood. He attended St. Alphonsus Elementary, Bancroft Middle School and San Leandro High (class of ’73).

From there he went to Cal State Hayward (now called Cal State East Bay) where he worked in student government and at the college’s radio station, KSUH. He moved to Fullerton to attend Western State School of Law and graduated in 1980.

“I took the bar in Long Beach, packed my car and came back to San Leandro. It seemed like a good idea at the time, although Orange County was a beautiful place. It was much smaller when I was there,” says Gonsalves.

His first job in the legal field was at the law offices of Simonian and Pretzer, becoming a partner within a few years. He became certified to practice before the U. S. Supreme Court in 1985— a step few local attorneys have taken.

In 1986, Gonsalves took over the law office of retiring attorney Stanley Block. He opened his own practice on the 14000 block of East 14th Street, where he remained for a quarter century.

Last year he decided to go from being a renter to an owner, buying and remodeling the building where his practice now resides.

Staff members include legal secretary Carolina Martinez, bookkeeper Diane Madden, and paralegal Cortland Kirkeby. The staff is fluent in Spanish, including reading, writing and interpreting.

Gonsalves is active in the San Leandro community, especially the arts. He served on the board of directors for California Conservatory Theater for over 20 years.

“We are well-connected with the community. If you have a problem, even if not necessarily legal in nature, we try to refer you to the right person or place,” he says.

The Law Offices of Matthew J. Gonsalves are located at 438 Estudillo Ave., between the Main Library and the fire station. Call 351-5102 or e-mail gonsalvesatty@sbcglobal.net or visit www.gonsalvesatty.com.