

LOS ANGELES

# Daily Journal

— SINCE 1888 —

OFFICIAL NEWSPAPER OF THE CITY OF LOS ANGELES AND THE COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2006

## Iwasaki Joins Lim Ruger, Gets John Minor Wisdom Award

**By Gabe Friedman**  
Daily Journal Staff Writer

**B**ruce Iwasaki, former head of the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles, was still looking for a pen in his new office this week when the good news arrived: On the same day that he joined Lim, Ruger & Kim as a partner, Iwasaki received the John Minor Wisdom Award for professionalism in public service.

The award, given by the American Bar Association's litigation section, honored Iwasaki for his service at Legal Aid, which provides legal advice to low-income people.

During his nine-year tenure as executive director, the number of staff attorneys grew to 60 and the annual budget doubled to \$14 million.

But this was far from Iwasaki's mind on Monday when he started a business dispute and consumer plaintiff practice at Lim, Ruger & Kim, a small, minority-owned firm in downtown Los Angeles.

The combination of starting a new job and receiving the award left him lightheaded.

"I'm very humbled to receive it ... people who receive awards often get a big head," Iwasaki said. "It's a recognition not for me, but my colleagues at the Legal Aid Foundation."

Certainly, Iwasaki is credited with restoring quality of service at the Legal Aid Foundation in Los Angeles. Besides doubling its resources, he also oversaw the merger of the Los Angeles and Long Beach Legal Aid organizations.

"It was a place that had not been well

managed before I came," Iwasaki said.

Dennis Rockway, director of advocacy and training for the organization in Los Angeles, credited Iwasaki with creating a "culture of learning." Iwasaki said that he always sought to bring the same quality of service that people expected from the private sector. He is well positioned to know the difference.

After graduating UCLA School of Law in 1976, he spent his first decade practicing general poverty law at Legal Aid, followed by nine years at O'Melveny & Myers practicing business litigation.

In 1997, he returned to Legal Aid and served for nine years as executive director.

Last Friday, Iwasaki left the Legal Aid offices near Koreatown for the comforts of private practice in downtown again.

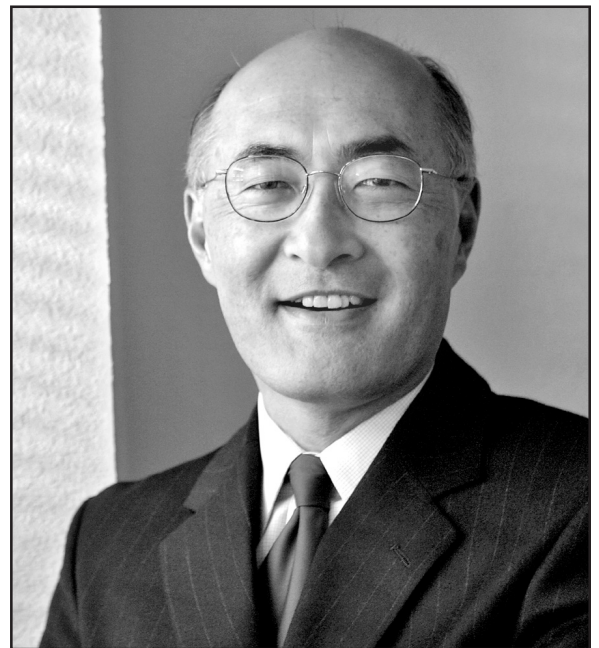
Only two days back into private practice, Iwasaki was still trying to articulate the difference.

He said that executive directors and law firm partners require similar skill sets.

The skills needed to schmooze at fundraisers resemble those used for business development in private practice.

As far as providing quality service, Iwasaki said he spent the past nine years studying how to raise standards at Legal Aid.

"In my view, the Legal Aid Foundation



HUGH WILLIAMS / Daily Journal

"In my view, the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles is one of the most important law firms in town," said Bruce Iwasaki who recently joined Lim Ruger.

of Los Angeles is one of the most important law firms in town," Iwasaki said. "It is the place for people with no where else to turn."

Alan Rader, a litigation partner at O'Melveny and Myers, also made the transition from the public sector, serving as a Legal Aid staff attorney and then executive director of the Western Center on Law and Poverty.

Rader pointed out one big difference in the private sector.

"Well," he said, "it pays better."

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