

# Working for the past and future

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## GE lawyer lauded for environmental, preservation efforts

By Jean Ayers

SPECIAL TO THE INDEX-TRIBUNE

Local attorney Susan Brandt-Hawley works in two different worlds - and both are reflected in her small Glen Ellen office, which is located in a brick building built in 1905 by Glen Ellen pioneer Joshua Chauvet.

The outside of the office conveys a solid sense of history and an appreciation of the past. This shows the side of Brandt-Hawley that loves history and seeks to preserve it for the future. Brandt-Hawley is one of the country's top historic preservation lawyers.

Inside, the office is bright and smoothly functional, with 1950s modernism reflected in art and furniture. This shows the up-to-date side of attorney Brandt-Hawley: a forward-looking innovator. She chose to specialize in preservation and environmental law more than 20 years ago, which placed her at the leading edge of that movement.

These two different sides of Brandt-Hawley are nicely integrated and mutually supportive. Her heart is drawn to the past which she seeks to preserve, yet she is a thoroughly modern woman.

A dynamic and effective litigator, she has been acknowledged as one of the best in the state. The Daily Journal, a statewide lawyers' newspaper, has just named Brandt-Hawley one of 30 top women litigators in California.

Earlier this year, Brandt-Hawley received the coveted CLAY award, as one of only 26 lawyers named by California Lawyer Magazine as an "Attorney of the Year" for 2001.

All this is pretty heady stuff for a small-town lawyer in the tiny village of Glen Ellen. But Brandt-Hawley accepts it all in stride. She is proud to make some small but real differences, and derives satisfaction from her accomplishments.

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She is also proud of work in the town of

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Susan Brandt-Hawley

Guerneville, where she represented the Bridge Club to save the old Guerneville Bridge.

However, Brandt-Hawley's work has not just affected the immediate area. She has done environmental and historical preservation work throughout the state, from San Diego to Mendocino County.

Although many of Brandt-Hawley's cases have affected the landscape, she is most satisfied with the 10 or 12 cases that have resulted in published opinions now widely cited as new legal precedent. Brandt-Hawley could easily have more such published cases involving the California Environmental Quality Act than any other lawyer.

Among these is a California Supreme Court case protecting historic resources in the city of Sierra Madre, and a Central Valley ruling that development projects cannot be approved without an adequate water supply.

Brandt-Hawley also notes that many environmental cases can be settled without need for extended court action, and she works hard to use her knowledge and experience to resolve disputes. Her expertise has also led to a role as invited faculty for CEQA courses presented to the state's judges.

When Brandt-Hawley opened her law office in Glen Ellen in 1979, she had no expectations that her practice would lead to fame and success. She was happy working in a small town where she could pursue her professional goals and raise a family.

She and husband Bill Hawley built their home on a mountaintop in the Mayacamas near Glen Ellen, which made the commute to

her office short and pleasant. Running her own practice afforded her the flexible time to care for a family, too.

Even while practicing general law, Hawley took several early environmental cases, including representing the Friends of Glen Ellen.

Her first major environmental case was in 1981 when she represented a group that was fighting the scale of a Hewlett Packard project in Rohnert Park. The press heavily covered that month-long trial and, Hawley admits with a smile, "It got my name out there."

Following that, she was invited to support efforts to preserve sensitive environmental areas and historic sites around the state. Hawley says that was "an exciting time; I was learning so much."

In 1991 Brandt-Hawley was invited to serve on the board of the California Preservation Foundation. Through that organization she met a network of people who were concerned with historic preservation.

She continued to be involved in a wide range of environmental cases, involving such things as gravel mining, endangered plants, river protection, airport expansion, new towns and, increasingly, protection of historic resources.

In 1998, Brandt-Hawley was named to the Board of Advisors for the Washington D.C.-based National Trust for Historic Preservation, which appoints only two advisors from each of the 50 states. And in 1997, the Sierra Club named Brandt-Hawley a Conservationist of the Year.

With her two recent awards, Brandt-Hawley is one of the top lawyers in California. Yet

when asked where she sees herself 10 years from now, she promptly answers, "as a grandmother."

Brandt-Hawley said that despite her success as an attorney, she values most her family and friends.

And her list of friends includes the staff members in her office. Brandt-Hawley said it is the whole team that has helped ensure the success of the law practice. Sara Hews arrived in Brandt-Hawley's office 14 years ago.

"I hired Sara as a temporary legal assistant, and she stayed," Hawley said. "With a degree in environmental studies and a deep interest in the practice, Sara has been a key contributor."

Rachel Howlett, one of Brandt-Hawley's longtime best friends, sought a career change from landscaping to law.

"Four years ago Rachel started here as a legal assistant," Brandt-Hawley said, "Now she's excelled in her first year of law school."

Anne Cottrell, an associate attorney working with Brandt-Hawley since October 2001, is an experienced environmental lawyer who first practiced in Oregon.

Shannen Jones, recently hired as a legal assistant and office manager, rounds out the practice and is described as "terrific" by Brandt-Hawley.

Brandt-Hawley and her husband have raised two boys in Glen Ellen. Emile, 23, will graduate from Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo this summer with a degree in philosophy. Zane, 17, will enter his senior year at Maria Carrillo High School this fall.

Bill Hawley is a grape grower and producer for the family's small, ultra-premium winery, Random Ridge, in the Mount Veeder appellation. The Hawleys enjoy their bucolic life in little Glen Ellen, where Brandt-Hawley has found a unique niche in the present, balancing the world of the past and the world of the future.

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A 25-year resident of Sonoma Valley, Jean Ayers has been free-lance writing for 15 years. She can be reached at 996-5995.