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Profile of an Activist

Steve Fabian, Chapter Leader

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Sonoma Chapter leader Steve Fabian with son Jay, 8, at ACLU-NC Activist Conference.

Every time the ACLU Sonoma County Chapter participates in a community event, Steve Fabian makes sure that the chapter is accompanied by an American flag. For Steve, it is a way of countering the use of patriotic symbols by the right wing. "Nothing," Steve says, "is more patriotic than defending civil liberties."

Since attending his first ACLU meeting at the urging of his girlfriend Judy McCann more than

ten years ago, Steve Fabian's tireless activism, vision and leadership has turned the ACLU Sonoma County Chapter into one of the most successful chapters in Northern California, if not the country. Two months after his initial meeting, Steve was elected Chapter Chair. A month later, the Chapter put out its first newsletter Sonoma Civil Liberties, with Steve as Editor. Not three months passed before Steve launched the Chapter's first membership drive. Later that summer, the Chapter organized the successful campaign to defeat Measure A (which would have created a county-wide drug task force that was accountable to no one and posed grave dangers to civil liberties) by a vote of 2 to 1, despite initial polls that favored its passage at 55%. In November of that same year, the Chapter started its first Bill of Rights night fundraiser, phoning donors and soliciting contributions for the ACLU-NC. By the time the Chapter Dinner rolled around a year after Steve became Chair, attendance topped 200, more than double the previous year.

Today, Steve Fabian is married to Judy McCann who first brought him to the ACLU. The ACLU Sonoma County Chapter has consistently ranked first in recruiting and retaining new members, as well as being one of the most active, with leadership roles in the campaigns to defeat Propositions 187 and 209. Sonoma Civil Liberties, which Steve edits, has a circulation of 1200 and is published 3 to 4 times annually. Steve often appears on talk radio and television, commenting on key ACLU issues such as immigrant rights, the death penalty, the "three strikes" law and censorship. Many ACLU members know Steve from his numerous panel presentations at ACLU Activist Conferences.

Yet for Steve, the reward from his activism is simple. "We have two young children. You are not only fighting for yourself and the people you know, but for the future as well," says Steve, who has served as the Deputy Public Defender of Sonoma County for 20 years.

"My father told me you should always try to make the world a bit of a better place while you're there," Steve says, and civil rights activism is still a family affair for the Fabians. Three years ago, he recruited his brother Gary, who now serves as Treasurer at the ACLU Sonoma County Chapter. And nothing is more gratifying for Steve than tabling for the ACLU with his children Jay, 8, and Audrey, 7, or bringing them to ACLU conferences, raising them to be patriotic Americans. "Even if they don't understand everything [the ACLU stands for], they understand the ACLU is helping people be free."

Sonoma County Chapter leader Steve Fabian will be honored with the 1998 Lola Hanzel Courageous Advocacy Award as an outstanding ACLU-NC volunteer at the Bill of Rights Day Celebration on December 6.

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