

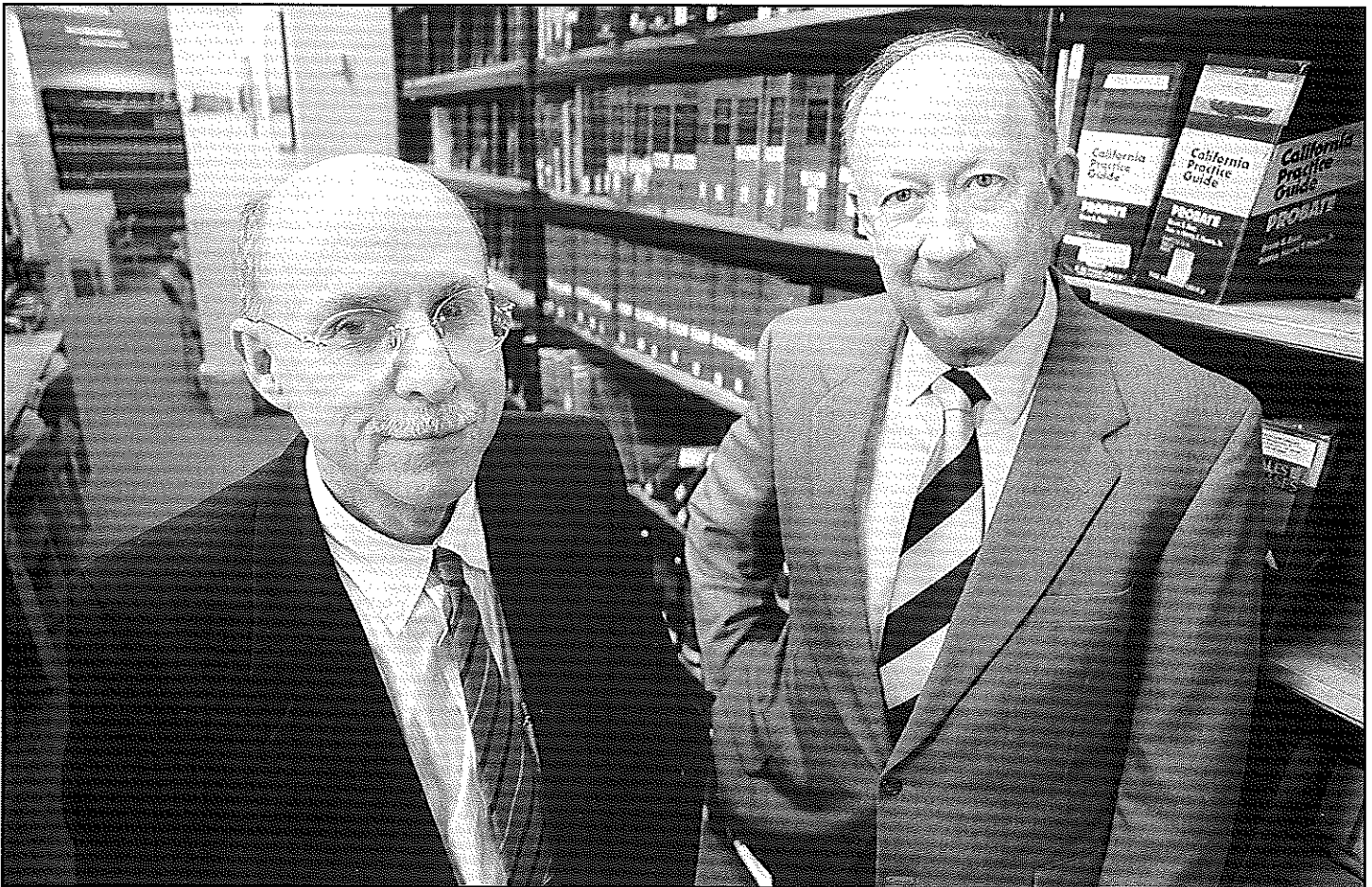
SAN FRANCISCO

# Daily Journal

Serving the Bay Area  
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## ALL BOOKED UP



S. TODD ROGERS/ Daily Journal

**Book Lovers** — Jacob Koff, left, head librarian of the Mills Law Library, provides a service much appreciated by longtime patron Bertram Izant.

**By Erik Cummins**  
Daily Journal Staff Writer

Every week, and sometimes every day, sole practitioner Bertram Izant strolls into the Mills Law Library.

Robert Mann, an accountant and fellow tenant of the Mills Building, also can be found on most days browsing the 30,000-volume collection.

### Members of the City's Only Subscription Law Library Appreciate Its Thousands of Volumes

"It's indispensable," said Mann, a patron of the library since it opened in 1987. Located on the first floor at 220 Montgomery St. in the heart of the Financial District, the Mills Law Library is perhaps the only subscription law library on the West Coast. It's something of a throwback to an earlier era when lawyers practiced alone or in small firms and did much of their research in libraries.

# LIBRARY: The County Runs Its Own Facility

Now even the smallest law firms subscribe to such on-line research services as LexisNexis or West, and new generations of law students are taught to go on-line first and open the books last.

But the Mills Law Library is not an anachronism, at least according to some of its 1,100 members.

David Benjamin, partner of the 10-lawyer firm of Benjamin, Weill & Mazer, has been a subscriber for more than 10 years.

"We have excellent computer resources in our offices. It augments that for us," said Benjamin, a tenant of the neighboring Russ Building.

Benjamin and members of his firm find secondary sources and treatises at the library. And the library can borrow rarer texts through its inter-library loan service.

"It allows us to do that without stocking the books ourselves," he said.

Benjamin, a business-litigation attorney, used to travel to the county law library when it was located at City Hall. He also used the library's Financial District branch at the Monadnock Building on Market Street.

These days he uses the Mills Law Library almost exclusively.

"I find it very reliable," he said. "A lot of times in the county [law library] you can't find the books. I think [the Mills] is very expansive."

The Legislature established the San Francisco Law Library in 1865. Today, it has three branches, including its main facility in the War Memorial Building and a small outpost in the Civic Center Courthouse.

Its problems began in 1995, when it left its longtime home at City Hall, which was undergoing seismic retrofitting. Two-thirds of its enormous 310,000-volume collection was placed in storage. Those books remain inaccessible to staff and patrons.

Plans for a new library at 525 Golden Gate Ave. will be presented to the Board of Supervisors later this year. If approved, it could open as soon as 2005.

Despite its well-reported problems, the county law library remains an outstanding resource, particularly to pro per litigants, said Jacob Koff, head librarian at the Mills Building.

"They do a pretty good job providing the information that people want," he said. "They do very well with the public." Although not as old as the county law library, the Mills Law Library is certainly a venerable institution. The building's first law library opened in 1924, following a series of renovations to the 1892 structure.

"They put in a law library because this building has always been known as a lawyers building," Koff said.

In 1932, a 22-story tower was added to the building and the Bar Association of San Francisco took over the top floor. The bar helped maintain the library until 1948, when the county law library agreed to operate the facility as its Financial District branch. The county moved its collection in 1986 to the Monadnock Building.

The Swig Co., which owns the Mills Building, decided it couldn't do without a library and hired Koff to reopen one as a service to its many lawyer and accountant tenants. Over the years, lawyers in other nearby buildings have joined the library.

Subscription law libraries are rare on the West Coast, where most states operate public law libraries. In California, the state requires each county to maintain its own law library.

"I think San Francisco is somewhat unique because we have such a large number of attorneys concentrated in such a small area," Koff said. "In other urban areas, like Los Angeles, where people are so spread out, I don't think this model would work."

Starting with a collection it purchased from a defunct Peninsula law firm, the library has grown to 31,000 volumes. It survives on an annual budget of \$322,000.

"We charge membership dues to pay the

bills," said Koff, a former librarian for Baker & McKenzie.

Sole practitioners pay \$275 a year to belong, a remarkably affordable rate at a time when book costs increase by double digits each year and some daily advance sheets cost even more, members said.

Supplements to many basic legal resources can run \$500 per year.

"The economics are really good for a small firm," Koff said. "By joining the library, they can leverage that into a much, much bigger collection."

Koff said the library puts small firm lawyers "on a level playing field" with those at large firms such as Bingham McCutchen, which maintain their own libraries. Bingham has more than 30,000 volumes in its San Francisco law library.

"We tried to bring the same services as if you had your own staff," Koff said.

That staff comprises Koff, another full-time librarian and a part-time assistant. That's more than enough, said Mann, the CPA.

"Mr. Koff or one of his assistants can direct you to almost any area," he said.

Koff, who charges \$100 an hour for extensive research projects, can answer most questions quickly and at no cost.

"Personal service and attention are one of the most important things here," he said. "Anybody can put books on a shelf. But do you have someone who can help?"

Although the library subscribes to the major on-line services, books remain its heart.

"Not every publication has an on-line equivalent," Koff said.

The jury is still out on whether on-line services will ultimately supplant libraries.

"Some people thought the same thing would happen to newspapers," Izant said.

Izant, a general business lawyer, keeps an old set of Witkin books and some codes in his office.

"I find it very pleasant to come down here," he said. "It's just an elevator ride away."

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