

Lawyer marks firsts in E. Palo Alto

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By SHARON NOGUCHI

When LaDoris Hazzard Cordell decided she wanted to practice law in East Palo Alto, she didn't anticipate the changes she'd be making to realize her ambition.

Ms. Cordell will open her law office at 2369 University Ave. this month, marking several "firsts."

She's the first attorney to begin a private practice in East Palo Alto, and the first person to open a professional office building.

And Ms. Cordell, 27, is still in the first year of her own law practice.

She was graduated in 1974 from Stanford University Law School where she was the only black woman in her class.

She was the first recipient outside the South to be awarded the NAACP's four-year Earl Warren fellowship, offered to young black lawyers. She worked a year in the San Francisco office of the NAACP legal defense fund, then began looking for space to set up her own office in East Palo Alto.

But she couldn't find a building with the resources an attorney needs — a law library, a copy machine, adequate space — so she and her husband, Gary, decided to buy one.

After waiting seven months for financing, a contractor began refurbishing a rundown, converted house. In a few weeks it will be ready with six law offices, a library and a reception room.

While searching for office space in East Palo Alto, Ms. Cordell began practicing from a Palo Alto office.

And she took time out to have a daughter, Cheran, now 13 months old.

The only legal services avail-



LaDoris Cordell

able in East Palo Alto is offered by San Mateo County legal aid. "When people want professional services, they go across the highway," Ms. Cordell said.

"I'm trying to change people's attitudes about this com-

munity," she added. "People (professionals) believe they can't make money because all the people here are poor. That's a fallacy."

She pointed out half her clients are white and half are (Continued on page 3, col. 5)

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black; most of the black clients live in East Palo Alto.

Some professionals also believe their white clients would not follow them to East Palo Alto for services, Ms. Cordell said. She intends to dispel that notion, she said.

She emphasized she won't lower her rates when she moves her office. "If you lower your rates, some people feel you're lowering your standards. I don't want to imply my services are worth less just because I'm in this community," she said.

Both rich and poor people need and will support professional services, she said.

She said she will look first for lawyers, then other profes-

sionals, as tenants for the offices.

Ms. Cordell insists she's realistic, not idealistic, about opening the law offices, which she said eventually will house her own firm.

She is a native of Ardmore, Pa., a suburb of Philadelphia. She attended Antioch College in Antioch, Ohio, where she majored in theater.

She's "starting from the ground" in this venture, and concedes she's scared — she and her husband have channeled all their resources into it.

But she believes students straight out of law school should have opportunities to start practicing immediately. "Why not be productive right from the start?" she asked.

CORDELL (Cont.)