

Life

Good news!

Chap

A professional upswing in East P.A.

By Sharon Noguchi
Times Staff Writer

EAST PALO ALTO — When the first attorney to set up practice here opened her offices, many people said she'd never make it.

Now, two years later, three more professionals have joined LaDoris Cordell in practicing in East Palo Alto.

Dr. Betty Jo Smith, a surgeon, has opened Faith Clinic at 2119 Capitol Ave., realizing a life-long dream to set up her own practice.

Attorneys Cameron Cunningham and Richard Potack now occupy suites in the professional building, 2369 University Ave., where Ms. Cordell has her offices.

Although their businesses are new, none of the three are strangers to the community. Dr. Smith has been a staff physician at Drew Medical-Dental Center, almost across the street from her offices.

Cunningham and Potack, who had occupied offices on Willow Road in Menlo Park, have handled many cases from East Palo Alto.

Dr. Smith, 40, is a native of Dade City, Fla., and attended Fisk Uni-

versity, then Meharry Medical College, both in Nashville, Tenn.

After an internship at Presbyterian Medical Center in San Francisco, she became the first woman to do a general surgical residency at Mt. Zion Hospital in San Francisco. She was the first woman to complete the general surgical residency at Homer G. Phillips Hospital in St. Louis, Mo.

After becoming certified by the American Board of Surgery in 1972, she joined the Drew staff.

She was the first black woman on the general surgical staff at Stanford University Hospital.

When she was young, she said, she dreamed of becoming President of the U.S. Later, she lowered her visions somewhat and aimed for an M.D.

Her husband, Lou Edgar Smith, helped her set up her practice. He is the medical technologist at the clinic.

Dr. Smith hopes other doctors will open offices in East Palo Alto. "I can see the need for other physicians in the community," she said.

She and her husband live with their three children in Menlo Park.

Cunningham and Potack also envision expanding services available in East Palo Alto. As a start, they are hoping Ms. Cordell's office building soon will house other professional services.

Racism and notions of prestige have kept professionals from setting up offices in East Palo Alto, Potack said.

He and Cunningham agreed that being white has not denied them a warm and friendly reception from the community. The odd looks they get come from associates west of the freeway, who have misconceptions of East Palo Alto, they said.

The two practice general law, and are committed to keeping costs as low as possible. "I don't agree you have to keep your fees up to keep your image up," Potack said.

Both have worked in law collectives, where members practiced general or criminal law in order to support themselves while handling political cases. Cunningham was on the defense team for the Gainesville

Eight in Texas, and has represented anti-war and anti-draft groups.

Cunningham, 40, moved to Menlo Park last year from Austin, Texas. Last summer he met Ms. Cordell, who later mentioned she was looking for lawyers to occupy her building. Cunningham and Potack agreed they should move where most of their clients lived.

"There have been a lot of legal needs here that haven't been met," Cunningham said.

Many people make just enough to disqualify themselves from receiving the services of the Legal Aid Society or the public defender, but they still can't afford an attorney. Their legal needs largely have been ignored, Potack said.

The attorneys have found much of their business has come from people walking into their office from the street. "I've never been in a location where you get as many walk-in clients," Cunningham said.

Potack, 28, received his law degree from Howard University in Washington, D.C.