



**MEDIA RELEASE**  
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## Neighborhood Law Corps Tops 146 Cities As Grand Prize Winner

### *League of California Cities' Helen Putnam Award for Excellence Goes to Oakland*

(Oakland, CA) Today, the Oakland City Attorney's Neighborhood Law Corps was awarded the Grand Prize for the League of California Cities' Helen Putnam Award for Excellence. Established in 1982, the Putnam Awards recognize outstanding achievements by California's 477 cities. Cities are recognized for making unique contributions to improve the quality of life for community residents and businesses.

"It's an honor to be recognized," said Neighborhood Law Corps founder and Oakland City Attorney John Russo. "The Putnam Award is the equivalent of a Pulitzer for community service." The League received 146 applications for this year's Putnam awards. Twenty-seven awards were granted in nine categories.

"Five years ago the Law Corps was just an idea," continued Russo. "We wanted to use the law to address chronic problems in challenged neighborhoods. Now, we've cleaned up and corrected problems the community thought could never be fixed."

In the last year, the Neighborhood Law Corps abated twenty-one drug nuisance locations, two problem hotels, seven blighted properties and eight general nuisance cases. The recent victory in a lawsuit against a negligent landlord resulted in the complete rehabilitation of eighteen rental properties and \$140,000 paid to the city. The coordination with other city agencies and Council offices recently turned around one problem liquor store, E & L Liquors, within a month.

The Neighborhood Law Corps (NLC) is part Peace Corps and part legal aid. The first program of its kind in the nation, Oakland City Attorney, John Russo, created the NLC in February 2002 and established the non-profit foundation which pays for the "legal fellowships" of novice lawyers committed to public interest law. NLC attorneys are offered a two-year fellowship at a salary commensurate to a first-year Oakland public school teacher (currently \$40,000, plus benefits).

As deputy city attorneys, the NLC does not represent individuals but the neighborhood as a whole, bringing to bear the City's health, safety and welfare powers. The community members prioritize the problems and works with NLC to create the solutions.

For more information on the Neighborhood Law Corps, please see the website: <http://www.oaklandcityattorney.org/neighbor.html>. For more information on the League of California Cities, please see the website: <http://www.cacities.org/index.jsp>.