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LOCAL

Attorney helps keep divorce out of court

Bart Carey specializes in separations without the litigation.

By **ADAM TOWNSEND**
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Bart Carey, a family law attorney who operates out of Anaheim Hills and Irvine, specializes in collaborative divorce.

Unlike the traditional divorce that Carey used to litigate, collaborative divorces allow the couple to stay out of court. He says they're much less traumatic for kids than the civil-court grab-fests many traditional divorces turn into.

That's why Carey has pursued collaborative divorces for all of his clients since 2003. He's been holding a series of informational seminars around the county for couples thinking of splitting up, but who don't want to be cutthroat about it.

Q: What is a collaborative divorce?

A: It's a noncourt, nonadversarial process. Back in 1990, some family law advocates in the Midwest were discussing divorce as a model for families. They said, "If I had to reinvent this, what would we put in place for the families?" They



Carey

do need some legal support, but they need some counseling. They need a child specialist – the kids need a voice, too. The kids, while they're not decision-makers, they're stakeholders. Studies have shown that by giving them a voice, it helps with the transition.

Also, having a rational financial plan for the family going forward is better than just dividing things up.

What if you just went to lawyers for legal advice, a child specialist for parenting issues and a financial planner to deal with money issues? So the parents work with each of those professionals to work out a plan for the family's future. The professionals operate as a team.

Q: How much do these things cost?

A: I know in my own practice, I would bring them in at one-third to one-half the

cost of a regular divorce, based on the lawyers' fees here in Orange County. They save substantially if they're able to work together.

Q: How long have you been in this line of work?

A: I've been a family law attorney since 1988, but in 1996 I started toward mediation. I didn't get a collaborative group trained up and involved until 2003.

Q: Have you seen an uptick in the number of clients seeking your services?

A: Absolutely. When I first started down this road, I was advised by my friends in litigation that this would never go over. (But) I haven't had a litigation client in two years.

If you step back and look at it, most people want to be fair, but they want respect. They want to feel that they're being represented and that they get to decide what's going on with their kids.