

## Outside the spotlight, making it right

*By Connie Schultz*

Mayor Jane Campbell arrived at The City Club breathless and late with her usual entourage. She walked to the lectern, and the bank of television cameras flared to life.

Michael Green, snappy in a short-sleeved patterned shirt and white fedora, sat stone-faced with his family as he listened to the mayor mourn his suffering and praise his never-ending quest to help other innocent people still behind bars. His lawyers, Al Gerhardstein and Barry Scheck, stood nearby, smiling and nodding their heads.

To the far right of everyone, Law Director Subodh Chandra leaned against a wall, occasionally nodding but otherwise invisible.

I don't fault Campbell for seizing the moment in announcing the city's historic settlement with Michael. The elected official is always looking for ways to remain so, and this was one press conference where the news was not just good, but redemptive. As Chandra has regularly stressed, it was the mayor who instructed him to do what he needed to do to bring about a just resolution. Under her leadership, the city has done the right thing.

After serving 13 years in prison for a rape he did not commit, Michael will receive \$1.6 million from the city that wrongly prosecuted him. Much more important to him, though, the city agreed to re-examine at least 100 cases where the conviction came about, at least in part, through the handiwork of the same forensics lab technician who lied at Michael's trial. It is an unprecedented move by public officials and a national model that his attorneys hope will become known as the Michael Green Forensics Audit.

It was Chandra, the man out of camera range, who saw beyond Michael's demand for \$10 million and heard the plea of his heart. "If there are more Michael Greens out there, we want to know," he told Michael. "We want to stand shoulder to shoulder with you and do the right thing. The time you spent in prison should mean something for other people."

That is what Michael Green wanted all along. From the day I met him in October 2001, Michael has insisted there are more innocent people in prison and that it is his job to help them. "Until the day I die, I will work to free them," he has told me repeatedly.

The day before Tuesday's news conference, I met with Michael, who was more animated and relaxed than he would be in front of the TV cameras. The 3½ years since his release have been far more difficult than he ever imagined.

"It took longer than I thought to adjust, and I didn't want to accept that for the longest time. I still have that fear that I could be accused of doing something I didn't do and be sent back to prison. I don't have that feeling as often as I used to, but it's still there."

He worked with troubled youths, then became a corrections officer for the county jail. His training included spending time behind bars "imagining what it feels like to be incarcerated."

I remember the anguish in his voice later that day. "This is hard," he said. "This is very hard."

He had an anxiety attack on the job soon after that and quit. Despite his newfound financial wealth - the state of Ohio paid him about \$1 million - he lives frugally with his wife, Patricia. He is finally giving himself the quiet time to sort out his life.

When we talked about his settlement with the city, Michael's face relaxed. "A huge burden has been lifted," he said. "I feel a degree of peace."

Immediately, he mentioned Chandra.

"I liked him a lot. I trusted him." It helped that, like he, Chandra is a man of color. "Some things he just knows about living in America," Michael said.

Chandra is Indian and clearly proud of his heritage. His cluttered office telegraphs a life lived with passion, from his triplet sons' photo on his screensaver to the civil-rights posters on his walls. One framed photo in particular caught my eye the day I visited. It is a black-and-white shot of Martin Luther King Jr. standing near a portrait of India's beloved leader, Mahatma Gandhi.

When I told Michael about that, he smiled.

"Yes," he said, nodding his head. "Yes."

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