

## PEOPLE IN THE NEWS

# Local Lawyer Tackles Highly Publicized Case

By Phyllis Lader

Taking charge is a way of life for veteran Commack attorney Floyd Sarisohn, whether he's in or out of the courtroom.

In addition to being a well-known defense attorney, former district court judge, former Smithtown Democratic leader and former Smithtown Justice of the Peace - "my biggest claim to fame is that I'm the only Democrat who ever beat John Klein," he said, Mr. Sarisohn is coordinating an international convention of chess collectors to be held in New York City on Memorial Day weekend. He and his wife, Bernice, are curators of the Long Island Chess Museum, a private collection of over 300 chess sets from around the world.

Currently, the 61-year-old lawyer is involved in a high-profile trial. He is defending Joseph Kunz, on two counts of second degree murder for the June, 1988 shooting of a 15-year-old youth, John Kaufman in Mr. Kunz' Mastic beach home. The defendant, who is

confined to a wheelchair, has claimed he shot the youth in self-defense, after the youth lunged at him and kicked his wheelchair. The trial began two weeks ago and Mr. Sarisohn expects it to last approximately two more weeks, with a new flurry of media coverage when the



**L.I. LAWYER:** Veteran Commack attorney Floyd Sarisohn, who is defending paraplegic Joseph Kunz on two counts of murder.

defendant and his wife take the stand this week.

"What makes this case unique is that my client freely admits guilt in having shot the kid in self-defense, and what also makes it different is the unique nature of the characters. He's a paraplegic since the age of five, and his wife has cerebral palsy and epilepsy - he's the arms and she's the legs of the couple," he said.

The attorney, who also pointed out an interesting side issue, other than the matter of guilt or innocence, that exists in this case. "If they find him guilty, where will the state put him? He's in jail to begin with, in the sense that he's already confined. There's not much they can do. Any punishment is no punishment except taking him away from his wife."

Mr. Sarisohn has taken the case on

a pro-bono basis, as Mr. Kunz is a welfare recipient. "There's no way, except through Legal Aid and they can't devote all the time and effort that a private attorney can, that he otherwise can get the legal representation he needs." As senior partner in the Commack firm of Sarisohn, Sarisohn, Carner, Steindler, LeBow and Braun, one of Long Island's larger and more politically active law firms, he is a

strong believer in the importance of doing pro bono work and is appreciative that "the firm allowed me to do it."

Mr. Sarisohn, a Queens native and St. John's University Law School Graduate, and his wife Bernice, a past Suffolk Region president of Women's American ORT, are the parents of two grown children, Ruth, of Commack, and David, who lives in New Jersey.