



PRESIDENT'S PAGE

DEIRDRE M. KELLY

Access to Justice: What the OCBA is Doing

This October issue's theme is Access to Justice—fitting for Pro Bono Month. The OCBA has a long history of involvement with supporting public interest legal organizations in the community. In 1955, the OCBA recognized the desperate need for legal assistance to those who could not afford to pay for it. The OCBA Auxiliary (also known as the Lawyers' Wives!) staffed a legal assistance office, and every member of the OCBA pledged financial support for legal aid. This was the genesis for the creation of the Legal Aid Society of Orange County (now Community Legal Aid SoCal) in May 1958. The office was originally staffed, in part, by the Lawyers' Wives. In 1981, the Legal Aid Society of Orange County created Amicus Publico, which later became the Public Law Center. To this day, the OCBA and our local pro bono legal providers work hand in hand.

The OCBA's fundraising arm, OCBA Charitable Fund, has two main fundraisers a year, the Kenneth Lae Golf Tournament and the Annual Benefit. Through the Charitable Fund and OCBA's LRIS (Lawyer Referral and Information Service), the OCBA has provided over \$3 million to pro bono legal service providers and law related entities in Orange County. In fact, through the LRIS and OCBA's Charitable Fund, the OCBA has provided approximately \$1.9 million to the Public Law Center and we're still going strong, funding both PLC and many other organizations and many more each year.

The OCBA's Pro Bono Committee, co-chaired by Dan Robinson and Lee Fink, is currently helping promote opportunities for OCBA Members interested in volunteering with legal service providers and nonprofit organizations through its website (www.ocbar.org/probono) and OCBA social media. The Pro Bono Committee is also partnering with the San Diego/Orange County Pro Bono Legal Services Disaster Planning consortium to host Orange County's first-ever Disaster Planning CLE event at the OCBA on October 10, 2019. OCBA members will be able to learn about common legal concerns for disaster victims, as well as response protocols and procedures for Orange County residents victimized by earthquakes, fires, and floods. There is a precedent for this type of a program. In 1993, the OCBA and its members helped organize volunteer attorneys to help people who lost their homes in the devastating Laguna Beach fires.

If you would like more information, or if you know of a good Orange County 501(c)(3) or (c)(6) that provides pro bono legal services that could be added to the Pro Bono Committee's pro bono opportunities website, please contact the Pro Bono Committee Coordinator, Teresa Vuki, at tvuki@ocbar.org.

The Pro Bono Committee also has been hard at work on a new project, led by Nikki Miliband and Larisa Dinsmoor. This collaborative effort with Community Legal Aid SoCal (formerly Legal Aid Society of Orange County) will support the Orange County Superior Collaborative Courts by helping link volunteer attorneys with people appearing before the collaborative courts to address their civil legal matters. Orange County has eleven collaborative, or "problem solving," courts for adults and juve-

niles. These courts address homelessness, substance abuse, mental health, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and other underlying issues that result in criminal proceedings. These courts' holistic approach involves partners coming together from a variety of agencies such as Health Care, Probation, Public Defender's Office, District Attorney's Office, Veterans Administration, Legal Aid, and other service providers.

Orange County Collaborative Courts have a high success rate in reducing recidivism and are nationally acclaimed. Collaborative court clients, or participants as they are more often referred to, voluntarily agree to follow strict rules and guidelines to address the underlying issues that brought them into the criminal system. Participants work hard on themselves to graduate from their collaborative court and have their criminal matter resolved or expunged. While the collaborative courts have jurisdiction over criminal matters, many participants have peripheral civil issues that hold them back from reintegrating into society. These civil issues include, but are not limited to, family law, probate, social security, immigration, healthcare, torts, and taxes. The collaborative courts desperately need pro bono attorneys to address their participants' civil matters.

The Honorable Judge Mary Kreber, who presides over the Orange County Community Court in downtown Santa Ana, states that "OCBA lawyers who provide pro bono services to the collaborative courts will make a positive impact in a person's life, as well as support our justice system." To that end, the OCBA's Pro Bono Committee created a subcommittee specifically to support our collaborative courts. This subcommittee, spearheaded by Nikki Miliband and Larisa Dinsmoor, developed a partnership with Community Legal Aid SoCal, which will give OCBA lawyers the opportunity to do pro bono work with collaborative court participants. Hence, there is an opportunity to give back to our courts and to our community: "collaboration squared." To volunteer or for more information please contact Nikki Miliband at nmiliband@goodwildman.com or Larisa Dinsmoor at larisa.dinsmoor@pubdef.ocgov.com.

The law is a noble and honorable profession. As attorneys, it is a privilege to be able to do what we do. An important and impactful way we can give back is by volunteering to perform pro bono legal work. In addition to the substantial monetary contributions made by OCBA Charitable Fund and LRIS to our local public interest organizations, the OCBA's Pro Bono Committee has been hard at work, coordinating with these organizations to develop opportunities for OCBA members to do just that. Please consider taking advantage of one of these opportunities today!



Deirdre M. Kelly is the 2019 OCBA President. She can be reached at DeirdreKelly@ocbar.org.

To read the OCBA's letter to the State Bar about Access to Justice and the State Bar's Proposed Regulatory Changes visit ocbar.org