



## PRESIDENT'S PAGE

SCOTT B. GARNER

# Heroes Among Us

We think of heroes as people who have achieved great things on a national or international scale—walking on the moon (Neil Armstrong), igniting a movement (Martin Luther King, Jr.), risking one's life for the right to an education (Malala Yousafzai), or stealing home against the longest of odds (Jackie Robinson). In the age of COVID-19, we are waiting for the next Jonas Salk to create a vaccine or find a cure. But while we wait for that hero, let's recognize our community members who are performing heroic deeds every day. Those deeds may not be on a scale that will change the course of the world or garner national attention, but they are heroic nonetheless. And they are certainly changing our community for the better.

Mentioning any heroes necessarily means leaving others out. But the fear of omitting people who also are doing heroic things is not a reason to ignore the great deeds we (or I) know about. And, of course, true heroes don't perform great deeds for the attention they get.

One hero, or group of heroes, is the members of the Orange County criminal justice system. At the outbreak of the pandemic, these judges, public defenders, private defense lawyers, district attorneys, and sheriff deputies did not have the option of sheltering in place as so many of the rest of us did. They had to plow forward in defense of our Constitution, sometimes at risk to their own personal health. This included attending in-person hearings (remember those?) and sometimes meeting in jails that were seeing the spread of the virus among inmates. These heroes recognized that, notwithstanding the health crisis, people depended on them to uphold our system of justice.

Yet another group of heroes is our pro bono legal community, including staff and volunteers for organizations like the Public Law Center, Community Legal Aid SoCal, and Veterans Legal Institute. Their clients' needs did not diminish when the pandemic spread; if anything, their needs increased exponentially. And, as usual, these individuals stepped up to the plate. One such individual is Antoinette Balta, Executive Director and Co-Founder of Veterans Legal Institute. Not only did Antoinette tirelessly oversee her organization's continuing dedication to helping Orange County's veteran community get through this crisis, but, at the same time, went on emergency state active duty with the California State Guard, assisting with public affairs in Sacramento and packaging food for distribution.

Some people who emerge as heroes in times of crisis don't really surprise anyone. One example is United States District Court Judge David Carter. A Vietnam War hero with the Marines, Judge Carter has been presiding over a number of homelessness lawsuits with a flare that only Judge Carter can bring. But what touched me most was seeing Judge Carter in the news, wearing a mask and gloves (and also a suit and tie), touring Skid Row in Los Angeles to make sure the homeless people there were getting adequate sanitation services.

And let's not forget the many Orange County lawyers who continue to serve their clients from home. Many of us are moms and dads who are doing double duty as home-school teachers, trying to maintain our practices in a cramped home office or on a kitchen table, often with less-than-stellar internet connections. But by staying home, we are doing our part in slowing this awful virus, while serving clients in need. That makes all of us heroes.

The heroes in our community obviously extend beyond our legal community. They include the grocery store workers who ensure we can find food and the delivery drivers who bring us meals and other essentials. They also include our brave medical professionals. And since I am married to one of them, I will let her symbolize the thousands like her who are truly performing heroic deeds every day.

My wife, Karen, is a physician—specifically, an internist. While my day consists of hours in front of my computer or on the phone, she goes into her office or to the hospital—that is, to the front lines. Thankfully, she is able to see many of her patients remotely, but not all of them. And her group must rotate through attendance at a “fever clinic” to see patients suspected of having COVID-19. I try to remember this when I feel like screaming at my internet provider after being dropped from the cloud for the fourth time that morning.

Karen is my hero. Not just for the risks she takes by treating sick patients, but for coming home from work, taking a shower, and then becoming mom to our three kids. Karen symbolizes two distinct types of heroes. First, she symbolizes our medical professionals who risk and sacrifice so much, and without whom we would be lost. They include not only the doctors, but also the nurses, the technicians, and the many employees and staff who keep our medical offices and hospitals functioning. Second, Karen symbolizes the many working moms (and dads) who every day split time between their paying jobs and their non-paying obligations. And, if being a working mom was hard in normal times, it is exponentially harder during a pandemic, where kids are home and tensions often run high.

Maybe we can't all be heroes in the classic sense, but we can all do heroic things. Whether your heroic deeds are merely staying home, washing your hands, and wearing a mask, or include defending the Constitution, protecting the homeless community, or saving lives, do things that will make you and your community proud.



*Scott B. Garner is the 2020 President of the Orange County Bar Association. He is a partner at Umberg/Zipser LLP in Irvine, California, where he practices complex business litigation, with a focus on lawyer liability and legal ethics. He can be reached at [sgarner@umbergzipser.com](mailto:sgarner@umbergzipser.com).*