



## PRESIDENT'S PAGE

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# Women's History Month, OCWLA, and Inspiration

March is Women's History Month. It is a time to honor women's contributions in American history, and to reflect upon progress in gender parity. According to a 2018 survey by the National Association of Women Lawyers (NAWL), only 19.5% of women were equity partners in the nation's 200 largest firms. Moreover, in the American Bar Association's 2019 report titled, "A Current Glance at Women in the Law," women lawyers' weekly salary was 80% of men's, and male equity partners were paid 27% more than female equity partners.

As a tribute to Women's History Month, I thought it apt to highlight our affiliate bar, the Orange County Women Lawyers Association (OCWLA). OCWLA is celebrating its forty-sixth anniversary and is "dedicated to advancing women in the legal profession by providing a professional network, raising awareness of discrimination and bias, and supporting charitable organizations."

OCWLA was founded in 1975 as the "Women and Individual Rights section of the Orange County Bar Association." The original focus was on all groups that experienced discrimination. In 1979, OCWLA became an Orange County Bar Association (OCBA) affiliate organization. Today, OCWLA has over 500 members of different genders, races, religions, ages, and sexual orientations.

Many of you know OCWLA for its annual gala held at Pelican Hill where it presents awards for "Judge of the Year," "Attorney of the Year," and most recently, the "Advancement of Women Award." This latest award is given to law firms or other legal organizations "whose words, actions, and deeds support the advancement of women within the firm and in the greater legal community."

Beyond its gala, OCWLA provides robust and varied CLE programming. For example, in October, it held a webinar with Presiding Justice Kathleen O'Leary, Cal. Court of Appeal, Fourth District, Div. 3, and Orange County Superior Court's Assistant Presiding Judge Maria D. Hernandez on "Tips from the Bench—What Judges Want You to Know." In November, OCWLA held a webinar titled: "When There Are Nine: Advancing Women on the Bench in Orange County." The esteemed panelists included Judge Daphne G. Sykes, Judge Terri K. Flynn-Peister, Judge Kimberly K. Menninger, and Judge Deborah C. Servino.

OCWLA's next program will be on March 31, 2021. It will host its annual "Equal Pay Day" event where top female executives and entrepreneurs in the community will share their experiences climbing the corporate ladder—a fitting topic during "Women's History Month," and sadly still relevant.

Other than attending OCWLA's March event, how can you celebrate Women's History Month? Caroline Djang, Member of the OCWLA Board of Directors, says: "If you have a choice among equally qualified candidates, consider paying it forward and making a referral to a woman attorney, hiring a woman or selecting a woman as your mediator." Antoinette Balta, Member of the OCWLA Board of

Directors, adds "Honor women . . . by highlighting the female champions in your life and their successes—both personally and professionally." OCWLA President, Kelly Galligan Dunn, suggests donating to any number of charities OCWLA supports at [www.ocwla.org](http://www.ocwla.org).


I encourage everyone to celebrate Women's History Month by honoring or remembering an inspirational female historical figure. To give some examples, I asked several OCWLA leaders. Lucia Valenzuela, OCWLA Treasurer, states:

One of my favorite recent historical female figures is Ellen Ochoa. In 1993 she became the first Hispanic woman in the world to go into space and in 2013 became the first Hispanic and second woman director of the Johnson Space Center in Houston, TX. As a young girl I remember watching space Shuttle Discovery with so much joy and hope because someone that shared my background had reached one of the highest achievements of all mankind—space flight.

Jacqueline Beaumont, Member of the OCWLA Board of Directors, shared that her inspirational female historical figures are: "Ruby Bridges in New Orleans and Sylvia Mendez in Orange County (who) bravely became the first children to integrate their schools at the ages of six and eight. Their decisions created a more just world and brought dignity to their peers and subsequent generations."

In the spirit of Women's History Month, OCWLA's leaders have important messages to all lawyers. Caroline Djang says, "The diverse membership of the OCWLA has succeeded in every area of law, from the judiciary, to starting their own firms, to achieving partnership at the county's largest law firms." Lucia Valenzuela adds that "OCWLA is a great place for young female lawyers to be known, heard, and build their professional network in an authentic way." Finally, Antoinette Balta exalts that: "Female lawyers should recognize their powerful education, one which was not readily available to many who came before us, and honor it by fearlessly rising in leadership while lifting up other females around them."

Everyone is encouraged to become a member of OCWLA. As President Kelly Galligan Dunn says, "The way I see it, every lawyer in Orange County should have an interest in advancing women in the legal profession." She hopes to offer her members many opportunities to connect by partnering with other OCBA affiliates and committees.

For younger attorneys, OCWLA offers law students and first year attorneys a free year of membership. Each month, OCWLA features a member on its blog and via social media. Reach out to Kelly Galligan Dunn if you would like to nominate a member. Kelly can be reached at [kgalligan@rutan.com](mailto:kgalligan@rutan.com). 

*Larisa M. Dinsmoor is 2021 OCBA President, an Orange County Public Defender, and co-chair of the OCBA's Racial Justice Task Force. She would love to hear from you at [larisa@ocbar.org](mailto:larisa@ocbar.org).*