



PRESIDENT'S PAGE

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The Hispanic Bar Association: Culture, Good Causes, and Community

Cinco de Mayo (May 5) is an occasion to celebrate our rich and diverse Latinx culture. The Hispanic Bar Association of Orange County (OCHBA) celebrates Latinx culture throughout the year with its annual events: Annual Día de los Muertos Mixer, Judge's Barbecue, End of Summer Mixer, international trips, and of course its famous installation dinner with tequila shots, traditional music, and dancers. However, the OCHBA provides more than a fun party or get together. It provides substantive resources and programming to its members and the greater community.

Culture

The OCHBA was founded in 1974 under the name, "Orange County Mexican American Lawyers Club." In 1975, the organization held its first election and the Honorable Frederick Aguirre became its first president. Judge Aguirre recalls the original members were: Luis Cardenas and Hon. Francisco Briseño (from the District Attorney's office), Hon. Frances Muñoz and Ramon Ortiz (from the Public Defender's office), and Wally Davis, Rudy Montejano, Hon. Greg Muñoz, Jose Ramirez, Fred Muñoz, Robert Espinosa, Hon. Richard Orozco, and the Hon. James Perez. The primary purpose of the organization was to "mentor Latino attorneys for the bench and to assist qualified and seasoned Latino attorneys in their application and or campaigns to become judges in Orange County . . ." At that time, only one Latino was on the local judiciary, the Hon. James Perez.

In 1980, the Orange County Mexican American Lawyers Club became the Hispanic Bar Association of Orange County (OCHBA) and codified a more expansive mission to "promote education, unity, and excellence in the Hispanic legal community by expanding the business and professional opportunities available to its members, enhancing the members' business and professional stature in the Hispanic community, increasing the participation of Hispanic leaders in civic affairs and enhancing the quality of life for the members and the community." Now, the OCHBA has over 150 active members and twenty attorneys on the Orange County Bench.

The OCHBA recently celebrated its 43rd Scholarship Fundraiser and Annual Installation Dinner for 2021 President Sasha Tymkowicz. Sasha's vision for the year is "unity, hope, and healing." The installation was a two-part event that included a drive to Christ Cathedral in the afternoon and a Zoom event in the evening. At Christ Cathedral, the friendly masked faces of the OCHBA Board of Directors and officers greeted attendees with music, flowers, and a boxed dinner that included a small bottle of tequila. Sasha hints that more tequila will be involved at the Cinco De Mayo virtual event . . . stay tuned.

Good Causes

The OCHBA has thirteen working committees to accomplish its mission, and includes a Scholarship Committee, Social Issues Committee, and Judicial Evaluations Committee. It provides helpful information for the non-legal community by having a resource page with "10 Ques-

tions to Ask Your Potential Lawyer." The OCHBA partners with several local organizations such as the Santa Ana High School Law Academy, which was founded by Judge Elizabeth Macias. The academy provides students with professional mentoring, internship opportunities, mock trial training and competition, and field trips to law schools, courts and other civic-related sites. Judge Macias describes the OCHBA as "an important legal partner" that assists the academy by buying supplies for the summer Justice League Camp and blazers for academy participants to wear during mock trial competition. It also funds the Academy's end-of-year banquet, which Judge Macias exclaims "is a big deal for our kids; we hold the event at the Chapman University Dale E. Fowler School of Law with the help of Justin Cruz, Assistant Dean of Admission and Diversity Initiatives—students dress up, they invite their families, and we celebrate their accomplishments."

Community

Hopefully this November, we will be able to join the OCHBA in celebrating the Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) during the Centro Cultural celebration on Fourth Street in Santa Ana. Judge Salvador Sarmiento explains "Observing this holiday gives us an opportunity to celebrate and recognize our ancestors' values and memories."

The OCHBA has something for everyone. You don't have to be Latinx to join the OCHBA; you only need a passion for culture, good causes, and community. People join the OCHBA for many reasons. Judge Sarmiento notes "[T]he reasons for joining the OCHBA today are the same as they were when we started. Our joint voices will be heard much louder when we jointly address issues that affect our community."

Joseph Chairez, former OCHBA President, reflects, "Like many OCBA members, I was looking for a way to give back to the community and was interested in their then-new project of establishing an educational endowment, which the OCHBA did. I was lucky enough to present the first scholarship check." The OCHBA continues to distribute numerous scholarships and financial awards, which are highlighted at the Installation dinner.

Darrell White, former OCHBA President and current OCBA Board member states "I joined the OCHBA as a young attorney and knew only two members. In the five-plus years I spent on the Board, I traveled the world for CLEs, built lasting friendships with attorneys and judges across almost every specialty, shared a stage with Justice Bedsworth at our 40th Anniversary Dinner, and attended the swearing in of California Supreme Court Justice Joshua P. Groban. By the time I was done, this wonderful organization even let a guy named Darrell White serve as President."

For more information about the OCHBA, contact Sasha Tymkowicz at sasha@oclegal.org. 

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.