



## PRESIDENT'S PAGE

LARISA M. DINSMOOR

# A Legacy of Leadership

September is the month of OCBA elections, which will shape the future of our organization. We have two highly qualified secretarial candidates running, Shirin Forootan and Mei Tsang. The winner of this election will automatically advance from secretary to president within a three-year timeline. Historically, fewer than 25% of OCBA members take the time to vote. In this ever-changing world where we often feel that we do not have a say in outcomes, this is an opportunity for your voice to be heard. Please get to know the candidates and cast your ballot, which can be done easily online.

Speaking of leadership, I would be remiss if I did not talk about our dearly departed former OCBA President Lei Lei Wang-Eckvall. Lei Lei was an exceptional leader who truly embodied the OCBA's mission: "To enhance the system of justice, to support the lawyers who serve it, and to assist the community served by it."

Lei Lei was the OCBA's eighth woman president and first Asian American president. She led by example, continuing to volunteer with the OCBA long after her presidency had ended. After chairing the Charitable Fund as Past President, she continued to be on the committee helping to raise thousands of dollars for local charities. She was repeatedly asked to be on the Nominating and Appointments Committees because of the many lawyers she knew and mentored. Lei Lei was on the Legislative Resolutions Committee, which drafts and lobbies for proposed changes in the law, and chaired the Commercial Law and Bankruptcy Section. She was Masters Division Secretary, Co-Chair of the Pro Bono Committee, and a member of the newly created Membership Committee, which is charged with promoting, encouraging, facilitating, increasing, and retaining OCBA members.

Lei Lei was also a leader in our greater community. She was Past President of California Legal Aid SoCal Board of Directors, and continued to serve on its board to raise much needed funding during the pandemic. She was a former president of the Orange County Asian American Bar Association (OCAABA) and the Orange County Bankruptcy forum, which was instrumental in creating the Central District's Pro Bono Bankruptcy Clinic.

It's impossible to summarize all that Lei Lei was and did, but I thought this quote by Harvard Business School Professor Frances Frei was appropriate: "Leadership is about making others better as a result of your presence, and making sure that impact lasts in your absence." I know I'm a better leader because of Lei Lei, and I'm not alone. Here are just a few examples of how Lei Lei's leadership and presence impacted others.

The Honorable Andrew Guilford, retired U.S. District Judge, states,



"Our beloved Orange County legal community has lost a wonderful person. I will miss her energy and leadership, her heart, and her smile. She will always be an inspiration to us all."

The Honorable Kirk H. Nakamura explains, "Lei Lei was an extraordinary person and leader. She led the OCBA and OCAABA with dedication and distinction. Incredibly approachable and friendly, she immediately put everyone around her at ease. But beneath this veneer of amiability, there was a highly motivated individual whose heart burned with desire for justice for not only her clients, but the underrepresented and less fortunate. We lost her before her time. I grieve with the entire Orange County legal community."

Kate Marr, Executive Director of Community Legal Aid SoCal shares, "Lei Lei was a staunch advocate for justice, a committed leader, and a steadfast supporter of Community Legal Aid SoCal. We were

fortunate to have her serve on our board for six years, including a term as president and in numerous committee roles. Lei Lei's leadership and wise counsel contributed greatly to the expansion of the legal services we are now able to provide to our client community. All of us at CLA SoCal will miss her tremendously. We are grateful and honored to have called her a friend and worked alongside her in service to the community."

Sharon Oh-Kubisch, Of Counsel at Smiley Wang-Eckvall LLP, expounds, "As one of the founding partners of Smiley Wang-Eckvall LLP, Lei Lei was smart enough to recognize the risk, brave enough to accept it, and creative enough to mitigate it. She also recognized that it was always important to celebrate the little things,

and to apply ethical principles to make a significant and lasting difference to others."

Mei Tsang of Umberg Zipser, shares, "Losing Lei Lei is a tremendous loss to our community. She was a legal giant in every way. She was an amazing attorney, a leader for her firm, a leader for our community, a mentor to many, and—most importantly—she was a loving wife and a mother. She showed me it was possible to be an Asian American woman and succeed in the legal field without losing your integrity and identity. Her legacy will live on in all those whom she touched."

Caroline Djang, partner at Best Best & Krieger LLP, summarizes how most people felt about Lei Lei: "I am humbled and honored to be associated with Lei Lei. She is my hero and role model, and I will miss her forever."

To honor Lei Lei and her legacy of leadership, reach out to me to get more involved.



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