



PRESIDENT'S PAGE

DANIEL S. ROBINSON

Our thoughts and prayers are with the people of Ukraine, especially the many families emigrating in the midst of this brutal and unjustified war. The OCBA encourages all members who want to help support nonprofits providing critical resources and relief to those in need to visit our Community Outreach page at www.ocbar.org/Get-Connected/Committees/Community-Outreach.

2022: Back to Business As Usual

It has been an honor serving as the 2022 President of the Orange County Bar Association. I can't believe this year is already coming to a close, and that it has been nearly a year since Judge David O. Carter swore in our 2022 leadership in a rainy, socially distanced ceremony in the OCBA's parking lot. I remember thinking, "Well, things can only go up from here." And they certainly have.

I also think about how far we've come from the day four years ago when I received the call from the OCBA informing me that I had won the election for Secretary. I should have known I was in store for a wild ride when I called Cate, my then-pregnant wife, to give her the good news and she responded, "That's wonderful . . . but my water just broke." Clayton was born the next morning and is now four going on fourteen (and currently curled up sleeping peacefully at my side as I write this column).

We've come a long, long way together. I don't think any of us could have predicted what was in store for us—a global pandemic, shutdowns, hardships, and a completely new normal. I am humbled by the resilience of our legal community, and deeply thankful for all of the hard work and dedication exhibited by OCBA's board of directors, staff, and members. We have overcome so much. Anyone who has attended an event in the last few months can see the renewed spirit and energy that exists in our county, as if the adversity of the past few years reshaped us into a stronger, more tight-knit, and thankful community. We appreciate the importance of connection and community more than ever. We understand that, in the words of the British philosopher Harry Styles, "[i]n this world, it's just us. You know it's not the same as it was." But in some ways, it's even better.

Always Darkest Before the Dawn

Yes, 2022 got off to a rocky start, with that familiar uncertainty and a resumption of precautionary measures. But we kept calm and carried on (albeit virtually) with our many events, including the January 28th OCBA Section Leaders Orientation, the February 8th Orange County Court Update (featuring Presiding Judge Erick L. Larsh, Assistant Presiding Judge Maria D. Hernandez, Judge Gerald G. Johnston, Judge Layne H. Melzer, and Judge Julie A. Palafox), and the "Fireside Chat" with Associate Justice Joshua Groban of the California Supreme Court.

Spring was filled with plans and projects, but a larger question loomed: "Would members feel comfortable enough to attend?" The OCBA first tested the "in-person" waters with its March 23rd Charitable Fund Grant Giving Reception, where we distributed a total of \$170,000 to Orange County legal charities at an indoor celebration at the OCBA's headquarters. Then, at the end of March, the OCBA conducted in-person the Affiliate Leaders Roundtable and the Committee Leadership luncheon at the Irvine Westin.

With a few successful events under our belt, we decided that all systems were go for the rescheduled April 7th Judges' Night at the Irvine Marriott. It turned out to be a marvelous night where mem-

bers were able to reconnect and catch up with old friends from across the county. We honored our bench officers, thanked outgoing OCBA President Larisa Dinsmoor, and celebrated Joel Miliband with his well-deserved Franklin G. West Award. It was an auspicious sign that dozens of attendees remained in the ballroom chatting long after the event had ended and the tables had been cleared. The whole night served as a powerful reminder of the importance of community as well as our collective desire to reconnect.

Returning to Normal

With the success of Judges' Night, the OCBA moved forward with a series of in-person events lined up for the spring. First, we held OCBA Charitable Fund's Annual Kenneth Lae Golf Tournament—one of two fundraising events held annually by the Charitable Fund. This event was a success, drawing in over \$80,000 for Orange County legal charities. Next, we held the June 28th OCBA Summer Social Celebrating Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, where we commemorated the inaugural Lei Lei Wang Ekvall Award. The OCBA is proud to establish an award in Lei Lei's honor and we hope it inspires many future lawyers about the importance of character, professional achievement, and diversity in our legal community.

The summer led to the OCBA's honoring the amazing contributions of other legal luminaries, including the OCBA's fifteen-year CEO and Executive Director, Trudy Levindofsky. At its 2022 Charitable Fund Raise Your Glass event, which raised an additional \$100,000 for Orange County charities, awards were presented to Kenneth Babcock (Executive Director and General Counsel of Public Law Center for nineteen years), law firm Umberg Zipser, and community partner Orange County Coalition for Diversity in the Law. The summer also featured many successful events by our affiliate bars, including the Hispanic Bar Association's End of Summer Mixer and OCAABA's annual luau honoring former Presiding Judge Kirk H. Nakamura and the Elder Law Center's Brooke Weitzman. It was clear by fall that the Orange County legal community was back to business as usual and operating on all cylinders.

Taking Care of Business

I want to take a moment here to highlight the exceptional work performed behind the scenes by the OCBA's many sections, task forces, and committees. The pro bono and community outreach committees found ways for OCBA members to give back to the community by promoting pro bono opportunities and donating meals and other items to nonprofits around the county. The legislative resolutions and administration of justice committees helped ensure Orange County had a voice in the shaping of laws, jury instructions, and other important issues. The Mommy Esq. Committee helped provide important programming and a way for its members to stay connected. Our Family Law, Business and Corporate Law, Appellate Law, and other sections have encouraged members to stay connected through both in-person and virtual

events. There's been no shortage of inspiring efforts this year by our section leaders to achieve their goals, keep their members informed, and address issues that arose over past year. I'm so proud of the incredible contributions made by this silent army of dedicated OCBA members who make a difference every day. One shining example is our judiciary committee, which held dozens of two- to three-hour-long meetings this year to evaluate a record number of judicial candidates.

The same praise goes to the OCBA's many task forces, such as the Civility and Professionalism Task Force, which helped push for posting the OCBA's civility guidelines outside superior courts, or the State Bar Task Force, which helped the OCBA lead numerous county bars to push back against the State Bar's efforts to enact policies that would erode California's protections against non-lawyer law firm ownership and non-lawyer practice of law. The State Bar Task Force helped draft over forty pages of letters that helped achieve the September 18, 2022 signing of AB 2958 by Governor Newsom—a bill preventing the erosion of the practice of law in California. It is my sincere hope that future leaders of the OCBA remember the exemplary model of persistence and dedication demonstrated by the members of these task forces.

Kudos also go out to the OCBA's Masters Division, which put numerous educational seminars and helped us honor and mourn important members of our legal community, such as Judge Margaret R. Anderson and Judge Frank Ospino. Likewise, the OCBA's Young Lawyers Division reignited enthusiasm among younger lawyers both with exciting social activities and with roundtable discussions featuring respected members of the legal community. Finally, this September and October, the OCBA's College of Trial Advocacy successfully certified dozens of OCBA members in critical aspects of trial advocacy.

A Time for Celebration

This fall also saw the OCBA and its affiliate bars celebrating many exceptional members of our community. For example, on October 11th, the OCBA honored Crowell & Moring partner Rick McNeil with the 2022 Harmon G. Scoville award at the OCBA's 2022 Volunteer Recognition Reception. At the October 12th OCWLA Gala at Shady Canyon, the OCBA honored Judge Deborah C. Servino as 2022 Judge of the Year, attorney Antoinette Balta of Veterans Legal Institute as Attorney of the Year, and Community Legal Aid SoCal with the Advancement of Women award. On November 1st, the OCBA's Appellate Law Section honored Presiding Justice Kathleen O'Leary


with the David G. Sills Award, and OCBA member Kimberly LaSalle was honored on November 2nd with the California Women Lawyers' Fay Stender Award. Finally, on November 13th, the Celtic Bar Association honored incoming Presiding Judge Maria D. Hernandez as Judge of the Year and Kate Corrigan as Attorney of the Year.

The end of this year brings the return of holiday parties and a host of special OCBA events, including the December 12th United States Supreme Court Review with Berkeley Law Dean Erwin Chemerinsky, and the Criminal Law Section's December 5th "State of the County" panel featuring Orange County District Attorney Todd Spitzer, Orange County Public Defender Martin Schwarz, Federal Public Defender Cuauhtémoc Ortega, and United States Attorney for Central District of California Martin Estrada (moderated by the Honorable Cheri Pham, Supervising Judge of the Central Felony Trial Panel). We encourage everyone to sign up and attend.

Moving Forward to 2023

It has been a privilege to work with the incredible leaders within the OCBA's executive committee, board, sections, committees, task forces, divisions, affiliates, and community partners. It has also been a tremendous honor to work with OCBA's wonderful staff, and with leaders in Orange County's public and private sectors, and state and federal judiciaries.

Although I am saddened to see this wonderful year come to an end, I am more confident than ever that both the community and the OCBA itself are in the hands of exceptional leaders. I am very pleased to pass the baton onto one such leader, Michael Gregg. I've had the pleasure of working with Michael over the last few years and can attest that he is an excellent attorney and an even better human being. I'm excited to see all that Michael and his incredible executive committee accomplishes next year.

To the rest of you, thanks once again for the opportunity to serve you and this special community. It has truly been the greatest honor of my professional career. I hope to see all of you at Judges' Night on January 19, 2023, and at the many, many OCBA events to come. 

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(L-R) 2022 Officers
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Zabat-Fran, Mei Tsang,
Larisa Dinsmoor, and
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