



PRESIDENT'S PAGE

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Women Leaders Have Shaped the OCBA

On October 17, 2023, the Orange County Women Lawyers Association (OCWLA) awarded the OCBA with the 2023 OCWLA Advancement of Women Award. The Award recognizes legal organizations whose words, actions, and deeds support the advancement of women within their organizations and in the greater legal community.

The OCBA has had many amazing women who have advanced its mission, including thirteen women presidents. The next three upcoming OCBA presidents are also women: Christina M. Zabat-Fran (2024), Mei Tsang (2025), and Shirin Forootan (2026). Seven women have received the OCBA's Franklin G. West Award, the OCBA's highest honor, presented to outstanding attorneys and judges whose lifetime achievements have advanced justice and the law. Thirteen women have received the OCBA's Harmon G. Scoville Award (Cherrie I. Tsai will be fourteen), given annually to an individual whose career has exemplified the highest standards of the legal profession and who has significantly contributed to the OCBA and championed our constitutional system of justice.

In this brief column, I would like to highlight some of the contributions of the OCBA's last two Executive Directors: Donna Fousté and Trudy Levindofske. As put by Tom Malcolm (OCBA's 1992 President) in a recent *Raising the OC Bar* podcast, establishing Donna Fousté and Trudy Levindofske as executive directors of the OCBA was "one of the best decisions the OCBA has ever made."


Donna Fousté served as Executive Director from 1992 to 2007. During her tenure, the OCBA's membership nearly doubled from just over 5,000 to nearly 10,000 members in 2005—making the OCBA the second largest bar association in California. In the May 2007 *Orange County Lawyer*, Dean Zipser (OCBA's 2005 President) wrote that Donna was the moving force behind numerous OCBA accolades, including the 1993 National Public Service Achievement Award for the OCBA's Task Force for the Homeless, the 1994 State Bar of California Pro Bono Award for the OCBA's Fire Relief Task Force, the 1995 award winning Modest Means program, the 1998 award winning Attorneys Representing Children program, and the OCBA's Teenage Legal Survival Skills program.

In 2007, Donna became the first and only non-lawyer or judge to be awarded the OCBA's Harmon Scoville Award. Tom Malcolm, who had offered the Executive Director position to Donna, shared that "Donna quickly assimilated the complexities of the OCBA, its Sections, Committees, finances, and charitable intentions. Within her first six months, she had created a well-oiled, disciplined staff who all adored her." Jennifer Keller (OCBA's 1996 President) commented that "Donna was a force of nature. She modernized and organized us, kept us on task, moderated our disagreements, and presented us with smart ideas for new programs. Without her during my year as president, I probably would have run away and assumed a new identity."

Trudy Levindofske, the OCBA's current CEO/Executive Director, started at the OCBA in 1989 and has led the OCBA as its Executive

Director since 2007. Trudy is the longest serving Executive Director in OCBA history, having served in the role for sixteen years and counting. Dean Zipser, who chaired a blue-chip task force that conducted a national search to find a new Executive Director when Donna Fousté retired, shared that Trudy impressed everyone and left no doubt that she was the best person to lead the OCBA. While a change in leadership can often result in disruptions, Dean shared that the OCBA did not skip a beat when Trudy took over as Executive Director.

Trudy has also been the force behind numerous OCBA and OCBA Charitable Fund awards including the 2011 and 2015 Community Partner of the Year Award to the OCBA Charitable Fund from Constitutional Rights Foundation, OC; Meritorious Recognition from the ABA Standing Committee on Delivery Legal Services, 2016 Louis M. Brown Award; 2017 Outstanding Community Services Award from Legal Aid Society of OC; 2017 Outstanding Service Award to the OCBA & Trudy Levindofske for support of Orange County Veterans from OC Women to Women; 2018 Outstanding Philanthropic Group, National Philanthropy Day, awarded to the OCBA Charitable Fund by the Association of Fundraising Professionals, OC Chapter; and 2021 Top Legal Organizations for DEI in OC from the Orange County Coalition on Diversity in the Law. Trudy's wide-ranging responsibilities include management of all OCBA staff, maintaining relationships with fifteen affiliate bar organizations and other outside organizations, and working with the leadership of the OCBA's twenty-six different Sections and twenty-two Committees. And every year for the last sixteen years, she has adapted to the goals, personalities, and idiosyncrasies of each new OCBA President, Executive Committee, and Board. All the while, Trudy puts the interests of the OCBA first. Nikki Miliband (OCBA's 2018 President) shared that "Trudy is the OCBA's hidden treasure. From coordinating a dedicated staff to ensuring smooth operation of the bar and its many functions, educational programs, and community outreach, Trudy has earned the respect and gratitude of the members of one of the nation's largest bar associations." Todd Friedland (OCBA's 2016 President) added, "Trudy is a dynamic, strong, reliable executive who is an expert at accounting for the OCBA's history, but also planning for the future, building consensus, and guiding the OCBA's efforts to promote its members, the legal profession, and our community." Deirdre Kelly (OCBA's 2019 President) commented that "Trudy is the heart and soul of OCBA. I could not have navigated my year as OCBA President without Trudy's knowledge, wisdom, and support. She was always there to guide me to the right decisions."

The OCBA is blessed to have been led by these two perspicacious women over the last thirty-one years. 

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