



PRESIDENT'S PAGE

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More Than a Woman

As you read this, it has been a couple months since the devastating fires swept through Los Angeles in January, leaving a path of destruction that will take years to heal. For our legal community, these fires underscore the critical role we play during crises. Beyond the immediate need for shelter and safety, legal assistance is essential for navigating legal issues. The OCBA has partnered with the Los Angeles County Bar Association and others to provide resources to those affected. We also have formed the OCBA Emergency Response Task Force to help with these efforts, co-chaired by Dan Robinson and Sharon Oh-Kubish.

I urge you to consider how you can contribute—whether through volunteering, donating, or simply offering a listening ear. To those who have already stepped up, thank you. To those still looking for ways to help, now is the time. Let our response reflect the very best of what we stand for as a legal community.

Now, let's shift gears to some celebration: March is Women's History Month! It's a time to honor the remarkable women in our lives. Although I am an only child, I grew up in a big family filled with women. My mom's five sisters were my constant guides, always telling me what to wear, eat, and do. They were my comfort and guiding light—a band of strong women. The men in the family played supporting roles, taking cues from the women who clearly ran the show. I learned early on that women play important roles.

When I began my legal career some twenty years ago, there were few women attorneys, and even fewer women partners. Yet, there were many women secretaries and paralegals who trained young associates like me how to draft and file a response, find shortcuts in Word, and locate the post office that remains open after 5:00 p.m. (way back when we still had to mail to file!) They were my mentors who guided me toward success in a predominantly male profession.

Even before I became an attorney, Belva Lockwood was the first woman admitted to argue before the U.S. Supreme Court in 1879. She shattered glass ceilings and paved the way for generations of women. Women now make up 56% of incoming law students at ABA-accredited schools—a dramatic shift from 1970 when only 9% were women. This progress is worth celebrating, but it also reminds us of the ongoing work needed to ensure equality in the profession. Today, countless women legal professionals balance growing their careers with raising families, mentoring young attorneys, keeping their teams running smoothly, giving back to the community, and trying to keep their sanity.

Closer to home, I'm inspired by the incredible women in our county: they serve as judges, partners, solo practitioners, and mentors, leading

with strength, empathy, and an uncanny ability to multitask. I serve as the 20th female president of the OCBA (out of 124!) and I am the first woman to be sandwiched between two other women presidents (Christina Zabat-Fran in 2024 and Shirin Forootan in 2026), and hope not to be the last. I asked a few of our women leaders about their journey, and this is what they told me:

Orange County Superior Court Presiding Judge Maria D. Hernandez emphasized the importance of supporting other women: "We are so incredibly fortunate to be on this journey with incredible women who have been trailblazers before us in the legal profession. Courage is contagious and empowering and supporting women to continue to shine is not only a responsibility, but a privilege."

Caroline Djang, a bankruptcy partner at Buchalter and former OC Women Lawyer Association Past President said, "Practicing law in Orange County as a diverse woman has been both the greatest blessing and the biggest challenge of my life. Over my twenty-four years of practice, I've found that the key is finding firms and organizations that recognize and reward the unique contributions of women, and are not just performative."

Annie Nicholson, an associate at Haynes Boone and President of OCBA Young Lawyers Division had this to say about practicing law as a new mother: "As the first lawyer in my family, it has always been extremely important to me to prioritize women's advancement in the legal field. The law needs more women to increase access to justice and foster innovation. In the words of Ruth Bader Ginsburg, 'real change, enduring change, happens one step at a time.'"

The OC Women Lawyers Association was established in 1975 so this year marks its 50th Anniversary. OCWLA has advanced women in the legal profession by providing a professional network, raising awareness of discrimination and bias, and supporting charitable organizations including tens of thousands in scholarship money. The OCBA also has the Mommy, Esq. Committee, co-chaired by Dana Heyde and Ashley Montenegro, that provides support for our parent attorneys through their legal professional journeys.

This month, take a moment to thank the women who have impacted your life and career, whether it's a mentor who gave you your first break, a colleague who always has your back, or a friend or a new friend in the making. 

Mei Tsang, as a mom of two, wants to remind you to thank the women in your life, especially your mom or aunts, even if it is for no reason, just because you can. Mei can be reached at mtsang@umbergzipser.com.