



PRESIDENT'S PAGE

TODD G. FRIEDLAND

Make a Difference!

As I write this, we are in the midst of the “Pokémon Go” craze. If you are one of the few that escaped the constant news reports on Pokémon, Pokémon Go is an app created by Nintendo based on the Pokémon characters. Pokémon are little creatures with various powers that are trained by their human handlers to do battle in tournaments. Nintendo’s app uses a smartphone camera to allow users to locate Pokémon, collect them, and eventually battle others. The Pokémon are imposed by the app in to the view on the smartphone screen. For example, a user could be looking at the Statue of Liberty via their smartphone camera and see a Pokémon sitting on Lady Liberty’s torch. The user could then capture the Pokémon. So, app users are walking around public places looking at the world through their phone screens. Bumping into things. Not really paying attention to what is around them. Just hunting Pokémon. As of this writing, the Pokémon Go craze has gripped people of all ages and Nintendo added \$9 billion to its market value in a matter of days.

I raise Pokémon Go because I witnessed a surreal scene the other day as I sat outside in the Civic Center reviewing a brief. Before I tell you about that, let’s discuss the Civic Center itself for a moment. If you have not walked through it recently, put down the *OC Lawyer* magazine and drive down there for a stroll. Orange County’s government is centralized there. The Board of Supervisors, District Attorney’s office, office of the Public Defender, and numerous other governmental agencies are all there. More importantly for us lawyers, Orange County’s court system is there.

The courthouse where I spend time must have been quite a sight when it was built. The architecture, with its metal shutters running the height of the building, is unique. There used to be a water feature out front. And the courthouse is surrounded by stone entries and pathways. Sure, it has lost its luster, but imagine it back in the day. Outside the courthouse’s backdoors is a large plaza that now displays flags from Orange County’s cities. There are also wide walkways and green space. Soon, the county will construct new buildings in the area and attempt to revitalize the Civic Center.

The Civic Center is the epicenter of justice in Orange County. It should be a shining example of access to justice, dispute resolution, fairness and equality, and all the other characteristics of the legal system in our great society.

Thus, it is somewhat ironic that the Civic Center has also become the epicenter of homelessness in Orange County. It is estimated that 500 people are living in the Civic Center. They live amidst construction that upgrades the Civic Center while at the same time displacing people from their familiar “spots” on the pavement or grass that they call “home.” They worry about whether they will be ticketed for

camping or storing too many items on public property. They stand in line for food or other items handed out by the many groups doing charity. They battle a bevy of problems such as health issues, mental illness, lack of facilities (restrooms and showers), and whether clean clothes are possible. Their “restrooms” are buckets and the bushes. Their “homes” are blue tarps draped over whatever belongings they can protect.

Amidst this combination of hope, despair, chaos, and tranquility, I sat reading a brief. On occasion I had a brief conversation with members of the homeless population. One gentleman saw a Lakers rally towel poking out of my briefcase and we chatted about their prospects for this year. I gave him the towel. A woman started screaming obscenities at me; or maybe it was at the sky, or at someone she thought she saw. I was concerned that I was in her designated plot of Civic Center real estate so I moved. As I walked back towards the courthouse, the smell of urine and feces was overpowering. The stench is carried on the breeze that flows through the plaza and seems to hit every corner. Sometimes it seems to burn your nose as you breathe.

It is a strange scene to see the contrasts of the Civic Center. Women and men in suits make a beeline for the courthouse while traversing a pathway bordered by disheveled people, a tent city, and other sights and sounds of homelessness. You can see members of the general public who walk this path pick up their pace and keep their eyes focused straight ahead. Don’t engage. Don’t make eye contact. Just get to the courthouse doors as quickly as possible.

And then, something even more surreal than usual caught my eye. People were playing Pokémon Go in the Civic Center. Among the abject poverty were people laughing, running from place to place, staring at their phone screens, looking for mythical, animated Pokémon to show up and be captured. Were Pokémon appearing on top of the blue tarps? Were they appearing on the heads of homeless sleeping on the sidewalk? Perhaps they were hiding in the bushes. The homeless people and their encampments had become

The homeless people and their encampments had become participants in Pokémon Go players’ entertainment.

participants in Pokémon Go players’ entertainment. And, throughout, these players seemed oblivious to the plight experienced by the people around them.

We at the OCBA cannot be oblivious to homelessness and this large population living in the shadow of the center of justice in Orange County. We, the lawyers of the OCBA, can provide services to this population that other charities and agencies cannot. We can assist with expungements, completion of forms for benefits, retrieval of possessions, and other things. Such efforts are already underway through our partners at Legal Aid Society of Orange County, Public Law Center, and Veterans Legal Institute. The OCBA’s community outreach efforts are also on the rise.

Moreover, on October 22, 2016 the OCBA will “Stand Up For Homeless” with a day of service at the Civic Center. You can be a part of it. Volunteer now. We need your help.

It is time to make a difference.



Todd G. Friedland is the OCBA’s 2016 President. He is also a business litigation partner at Stephens Friedland LLP in Irvine. Want to make a difference? Email Todd at heyodd@ocbar.org, todd@sf-lawyers.com, or [@heytoddocba](https://twitter.com/heytoddocba).