



PRESIDENT'S PAGE THOMAS H. BIENERT, JR.

2014: Plans to Reinforce the OCBA's Solid Foundation of Service

I write this during the holidays, when we reflect on the good things in our lives. Orange County, including the OCBA, tops my list.

I moved from Louisiana to Southern California twenty-six years ago, first to Los Angeles, then to Orange County. I still notice each day that our county is beautiful, filled with everything imaginable to do (natural or man-made), and has the best weather in the world. It's also a fantastic place to practice law. Our diverse population presents every variant of legal and social issue known to man (good and bad), we boast as expansive and diverse a business community as exists in the world (requiring the services of all types of attorneys), and we have intelligent and conscientious attorneys and judges. Most of all, things by and large work here the way they are supposed to, with all of us having a fair chance to live and practice our profession.

I came here from a place and time where narrow-mindedness, cronyism, and corruption were presumed (thankfully, much progress has occurred since I left). Though I knew no one here, California was always welcoming and inspiring. At both the U.S. Attorney's Office and Irell & Manella, I was surrounded by bright, hard-working, and thoughtful people. Superiors and colleagues readily took the time to teach me; even more, their zeal for knowledge and improvement inspired me to do the same. My own firm has grown steadily based on work and accomplishment; I've not been confronted with overtures or demands to compromise integrity in order to enhance business. Sadly, I know attorneys in other places who haven't been so fortunate.

Even my time with adversaries has largely been professional and upbeat. Despite the stereotypes, unpleasant and unethical litigants, and uncaring or inattentive judges have rarely been my experience; I view almost all of my attorney adversaries positively, and can count on one hand my few instances of impolite or uncaring judges. This latter point was again reinforced recently. What little reputation I have is primarily in federal court, where I've spent the bulk of my practice. Last month, I tried a criminal case in Orange County Superior Court with a Judge and Deputy District Attorney who knew each other but did not know me. The Judge (the Honorable Carla Singer) and her staff were extremely courteous and professional to me and my client, the Deputy DA (Chris Duff) advocated zealously but was fair and up-front with me throughout, and the jury appeared attentive and conscientious during the entire process. The result was neither a win nor a loss (hung jury favoring conviction). But importantly, the process felt fairly administered by all involved. My practice puts me in courthouses all over the country, and I don't always walk away feeling that way.

In short, California is a meritocracy. Its blemishes are the exception, not the rule. We are fortunate to practice here.

I view our OCBA much the same way, as a meritocracy working in good faith to improve things for all of us. From its inception as an all-male ten-member association started in 1901, we are now a 9,000-member group, with eleven affiliate bar associations that

span the geography, practice areas, and demographics of our county. While some things took longer than they should have, we have broken through antiquated and narrow-minded barriers to become an organization wherein leaders and members reflect the diversity of our entire community. Our board and executive committee continue to make a priority of serving our members.

As I enter my term as president, our bar association is in great shape. We continue to be fiscally sound. Our presidents change each year, bringing new vigor and ideas with each term, but our Executive Director, Trudy Levindofske, has been with us for six years, providing consistency and expertise. Thanks to the hard work of John Hueston and others during his term, we own our own building, which will provide financial savings and suit our needs for years to come. Our Charitable Fund, Lawyer Referral & Information Service, MCLE Programs, and numerous committees continue to assist those in need and to provide invaluable continuing education and services to our members. We are technologically advanced, with an excellent website that provides members immediate access to OCBA information and services, calendar, and full issues of *Orange County Lawyer*. Our Internet services include a mobile app, and Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn accounts that allow us to communicate with our members. We have made available to members health care insurance and discounts on business support services.

My immediate predecessors have instituted terrific programs for our members. John Hueston initiated the extremely successful Masters Division, where our most experienced attorneys have a peer-based networking forum and can impart their immense skill and knowledge to less-experienced attorneys. Dimetria Jackson started Mommy Esquire, providing enjoyable opportunities for working attorney-parents to share and compare on the difficult balance of work and family. Wayne Gross initiated several strategic alliances with law schools, the arts, and the Orange County Business Council, which provide better insights into the needs of our community and better inform us of the vast legal resources OCBA members provide.

With these many positives in place, I plan to continue the stewardship of the many meaningful programs and services the OCBA offers. The strategic goals adopted during Dimetria Jackson's tenure will be a focus. Of particular import to me is furthering the strategic goal of Practice Viability. With our economy still not where it once was, seeking more employment for our members will continue to be a priority. To that end, I will explore ways to better develop the OCBA's ability to connect member attorneys with employment opportunities. Finally, and most importantly, it's your OCBA; let me know your ideas for doing things even better. You can send your ideas to me at President@ocbar.org.



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