



PRESIDENT'S PAGE

THOMAS H. BIENERT, JR.

Giving All Year Long

The happiest of us are often those who do the most for others. The giving spirit and attendant happiness quotient of many peak during the holiday season, the traditional time for giving. Of course, those needs don't end with the close of the holidays, but continue throughout the year. OCBA programs address the needs of those less fortunate, year-round. The OCBA gives each of us a ready-made system to make our own contribution to Orange County.

Typical of a bar association, we support the lawyers who practice in our county. What sets us apart from many bars, however, is our commitment to the service of others. Indeed, our Mission Statement goes well beyond merely supporting our attorneys:

To Enhance the System of Justice, To Support the Lawyers Who Serve It, and To Assist the Community Served By It.

True to our Mission, our attorneys routinely give to enhance our system of justice and the community.

OCBA attorneys volunteer hundreds of hours per year to provide legal expertise and services to those in need. The OCBA *Pro Bono* Committee works with the Public Law Center, an organization that provides free legal services to low-income residents, to work with clinics that serve the community. The forty-seven *Pro Bono* Committee members donate their time to plan and organize activities through which other OCBA members can volunteer their time and expertise, including bankruptcy, domestic violence, and guardianship clinics. Through these efforts, each year dozens of domestic violence victims at Laura's House are assisted in preparing restraining orders

for their protection. Hundreds of people are also served in weekly guardianship clinics, where unrepresented caregiver clients are educated about the guardianship petition process and assisted in filling out required forms. Hundreds more are helped through weekly bankruptcy clinics, where volunteer attorneys guide those in need through the bankruptcy process. Beyond the *Pro Bono* Committee, the OCBA also encourages and arranges for attorney members to handle individual cases from the Public Law Center on a *pro bono* basis.

The OCBA Lawyer Referral and Information Service (LRIS) assists the community by directing those with legal needs to a service provider. LRIS-trained representatives take calls from the public and refer them, as appropriate, to community service agencies, like Fair Housing, the Labor Board, and the Legal Aid Society; to attorneys who work for reduced fees on the "Modest Means Panel"; or to attorneys on the LRIS Attorney Referral Panels. LRIS provides attorneys that span over thirty-two practice areas. In the last year alone, LRIS handled almost 13,000 calls and made almost 6,000 referrals.

OCBA attorneys also donate their expertise through the yearly "Teenage Legal Survival Skills" program, where our attorneys provide

high school seniors with a primer on laws and issues that affect them once they turn eighteen. We also have a Speaker's Bureau, which provides attorney speakers for events at Senior Centers, Rotary Clubs, and the like about topical legal issues.

OCBA attorneys and their families also provide their time to improve our community in ways that extend beyond legal services. Each year, the seventy-five-member OCBA Community Outreach Committee arranges and sponsors over a dozen community events. The Committee addresses a wide range of needs, offering OCBA organization and manpower at events including beach cleanup, toy drives, luggage drives, food drives, soup kitchens, pet adoption, Race for the Cure, and visits to the Orangewood children's home. This coming month, the Outreach Committee will be participating in the Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County's Crop Harvesting Event, in which OCBA members and their families can help with planting, picking, and weeding the current in-season crops. You can learn more about this event and other OCBA events by checking out the OCBA website at www.ocbar.org to view this month's activities.

We also provide several opportunities for our attorneys to donate funds to organizations that help those in need. The OCBA Charitable Fund, a separate 501(c)(3) charity, raises funds through enjoyable events, like the Kenneth Lae Memorial Golf Tournament set for March 31 at Pelican Hill, and the "Raise Your Glass" Wine Tasting Fundraiser set for October 2 at Big Canyon Country Club, as well as through direct donations to the Charitable Fund. It then provides grants to

worthy organizations, such as the Constitutional Rights Foundation of Orange County, the Public Law Center, and many other lesser-known but worthwhile law-related charitable projects. And once again this year, the OCBA Community Outreach Committee will be assisting with the Charitable Fund's "Raise Your Glass" fall fundraiser and with Project Hope's Adopt-a-Family program during the Holiday Season.

In this Super Bowl month, I'll quote the great Vince Lombardi, who said, "Individual commitment to a group effort—that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work." It's also what makes the OCBA work. Our 9,000-member group has numerous programs that allow each of us to give in the way we think best, through expertise, time, or money. Consider in 2014 making your own individual commitment to our OCBA group effort. Let's give ourselves, and others, more reasons to be happy.



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