



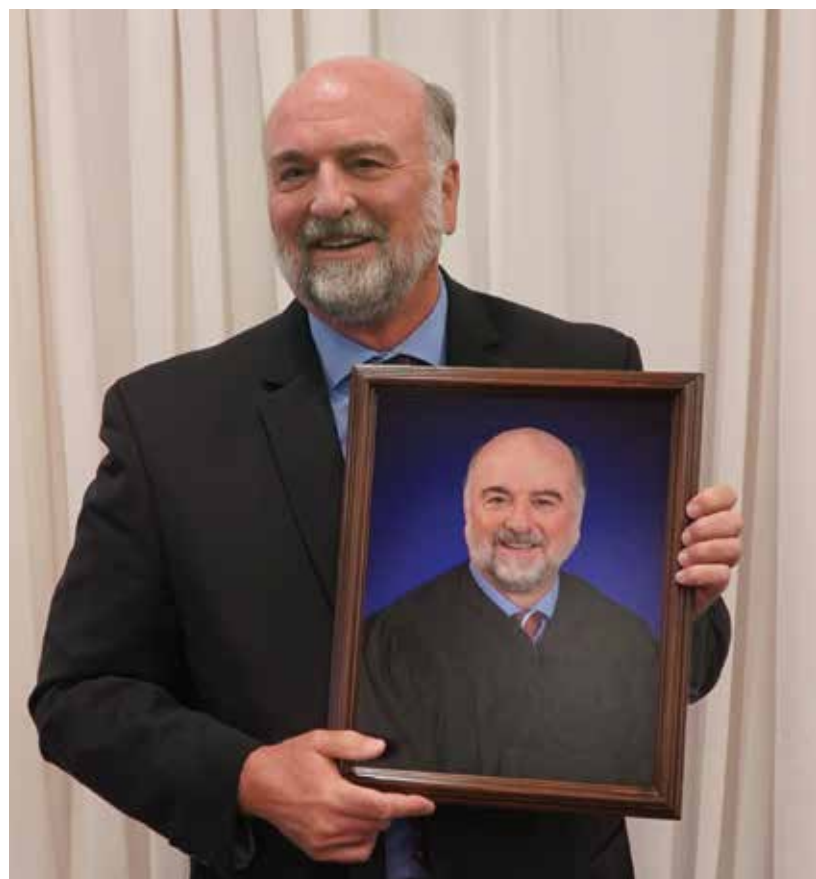
CITATIONS

JUNE - TWO THOUSAND TWENTY SIX

VCTLA JUDGES' NIGHT 2026

By Kathleen Maheu, Esq.

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KRISTINE TIJAM

JUDGE HARRY WALSH (RET.)

PAUL BUJOLD

MEG NAKAGAWA-HOFFMANN

JOHN ORR

JUDGE CARLA ORTEGA
& VICTORIA BORJESSON

SHANDRA L. TODD

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KATHLEEN "KAT" MAHEU

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By Kristine Tijam

I recently had the pleasure of attending some of my former students' law school graduation and was grateful for the honor of hooding them during the commencement ceremony. Some of those graduates later learned that they were part of the 30.8% of exam takers who received a passing score on the February 2026 California Bar Exam. Therefore, just a few weeks after the Commencement ceremony, I proudly witnessed some of them take their attorney oath. Their oath was administered by the **Honorable JoAnn Johnson**, who was also my Community Property professor while she was still a commissioner. Judge Johnson's courtroom was filled with excited family, friends, judges, local attorneys, and law school faculty.



Some of Ventura County's newest attorneys are now practicing law throughout the state in the fields of estate planning, insurance defense, personal injury, family law, and in the district attorney's office. Others are still evaluating their next steps. Regardless of where they may be in this new chapter of their professional journeys, they would all agree that now being a licensed attorney is an indescribable feeling after their years of hard work and sacrifices.

For those of us who may have forgotten, or who have taken a different version of the attorney oath, it presently reads as follows:

I, [licensee name] solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of the State of California, and that I will faithfully discharge the duties of an attorney and counselor at law to the best of my knowledge and ability. As an officer of the court, I will strive to conduct myself at all times with dignity, courtesy, and integrity.

Each of these words carry significant weight. Reading the attorney oath slowly and truly digesting what each component means and represents is a useful reminder of our professional and obligations to the law, courts, and public, as well as the deference we should have for the systems we serve.

The language in the attorney oath was codified by Business and Professions Code section 6067, which states, "Every person on his admission shall take an oath to support the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of the State of California, and faithfully to discharge the duties of any attorney at law to the best of his knowledge and ability. A certificate of the oath shall be indorsed upon his license." Additionally, further requirements of the attorney oath regarding civility are set forth in California Rules of Court, Rule 9.7.

Rule 9.7 became effective in 2014, which required the following additional language in the oath: "As an officer of the court, I will strive to conduct myself at all times with dignity, courtesy, and integrity." That Rule went into effect after the California State Bar observed increasingly unprofessional behavior among attorneys across various practice areas, which had detrimental effects on legal proceedings and court resources. In September 2025, the California Supreme Court approved amendments to Rule 9.7, reaffirmed the civility oath for California attorneys, and required annual affirmation. In February 2026, the State Bar Board of Trustees adopted the Civility in Practice, Navigating Professional Responsibilities Toolkit (Civility Toolkit), which is available on the State Bar's website. According to the State Bar, [t]he Civility Toolkit modernizes and builds upon the Attorney Guidelines by providing a statewide educational program, including a lesson plan, presentation materials, and participant resources designed to support meaningful engagement with civility principles in a variety of practice settings." The State Bar website also has other ample resources regarding the topic of civility. All of these efforts throughout the years stem from the State Bar's documented reports of increasing unprofessionalism.

How did we get to a point where the State Bar and other governing bodies must take such drastic measures to remind all of us to be civil with one another? Some will argue that this is an issue that has always existed in our industry but is only become more publicized in recent years, while others will argue that social media and changing attitudes are to blame. I believe there are a multitude of factors affecting the ways in which we interact and treat each other. Regardless, it feels like our world is becoming more polarized than ever and a lack of empathy and respect for others is growing. Additionally, as communication is increasingly through screens as opposed to in-person or through phone calls, many people seem to use those screens as shields to allow them to act more aggressively and sometimes unprofessionally.

Civility in our profession is not just how we communicate with one another. Rather, civility is much more pervasive and affects how we practice law. From a litigation standpoint, are we taking reasonable positions likely to be supported by a court of law, or are we being obstructive for an improper purpose? Are we acting to further our client's interests, or are we simply trying to harass the other side and make things more difficult for them? When the parties are at an impasse, are we genuinely trying to understand the other side's position, see the issue from their point of view, and meet and confer with them in good faith? Importantly, are we operating based on our legal and ethical duties and to further our clients' interests? These questions are critical in the broader discourse of civility, but sometimes fall to the wayside especially when handling contentious matters.

As officers of the Court, we can and should be held to higher standards. As attorneys, we not only represent our clients, but the rule of law. Our words and behavior are not only reflections of each of us, but have the profound effect of collectively shaping our legal community and how the public views the legal system.

I have always firmly believed that we can be zealous advocates while remaining

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PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

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professional and respectful to those working across the aisle from us. For the most part, I have pleasant working relationships with opposing counsel. I know I am not alone in that. As litigators, the vast majority of us seem to respect the other side and can take adverse positions while remaining civil and professional. Although we may encounter difficult situations (and people) that test our patience, we must remember that those disagreements are not personal and that our advocacy in the gray areas of the law is often necessary to further our legal system and best serve the public.

When working in an inherently adversarial system, it is far too easy at times to let emotion build when faced with improper conduct such as personal attacks, a creative recitation of “facts” you know to be false, and inflammatory actions. I have learned that remaining coolheaded and unwavering in those situations gets easier with experience and sometimes takes work. Importantly, it is crucial to not allow yourself to stoop to those engaging in unprofessional behavior. “Never wrestle with a pig in the mud. You both get dirty, and the pig likes it.”

Building and maintaining civility requires a conscious effort that begins at the individual level and develops into our culture. We foster professionalism daily, in the way that we mentor new attorneys, interact with our

colleagues, and work across the aisle with opposing counsel. This requires keeping emotions at bay, practicing patience, giving grace and keeping egos in check, and ensuring that our main goal is always acting in the clients’ best interests while balancing our legal and ethical obligations. The State Bar and governing bodies can provide countless civility resources and laws, but they are all ineffective without collective efforts by all of us to create the kind of legal community in which we want to practice and which would best serve the public.

As I know many would agree, I appreciate practicing law in Ventura County due in part to the civility and cordiality that we experience from our fellow legal professionals. I hope that this continues in the years to come, especially as we welcome more new attorneys into our industry.



Kristine Tijam is a civil litigation attorney at Procter, Shyer & Winter, LLP and an adjunct law professor at The Colleges of Law. Her practice focuses on representing cities, businesses, and individuals in various types of lawsuits. She can be reached at kristine@proctershoyer.com or (805) 603-8623.

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VCTLA JUDGES' NIGHT 2026

By Kathleen Maheu, Esq.



The Ventura County Trial Lawyers Association honored three distinguished judicial officers at its 46th Annual Judges' Night held on May 5, 2026, at the Holiday Inn in Oxnard. The evening recognized **Judge Maureen M. Houska** as the 2025 Judge of the Year and honored retired **Judge Bruce A. Young** and the late **Judge Ryan J. Wright** as Courtroom 22 portrait honorees. VCTLA President **Margaret 'Micky' Coyle** guided the evening's program and introductions.

The annual event brought together many judges (active and retired), attorneys, court staff, and members of the Ventura County legal community to recognize careers marked by professionalism, public service, and commitment to the administration of justice. The program was highlighted by sincere and heartfelt tributes to the evening's honorees.

Judge Ronda McKaig introduced Judge Houska and described her as both a colleague and a friend. McKaig described Houska as "refreshingly authentic" and praised her intelligence, preparation, and humility. She noted that Houska graduated as her high school valedictorian, has earned a black belt in Tae Kwon Do, and loves music and theater.

McKaig told the audience that Houska "shows up every single day willing to do the work." She described Houska as exceptionally thorough and explained that she carefully considers all arguments before

making decisions. McKaig also emphasized that Houska recognizes the people appearing before the court are real people and understands that judicial decisions carry "real consequences."

McKaig said that Houska genuinely loves judicial service and brings both "light and levity" to her work, even while handling difficult matters and demanding calendars. She described Houska as "whip smart," "well-read," and meticulous in checking facts and evaluating arguments.

McKaig also observed that Houska "doesn't always see how good she is," a comment that highlighted the humility colleagues admire in her.

Houska joined the Ventura County Superior Court in 2022 following decades in private practice, including work defending public entities in personal injury, employment, and civil rights litigation. In accepting the award, Houska called the recognition "deeply meaningful" and reflected on both the privilege and responsibility of judicial service. She acknowledged that "judgeship demands long hours."

Houska said she appreciates the skill and integrity of the trial lawyers who appear before her and acknowledged that litigation is not easy work. She recognized the emotional toll that litigation can take on attorneys working hard to represent their clients.

Houska also recognized the contributions of the court staff who make it possible for Department 20 to operate every day and said she has been inspired by countless colleagues on the Ventura County Superior Court bench. Quoting Helen Keller, she told the audience: "Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much." She also added: "Excellence in the courtroom is not a destination, it's a journey."

Houska's adult children, Luke and Brianna, attended the event and shared the evening's recognition with their mother. Houska ended with a plug for the Ventura County Superior Court's new Civil Mediation Program and encouraged attorneys to take advantage of the court's new mediation resources.

Judge John "Jack" Smiley (Ret.) introduced Judge Young with remarks that reflected both admiration and longtime friendship. Smiley described Young not only as a respected judicial officer, but also as his best friend. Smiley opened by observing that the legal profession is inherently adversarial and "full of disputes," noting that resolving conflict is how lawyers earn their living. Against that backdrop, Smiley said, Young built an entire career around solving these disputes.

Smiley reminded the audience that Young received the Ventura County Trial Lawyers Association's Judge of the Year Award 10 years ago. Now, Smiley said, Young was being recognized as a portrait honoree, and deservedly so.

Smiley also spoke warmly about Young's marriage and family life, joking that marrying his wife was Young's best personal decision and also his best career decision.

Young retired from the Ventura County Superior Court in December 2023 after more than 20 years of judicial service. The Ventura County Superior Court selected Young to serve as a court commissioner in 2002. He was sworn in on December 11, 2002, and began serving as commissioner on February 10, 2003. Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger later appointed Young to the Ventura County Superior Court on August 20, 2007.

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VCTLA JUDGES' NIGHT 2026

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Judge William Q. Liebmann (Ret.) drew Young into family law assignments, where Young reflected that the work involved helping “good people on their worst day,” a perspective that shaped his approach to judicial service throughout his career.

During his years on the court, Young presided over family law, juvenile, adoption, and criminal matters and later served as Assistant Presiding Judge and Presiding Judge of the court. Before joining the bench, Young worked in private practice and later served as a Ventura County Deputy District Attorney.

Smiley praised Young’s skill as a settlement judge and told the audience that “Bruce Young is very, very good at settling cases.” He also said Young “prepared as though every day is his first day on the bench,” emphasizing Young’s discipline and professionalism throughout his judicial career. Smiley said Young’s memory was impeccable, and that he often knew his cases “better than the lawyers” appearing before him.

Throughout his remarks, Smiley emphasized Young’s humility and steady approach to judicial service. Smiley said Young never made the work about himself and “never [played] the hero — not about him.”

Smiley also reflected on Young’s roots in Ventura County, including Young’s love of basketball and admiration for UCLA and Los Angeles Lakers star Jamaal Wilkes. Smiley recalled the story of a 1968 game in which Buena High School lost to Ventura High School 61-60, with Young guarding Wilkes on the court. Smiley recounted Young joking that, despite the loss, he “held Jamaal Wilkes to 36 points,” which drew laughter from the audience.

In his own remarks, Young recounted a story of a juror who once drew a picture of him during a trial. He wondered if he should use that drawing as his portrait, but noted that he looked like Charlie Brown in the drawing, eliciting more laughter from the audience. Young then reflected on his upbringing and the path that eventually led him to the law. He explained that his father

had very little formal education and had worked in coal mines. Young attended Cal Poly San Luis Obispo as an undergraduate and pointed to a business law class during his senior year as the spark that led him to the legal profession. He later attended Pepperdine Law School.

Young also reflected on lessons he learned long before becoming a judge. He spoke about officiating sports and the importance of decisiveness and preparation. “Make the call,” Young said. “Don’t waste time. No matter what the call — someone will be mad.”

Young also recognized the contributions of his court staff, including his bailiff, judicial assistant, and judicial secretary, acknowledging the daily work they performed to support the court and the people appearing before it.

The evening concluded with a tribute to Judge Wright, whose portrait will join the gallery in Courtroom 22 following his passing in September 2025. **Presiding Judge Matthew P. Guasco** delivered the tribute and reflected on Wright’s leadership, work ethic, and dedication to public service. Guasco described Wright as his “best friend” and described Wright as “real” whether you liked him or not, and as someone who “hated” meetings and just wanted to “get to the point.”

Wright served on the Ventura County Superior Court beginning in 2011 and spent many years supervising the criminal division and presiding over the Criminal Master Calendar. Before joining the bench, Wright worked as a Ventura County prosecutor and served in multiple assignments, including narcotics, domestic violence, sexual assault, and community prosecution.

A major theme of Guasco’s remarks focused on Wright’s relentless commitment to efficiency and effective court administration. Guasco described supervising the criminal division as “3D chess” and said Wright handled one of the court’s most demanding assignments with exceptional discipline and organization. Guasco emphasized that Wright constantly looked for ways to improve criminal case management,

jury selection, and courtroom operations while still ensuring fairness to the parties appearing before the court.

Guasco explained that Wright understood the importance of moving cases efficiently through the system without sacrificing preparation or justice.

Guasco also reflected on Wright’s understanding that criminal cases affect not only defendants and victims, but entire families and communities. He said Wright believed courts must balance “justice, fairness, compassion, and mercy.”

Throughout the tribute, Guasco emphasized Wright’s integrity, intensity, and commitment to excellence. He described Wright as someone deeply committed to the rule of law and to maintaining public confidence in the justice system. Guasco also referred to Wright’s “legendary temper — but a legend of justice.” He opined that Wright would be seen as a “giant” over time.

Near the conclusion of the presentation, Wright’s daughter Alexandra addressed the audience and thanked the Ventura County legal community for honoring her father’s memory and public service.

The evening served as both a celebration and a reflection on the qualities that define exceptional judicial service: preparation, integrity, humility, and compassion. Through their work on and off the bench, Houska, Young, and Wright each have strengthened the Ventura County courts and the community they served.



Kathleen “Kat” Mabeu is an associate attorney practicing family law with Pachowicz | Goldenring, a PLC, and Managing Editor of CITATIONS. She can be reached at kat@pplaw.law.

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BEYOND THE BENCH: JUDGE HARRY WALSH (RET.)



Judge Harry Walsh (Ret.)

When I drove home on Friday, December 13, 2024, with one exception, it was no different from any of the other 1,300 Friday afternoons I had driven home since being appointed to the Superior Court in June of 1998. The exception was that I would not be going back on the following Monday morning. I was 81 years old and decided not to re-enlist for another six-year term.

I have never shied away from saying that being a judge was the best job I ever had, bar none. When I first reported for work in July of 1998, my supervising judge was **Judge Bill Peck**. He told me that there were three stages to being a judge. First, you cannot believe that you get paid for doing the job. Second, it just becomes a job, and then, you hate it. I thought this was odd advice for the first day on the job, but I never got past stage one.

When I retired, I was fully intent on enlisting in the Assigned Judge Program, but wanted some time to disengage. What I discovered was that I enjoyed having time on my hands, and not having deadlines to complicate my life, e.g. ruling on a summary judgment motion with 150 undisputed material facts. So, what have I done? I have not written the Great American novel, nor have I brought peace to the Middle East. I begin my days with a 600-yard swim at 5:30 a.m. at the health club I belong to. That is

followed by reading the three newspapers I get every day (L.A. Times, Ventura Star, Wall Street Journal).

I have successfully become reacquainted with my wife (we have been married for 53 years), and sometimes I take an afternoon nap. I read a lot (history and some favorite fiction authors). I went to Berlin for week with my younger daughter, and have been to Kansas City with my youngest son for a Dodger game (Kansas City has an incredible World War One museum).

At home, I fold laundry and prepare dinner several nights a week. I belong to a couple of informal groups that I have lunch with periodically. If this sounds lacking in excitement, it probably is. However, at my present age, I have more days behind me than I have ahead of me. I did not want to conclude my judicial career by leaving on a gurney after having a heart attack in the middle of a jury voir dire.

My retirement uniform is Crocs on my feet, shorts and a clean T-shirt. If you spot me in the produce section at Von's, don't be shy. Say "Hello," and share a few minutes with me. Some of my best friends are, and have been, lawyers.

Harry Walsh
Judge of the Superior Court, Retired

NEWS FROM THE COURT

VENTURA SUPERIOR COURT TO END USE OF COURT CALL

The Court has announced that effective July 1, 2026, it will no longer coordinate services with Court Call. All remote access will be coordinated via Zoom.

CASE REASSIGNMENTS FROM DEPT. J3 TO J4

Beginning June 1, 2026, W&I 8102 / 8103 Deadly Weapons cases including Requests to Challenge Disqualified Persons, and Notice of Impoundment of Vehicle cases will be assigned to Judge Carla Ortega in Courtroom J4 at the Juvenile Justice Center in Oxnard.

Beginning June 1, 2026, the above matters will be heard on Mondays at 3:00pm in Courtroom J4.

Filings on the above case types must be submitted to the Civil Clerk's Office at the Hall of Justice in Ventura (800 S. Victoria Ave Ventura, CA 93009). Filings will not be accepted at the Juvenile Justice Center in Oxnard.

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VENTURA COUNTY LEGAL AID LAUNCHES EVICTION PREVENTION PROGRAM

By Paul Bujold

Ventura County Legal Aid (VCLA) is proud to announce that it received funding from the County of Ventura's Continuum of Care initiative to create an eviction prevention program. This program will assist individuals whose housing is in jeopardy, before eviction and displacement become inevitable. Given the high cost of real estate and rents, housing instability is a pressing issue. VCLA receives 1,000 housing-related inquiries annually, primarily concerning unlawful detainers and habitability. This critical funding will allow VCLA to significantly expand its capacity to deliver housing stability services and protect vulnerable tenants.

To lead the implementation of this vital program, VCLA is bringing on **Debra Benci-Woodward**, a licensed bilingual attorney with over 20 years of experience specializing in housing and self-help legal services.

VCLA views itself as a vital part of the community's broader support infrastructure. As part of this grant, the eviction prevention team will work closely with existing community partners, including the Ventura Superior Court's Self-Help Legal Access Center (SHLAC), to coordinate efforts and maximize their effectiveness for Ventura County residents.

Services provided through the program include:

- Delivering clear, accessible legal information to tenants.
- Offering dedicated legal counsel and advice regarding housing rights and disputes.
- Assisting individuals with completing necessary legal forms and documentation.
- Providing mediation services to help landlords and tenants resolve conflicts outside of the courtroom.

- Connecting clients with additional community resources through "warm handoffs" to partner organizations and agencies.
- Hosting "know your rights" tenant education workshops, in-person and online.
- Legal representation in selected cases.

If you know of anyone who could benefit from our eviction prevention program, please have them complete an online application located on our website at www.vcla.org or call our office at 805-650-7592.



Paul Bujold is the Executive Director of Ventura County Legal Aid.

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VENTURA COUNTY LEGAL AID PROVIDES FLEXIBLE OPPORTUNITY FOR ATTORNEYS TO COMPLETE PRO BONO HOURS AND SERVE THE VENTURA COMMUNITY

By Meg Nakagawa-Hoffmann

Long days, growing caseloads, and endless billable hours; it's easy to get caught up in the stress and overwhelming responsibility that comes with the practice of law. Along the way, you can forget your purpose, your "why." Just take a moment and think: do you remember what you wrote in your law school application? Perhaps you wrote about your desire to serve your community or provide equal access to justice. In the day-to-day chaos of being an attorney, it's easy to forget that our ability to practice law equips us with one of the most powerful tools: the power to help individuals during some of the darkest moments of their lives.

One of the most effective ways to fulfill your individual commitment to giving back to your community is by providing pro bono services.

While California does not have a mandatory minimum number of pro bono hours for practicing lawyers, it is highly encouraged. Furthermore, effective this year, active attorney licenses **must** annually report pro bono legal services hours and reduced-fee hours served to low-income individuals or nonprofits. (Business & Professions Code § 6073.2.)

If you are interested in providing pro bono legal services but are unsure how you could possibly add to your current caseload, Ventura County Legal Aid (VCLA) is providing a flexible opportunity for attorneys to fulfill their hours while serving Ventura's underserved community.

VCLA provides no-cost legal aid for low-income, disabled, or elderly Ventura County residents. VCLA continues to promote equal access to justice through direct representation, legal advice, information, and educational outreach.

Areas of legal services provided include family law, eviction and tenant rights, estate planning and trusts, domestic violence, and more. VCLA currently has five programs: community assistance, the walk-in legal aid clinic, partnership with the Family Justice Center, the eviction prevention program, and its newest program, the

pro bono attorney program. This means that no matter your practice, you'll have no problem finding a way to help.

Volunteering through VCLA's pro bono program is simple and easy. You decide how many cases to take, and VCLA tracks your hours so you can report them to the State Bar. VCLA carefully screens all referrals, and your work is covered under VCLA's professional liability insurance policy.

Now, more than ever, it's imperative that we show up for our communities and provide support in any way we can. Whether it's a couple of hours a week or a month, never underestimate the impact you can have as an attorney providing legal support to a person in need.

If you're interested in volunteering with VCLA, or you would like more information, you can reach out at 805-465-2764 or support@vclegalaid.org.



Meg Nakagawa-Hoffmann is a law clerk at Ferguson Case Orr Paterson LLP and is currently completing her final year of law school. Prior to joining the firm, she served as a legal intern at Legal Aid Foundation of Santa Barbara County. She currently volunteers at the walk-in clinic operated by Ventura County Legal Aid and runs a mental health organization called Blossom the Project.

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Lori M. Dobrin, Esq.

MEDIATOR

Lori Dobrin is a 30-plus year litigator who is recognized for her preparation, empathetic demeanor and knack for building rapport and trustworthiness. She brings this mindset to her mediation practice where she balances patience with perseverance in discovering the underlying interests to forge a resolution. Firm on the substance on the dispute, yet tactful towards the participants, she employs active listening, and asking the right questions to hone into the root issues that move the parties to agreement. In her roles as mediator and settlement officer for various Courts, including the US District Court, and the Superior Courts of Los Angeles, Santa Barbara and Ventura, she is gratified when her encouragement and tenacity results in litigants taking control over the outcomes of their dispute and reaching resolution, sparing them from the inherent uncertainty of protracted litigation and trial.

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John Orr sadly announced to Ferguson Case Orr Paterson that he “lost my long-time friend and client, **Bob Soares**, in May. He died at the ripe age of 94. I had visited him at his home last week and while physically pained, he was as sharp as ever.”

John's memories

Bob came to Santa Paula in his sophomore year of high school, was sweet on a girl in his class, Catherine Atmore (Punky), and married her five years later after they had graduated from college, she from Berkeley and he from St. Mary's. Drafted during the Korean War, Bob managed to get posted in Germany through local Ventura contacts. When Bob and Punky wed, as he recently told me, they honeymooned for two years in a Volkswagen bug he bought from winnings playing poker on the troop ship on his way to Europe.

Bob attended Boalt Hall for law school and joined the District Attorney's office, which in those days included the County Counsel functions. Some years later, he and others started their own firm, which later became Hathaway, Perrett, Webster. Bob would regularly try cases for transactional lawyers. He became a Municipal Court Judge in 1971 or '72 and then was elevated to the Superior Court when the courts were unified in the late 1990s after Prop. 220 passed. **Joe Strohman**, **Mike Case**, and others in the firm appeared before him periodically. As a judge, Bob strongly believed his role was to make rulings based on the facts and the law, not to push parties to settlement.

He and I became friends because Punky's family had a house at Faria Beach. The year before I took the bar, I bought a Hobie Cat I had no idea how to sail, and he had

IN MEMORIAM

JUDGE ROBERT SOARES

one as well. He taught me the ropes, and we had weekend sailing regattas along the beach. Bob always set the course with Troels Udsen; to no one's surprise, they invariably finished one, two. On the other hand, I was the sand volleyball coach to his young family of six kids. I'd leave the office at 5, put on shorts and a T-shirt, run up the beach to their house for v-ball and then dinner, back home at dark. They were some of the best times of my life.

We hunted doves at the Ranch reservoir every September 1st, we argued about politics, and we each became owners of avocado groves. Our friendship grew. I followed his kids' progress through school, marriage, and tragedies and victories both large and small. I supplied him with corn, melons and boysenberry jam.

Last year Punky died in August, leaving a large hole in Bob's life. No one could fill it – which is, of course how it should be when you marry your high school sweetheart and stay together for as long as he did.

More recently Bob, realizing his own limitations, placed a lot of trust in my decision making for him. I felt honored by his confidence.

I share this short history in the hope that we all remember how lucky we are to serve the clients we have and how meaningful it is to them and their families as well as to each of us.

Michael Case added

Judge Soares was one of a kind. That is probably why John and Bob were such good friends and well suited. He was famous for his efficient, no moment wasted, court room. He even announced he did not need to be assigned a bailiff at one point.

A smart, practical judge that honored and loved his position. Not afraid to make decisions. I was always pleased to be assigned to his court room.

My partner **Bill Paterson** and I tried his last trial on retired status. One month for Bill and two weeks for me (I got out early on motion). It was difficult because of opposing counsel, and it tested the patience of even Judge Soares. Some great stories.

But there are a lot of grand Bob Soares stories.

Joe Strohman shared one of those stories

Judge Soares was known for being a no nonsense, hard-working judge.

In the 1990s, Mike Case and I had a “rent a judge” trial with him shortly after he retired from the bench. We were holding the trial in the large judges' conference room on the first floor of the VCSC courthouse. At the start of the trial there was a bomb scare, and everyone was ordered out of the courthouse. Hundreds were standing outside of the courthouse. While the bomb scare was still ongoing, Judge Soares came out of the courthouse, grabbed all of the attorneys in our case and dragged us back into the conference room. He said, “let's go,” and started the trial.

Bill Paterson had a great line about Judge Soares: If Judge Soares could, he would put a wood divider down the middle of the courtroom and try 2 cases at the same time.

As Mike wrote

The herd is thinning. And for John, “a grief that cannot be spoken.”

John Orr and **Joe Strohman** are partners at Ferguson Case Orr Paterson, LP. **Michael Case** is of counsel. **Bill Paterson** is a retired partner.

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TRIBUTES TO BRENDA MCCORMICK

From Judge Carla Ortega

When I think of Brenda McCormick, I think of bright, unflagging enthusiasm and an unwavering commitment to public service. I first met Brenda through the managing attorney listserv when she was serving as General Counsel for the Court, and I was the newly hired Managing Attorney for Kern County Superior Court.

Brenda was a source of calm during tumultuous times, a voice of reason when we were navigating the uncharted waters of COVID, and an endless source of knowledge when it came to court operations.

Although Brenda was often required to make difficult or unpopular decisions, she never made them lightly or without thoughtful consideration. She was never driven by personal ambition, but instead by what she genuinely believed was in the best interests of the court as a whole. The demands of balancing the interests of judges, court management, court employees, justice partners, the union, and the Judicial Council of California made her role extraordinarily challenging and complex, and she navigated it with grace.

Brenda approached her work with wisdom, compassion, and integrity. While hers was a position in which it was impossible to make everyone happy, everyone could be assured that she always gave her very best, because that dedication was simply part of who she was.

I am deeply saddened that Brenda will not have the opportunity to enjoy all the long-awaited fruits of her labor, to watch her twins grow up, and to grow old alongside her beloved husband, Kevin. But I know she made our world brighter, kinder, and more joyful simply by being in it.



Judge Carla Ortega
was appointed by Governor Gavin Newsom as Judge of the Ventura County Superior Court in December 2024.

From Victoria Borjesson

There are leaders who supervise, and then there are leaders who *stand in the fire with you*. Brenda was the latter — a rare combination of brilliance, stamina, and heart. She was one of the hardestworking CEOs and General Counsels I have ever known or worked with, and she carried those roles with a level of integrity that shaped every corner of our court.

Brenda didn't just mentor an executive team — she mentored an entire court. Executives, managers, supervisors, attorneys, clerks, analysts... every one of us learned from her. If a crisis erupted, no matter the hour, no matter the location, Brenda was there. Whether she was at the Hall of Justice or halfway across the country in Nebraska, she handled every emergency with the same calm, grounded grace that made people breathe easier the moment she arrived — **not to mention, she did it all while dressed beautifully and styled high, never wearing the same ensemble twice.**

She had that rare ability to step into any pair of shoes (and I mean ANY pair of shoes) and wear any hat the moment the court needed her. Strategist, counselor, firefighter, architect, protector — she moved between roles with a kind of effortless precision that made the impossible look routine.



From left to right, Victoria Borjesson, Retired Court Executive Assistant to Brenda L. McCormick, Court CEO, Superior Court of California, County of Ventura; Keri Dawkins (close friend); Brenda McCormick; and Lorraine Benavides, Retired HR Director (almost 36yrs), Superior Court of California, County of Ventura

And nowhere was that more evident than on March 19, 2020, when COVID19 crashed into our world and turned everything upside down. While most people were still trying to understand what was happening, Brenda was already out on the front line. She was still serving as our General Counsel, but during the days you could find her at the COVID19 Triage site — the one she and her team seemed to build overnight, as if by instinct.

She wasn't behind a desk issuing directives. She was out there in person, setting up tents, organizing flow, wheeling in carts of water and ice, replenishing staff supplies, coordinating COVID19 materials and masks for staff and court visitors, helping with testing, and assisting citizens with whatever they needed — often when they were already frustrated, frightened, or overwhelmed just to be there. She met every one of them with patience, clarity, and compassion.

And through all of it, she was moving fast — sometimes literally running around the triage tent and the perimeter — in her stilettos, no doubt. Only Brenda could turn a crisis site into a runway of competence and calm. It was impossible not to smile watching her do what she did best: lead from the front, heels clicking, mind sharp, heart steady.

That was Brenda: unshakable and unmistakably herself, even in the middle of a global storm.

And the storm didn't pass quickly. COVID lasted three relentless years. During that time, Brenda must have issued well over a hundred emergency orders concerning the Court's COVID19 Emergency Procedures. Everything changed by the hour, and she was right there beside the Presiding Judge, drafting, revising, and issuing order after order as the situation shifted beneath everyone's feet.

Just when she would lock in a new emergency procedure — when she finally had the latest guidance stabilized and implemented — COVID19 would turn around and hit the courts with yet another

BECOMING A CERTIFIED GREEN BUSINESS

by Shandra L. Todd

obstacle. A new surge. A new mandate. A new restriction. A new operational crisis. And every single time, Brenda moved quickly. She adapted, recalibrated, and responded with the same sharp mind and steady hand that carried this court through the storm.

She didn't just keep up with the chaos — she stayed ahead of it.

Her leadership wasn't theoretical. It was lived. It was visible. It was felt. She showed us what it meant to serve with courage, to lead with grace, and to carry responsibility without ever losing her humanity.

For those of us who had the privilege of working beside her, Brenda wasn't just a boss. She was a guide, a mentor, a fierce advocate, and a friend. And she was also my friend. That is a truth I will carry for the rest of my life.

Although I am now retired from the Ventura Superior Court, I am certain that her absence continues to be felt throughout all three courthouses, across the Ventura County legal community, and far beyond the places where her leadership once steadied so many.

Words will never be able to express the loss that I — along with hundreds of others whose lives she touched — feel at this time. Brenda wasn't just a leader; she was a presence, a force, a steady heartbeat in the middle of chaos. Her absence is felt in every hallway, every department, every place where her footsteps once echoed — stilettoes and all.

***She gave her strength freely,
her heart without hesitation.***

***Her life was a rainbow —
leaving color in every life she touched.***

Love, Victoria

Victoria Borjesson, now retired, was the Court Executive Assistant to Brenda L. McCormick, Court CEO, Superior Court of California, County of Ventura.



It's no secret that the legal profession is among the highest consumers of paper. However, with advancements in technology like e-filing, e-service and electronic files, the use of paper has decreased...*slightly*. As a legal community, there are steps we can take to make environmental sustainability a priority in our businesses. The City of Ventura is part of the California Green Business Network, where local businesses can become Certified Green Businesses by implementing simple practices into their business workflow.

Their mission is to assist businesses with operating sustainably while still being profitable. To become certified, businesses voluntarily implement environmentally friendly practices into their business by conserving water and energy, implementing waste reduction, and pollution prevention. To start, a business follows an online checklist and receives assistance from your city's Green Business Coordinator, who will come do a short walk through at your business, assist with the registration process and provide you with a short list of changes to complete your certification. They even provide a \$500 rebate to help with any updates needed to comply with the checklist.

Once certified, your business will be entered into a statewide database of green certified businesses and listed on the Shop Green App. Our law office was recently certified for the second time. We were honored to be recognized in a ceremony at a Ventura City Council meeting and meet our mayor.

With a little effort, we are proud to be contributing to making our city and business environmentally sustainable.

<https://greenbusinessca.org/CityofVentura>
<https://greenbusinessca.org/get-certified/>



Shandra L. Todd is the Vice President of Ventura County Barristers and works as an associate attorney for The Law Office of Amber Rodriguez. Todd has been in estate planning, trust administration and probate for about fourteen years, first as a Paralegal, and now as an associate attorney.



VALERIE SALAZAR – RECIPIENT OF THE J. ROGER MYERS SCHOLARSHIP FOR 2025-2026

By Rachel Coleman

The J. Roger Myers Scholarship Fund is an ongoing, \$5,000 yearly scholarship created in honor of local attorney, J. Roger Myers. The Fund is proud to announce Valerie Salazar as the 2025-2026 recipient.

Salazar is a first-generation college graduate, community leader, and mother of three whose work is rooted in lived experience, education, and service to Ventura County. She attends The Colleges of Law, Ventura Campus and is in her first year pursuing her Juris Doctor degree. She is expected to graduate in 2029.

Salazar was inspired to pursue a career in law at an early age. As a young person, she was directly impacted by the juvenile justice system. As a result, she learned first-hand how the systems in place often make decisions about youth without considering their perspective. Education became the pathway that allowed her to change her own trajectory and commit herself to a career where she could have impact in the local community by ensuring youth and families are seen, heard, and supported within the legal system.

Today, her work in the local community spans multiple systems and community spaces. She previously served as a Community Outreach Specialist with the Ventura County Community Information Exchange, where she supported cross-sector collaboration among schools, health providers, local government agencies, and community-based organizations to strengthen access to coordinated, prevention-focused services. She also serves as Commissioner of the Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention Commission, advocating for youth-centered policy, system accountability, and the meaningful inclusion of lived experience in oversight and reform efforts. In addition, she participates in statewide juvenile justice collaboratives that help inform local practice and policy.

Beyond formal leadership roles, she remains deeply engaged in direct community care. She is a member of The Parents' Voice's CORE group, an emergency shelter home provider for foster youth, and a volunteer book club facilitator at the juvenile facility. She recently accepted a new position with The Office of Youth and Community Restoration "OYCR" as an Analyst. OYCR is a California agency established under Senate Bill 823 to promote trauma-responsive, restorative justice and oversee the transition from state-run youth prisons to community-based care.

Her pursuit in a career in law is to build safer, more equitable systems for today's youth and for future generations.

Salazar was extremely grateful to receive the scholarship as it will assist her in continuing her education at The Colleges of Law. She will be officially recognized as the recipient of the J. Roger Myers Scholarship at the Ventura County Bar Association's 41st Annual Installation and Awards Dinner on Saturday, November 14, 2026 at the Crown Plaza Hotel in Ventura.




Rachel Coleman
handles civil litigation and family law matters. She can be reached at rachelcoleman@live.com



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MEMBER SPOTLIGHTS:

CAROLYN PHILLIPS AND LOUIS KREUZER

By Kathleen Mahen, Esq.



Carolyn Phillips brings a broad background in litigation, public service, and community involvement to her Ventura County real property practice. A member of the Ventura County Bar Association for nearly 20 years, Phillips practices through the Law Office of Carolyn C. Phillips, APC, focusing on real property law and civil litigation involving real estate, contracts, and related disputes. Her work occasionally intersects with matters involving criminal law components, drawing on her earlier experience as a public defender in Johnson County, Kansas.

Phillips earned her law degree from Pepperdine School of Law after attending UCLA as an undergraduate. In addition to her VCBA membership, she has served on the VCBA Lawyer Referral Board and previously participated in Inns of Court. She is also active with Women Lawyers of Ventura County and the Los Angeles County Bar Association.

Originally from a small town outside Kansas City, Kansas, Phillips moved to California in 1986 and now resides in Camarillo. She and her husband have four daughters whose careers reflect the family's strong professional and academic values: two are physicians and two are attorneys. Phillips proudly describes family gatherings as full of "women power."

Her commitment to helping others motivated her decision to pursue law. Phillips explained that she has always believed she was blessed with intellectual gifts and feels a responsibility to use them in service of people who cannot always help themselves. As if law school wasn't enough for her, Phillips attended nursing school before hitting the books at Pepperdine.

Outside the office, Phillips enjoys gardening, hiking, snorkeling, and travel. Since 2017, she has been an active member and Executive Vice President of the Conejo Ski & Sports Club, leading trips to destinations including Dubai, Belize, Thailand, and Scotland. She also managed her community garden for approximately a decade before retiring from that role in 2025.

Phillips's favorite Ventura County experiences involve the Channel Islands, particularly riding an Island Packers boat while dolphins race alongside the vessel. She also enjoys fishing and hiking on the islands. Closer to home, she recommends Azafran in Camarillo for its "exotic and delicious" food and exceptional soups.

A lifelong Kansas City Chiefs fan, Phillips says football is "in my blood." She also enjoys watching *The Big Bang Theory*, especially the character Sheldon Cooper, and cites *All the Light We Cannot See* by Anthony Doerr as one of her favorite books because of its powerful portrayal of war's impact on individuals.

When asked about a favorite legal statute, Phillips noted that while she does not have a single favorite, Civil Code section 1717 stands out because she always tries to recover attorney fees for her clients whenever possible.

Her favorite quote reflects the faith and determination that guide her life and career: "*I can do all things through God who strengthens me.*" Philippians 4:13.



Louis H. Kreuzer II has spent more than three decades in legal practice with a focus on employment law through the Law Office of Louis H. Kreuzer II. Admitted to the California Bar in 1992 after graduating from California Western School of Law, Kreuzer brings both analytical rigor and community involvement to his legal career.

Originally from Kansas City and a graduate of the University of Kansas, Kreuzer said he chose the legal profession because he believed he would enjoy its analytical aspects. Over the years, he has become involved in the Ventura County legal community, serving as a VCBA Board Member and Chair of the Ventura County Judicial Evaluations Committee. His civic and service interests also extend beyond the legal field through his involvement with the Sons of the American Revolution and the Knights of Columbus.

Family remains central to Kreuzer's life. He is married to Margie Kreuzer, and together they have two daughters. One daughter works as a registered nurse at Children's Hospital Los Angeles, while the other is graduating from San Diego State University. The family also includes Remi, their 16-year-old cattle dog mix.

Outside the office, Kreuzer enjoys spending time outdoors, particularly at Oxnard Beach and in the Santa Monica Mountains. Hiking and golf are among his favorite recreational activities, while college basketball remains his preferred spectator sport.

Kreuzer's favorite films include *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* and Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*. He also names *A Confederacy of Dunces* as a favorite book. When it comes to food, barbecue tops the list.


Asked what he might have pursued had he not become a lawyer, Kreuzer offered an unexpected answer: "social media influencer."

Among constitutional principles, Kreuzer identifies the First Amendment as his favorite written law, reflecting an appreciation for the freedoms and protections it guarantees.

Author's Note: It is entirely coincidental that both of this month's members spotlighted in CITATIONS are originally from Kansas!




Kathleen "Kat" Mabeu is an associate attorney practicing family law with Pachowicz | Goldenring, a PLC, and Managing Editor of CITATIONS. She can be reached at kat@pglaw.law.



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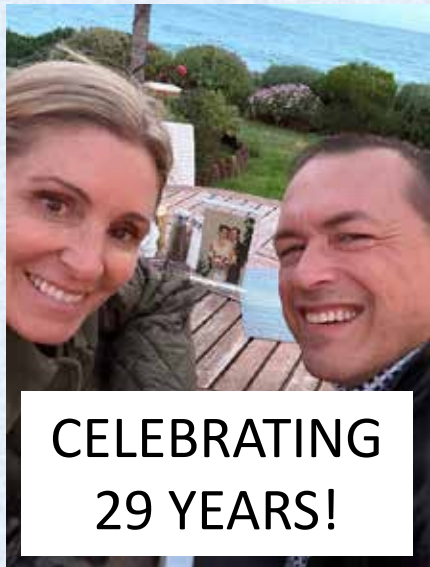
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