



# CITATIONS

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# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By Kristine Tijam

Undoubtedly, the most prominent July event in our country is Independence Day. While the 4<sup>th</sup> of July each year is most commonly associated with fireworks, backyard barbecues, and summer celebrations, this year's Independence Day is especially significant because it marks the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, better known as the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United States.

On July 2, 1776, the Second Continental Congress ("SCC") voted to approve the Lee Resolution for Independence, which officially declared the thirteen U.S. colonies independent from Great Britain. The only colony that did not vote in favor of independence at that time was New York, whose delegation abstained from voting since it had not yet received guidance from their state on how to vote. Due to the passing of the Lee Resolution, John Adams believed July 2 would become the United States' Independence Day.

After voting on independence, the Declaration of Independence was then proposed in draft form by John Adams, Roger Sherman, Robert R. Livingston, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson. It then took two days for Congress to agree on edits. The Declaration of Independence was then approved on July 4, 1776. Printer John Dunlap was asked to make about 200 copies to be distributed throughout the colonies.



Notably, the Declaration of Independence was not signed until August 2, 1776. At that time, John Hancock signed first, followed by 49 other delegates who were present that

day. Some of the most notable signatories also included Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, and John Adams. Several others then signed on later dates. According to the National Archives and Records Administration, 56 individuals in total signed the Declaration of Independence. Of those, 25 were lawyers. A list of all signers and their information is available at <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/signers-factsheet>.

As attorneys, judges, and other legal professionals, we serve and regularly interact with the very institutions that form the foundation for our country. We are in the unique position to help create policy change and ensure that the ideals our country was founded upon are upheld. Those ideals have continued to be hotly contested throughout our nation's history, expanded through efforts to advocate for marginalized groups. To date, the Declaration of Independence's framework continues to guide our country's efforts in political activism and the desire to improve our nation.

Many monumental events have occurred over the last 250 years of our country's history, including the ratification of our country's Constitution, the Emancipation Proclamation, expansion of voting rights, and further development of civil rights through landmark Supreme Court decisions, movements throughout our country, and advocacy for disenfranchised groups, among many others. As we look to the future of our country, we must remain steadfast in advocating for the very principles our nation was founded upon, upholding the rule of law, and supporting the institutions that are the backbone of our country.

This July is certainly a time for celebration, particularly within our own local courts. **Justice Tari L. Cody** has been nominated by Governor Newsom to serve as Presiding Justice in the Second District Court of Appeal, Division Six, where she has served as an Associate Justice since 2023. She will fill the vacancy created by the retirement of **Presiding Justice Arthur Gilbert**. The position will require confirmation by the Commission on Judicial Appointments, which consists of Chief Justice Patricia Guerrero, Attorney General Rob Bonta, and

Senior Presiding Justice Francis Rothschild. Those of us who have appeared before Justice Cody will agree that she is an asset to the Court of Appeal, ruling with a sharp mind, attention to detail, and thorough analysis of complex legal issues, all while always treating attorneys and litigants with dignity and respect in the courtroom.

Additionally, Governor Newsom has appointed **Jacquelyn D. Ruffin** to serve as a Judge in Ventura County Superior Court. As many of you may be aware, I had the honor of working alongside Ms. Ruffin, a former VCBA President, while serving as Chairperson of VCBA's Community Outreach Committee. She created that committee to better serve the public, which remains active. Based on her intellect, integrity, unwavering professionalism, and her passion for serving our community, she is a perfect fit for the bench.

Finally, Ventura County Superior Court recently held the formal enrobenment ceremony for newly appointed **Judge Brian L. Sottile**, on June 5, 2026. Courtroom 22 was packed with dignitaries, judges, attorneys, court staff, and other legal professionals, with some also attending via Zoom. The ceremony reminded all of us of the importance of the institutions we serve, and the respect and deference we must have for the titles we hold within them.



I was grateful to Ventura County Superior Court **Presiding Judge Matthew P. Guasco** for the invitation to attend and speak at Judge Sottile's ceremony on behalf

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**PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE**

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of VCBA. In preparation for the event, I had the pleasure of speaking with Judge Sottile, where we discussed more of his background, career, and vision as he takes the bench. Our conversation made clear that he exhibits the most important qualities we all want and need in a judicial officer: someone who understands the power in his new title, but also leads his courtroom with humility, self-awareness, and by prioritizing the importance of allowing litigants to be heard and understood. Judge Sottile is focused on serving the public through the court and increasing access to justice. Additionally, he emphasized that although litigants are not always going to agree with the Court’s rulings, it is important that the Court truly listens to their positions, gives them empathy, and treats them with dignity and respect. (For those interested in reading more about Judge Sottile’s background, please see the October 2025 issue of Citations for an article by VCBA Board Director Rachel Coleman, which was written when he became a commissioner.)

We congratulate and wish Justice Cody, Jacquelyn Ruffin, and Judge Sottile the best, and know they are all assets to our bench and are exemplary representatives of our courts.

While we look to the past at how far our country has come, we also look to the future and know that much work is still to be done. We will all play a role in shaping the further development of our nation, whether it be by advocating for our communities and the less privileged, making our voices heard at the polls, shaping the future of our legal profession through the positions we hold within the system, providing education and resources to the public and the next generation of legal professionals, and taking leadership roles within our communities. Within our own county legal system, the recent judicial appointments outlined above further demonstrate the continuing strong leadership of our courts. Regardless of how you choose to spend this month and celebrate this Independence Day, I wish all of you an enjoyable summer with your families and loved ones.



*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@proctershyster.com](mailto:kristine@proctershyster.com) or (805) 603-8623.*

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## HAVE YOU HEARD?



**Justice Tari Cody** has been nominated to serve as Presiding Justice of Division Six of the Second District Court of Appeal, where she has served as an Associate Justice since 2023. She fills the vacancy created by the retirement of **Presiding Justice Arthur Gilbert**. The nomination requires confirmation by the Commission on Judicial Appointments, which consists of Chief Justice Patricia Guerrero, Attorney General Rob Bonta, and Senior Presiding Justice Francis Rothschild.



**Jacquelyn Ruffin**, of Ventura County, has been appointed to serve as a Judge in the Ventura County Superior Court. Ruffin has held various roles at Myers Widders Gibson Jones & Feingold including as a Partner since 2018, as an Associate from 2012 to 2017, and as a Contract Attorney from 2011 to 2012. She worked as a Law Clerk at Ferguson Case Orr Paterson in 2011. Ruffin received a Juris Doctor degree from the University of California, Los Angeles School of Law. She fills the vacancy created by the retirement of **Judge David M. Hirsch**. Ruffin is a Democrat.

Local attorneys **Patrick Walsh**, **Russ Charvonia** and **Carol Woo** have been selected as part of the 36-member Grand Jury panel for 2026-2027 by a majority of the judges of the Ventura Superior Court, by Order dated June 9, 2026. The nineteen-member 2026-2027 Grand Jury will be drawn from this 36-member panel on July 1, 2026, at 3:00 p.m. in Courtroom 22 and eleven (11) persons not drawn from the panel for immediate service will remain alternate jurors to be drawn as replacements should that become necessary during the 2026-2027 fiscal year.

The 2026-2027 Grand Jury panel will be summoned to a special session of the Superior Court to be held in Courtroom 22 at 3:00 p.m. on Wednesday, July 1, 2026, at which time the names of those nineteen (19) persons who will serve as 2026-2027 Grand Jurors will be drawn. Presentation to the court of the official report of the 2025-2026 Grand Jury will be made by the outgoing Grand Jury panel.

## NEWS FROM THE COURT

### New Superior Court Commissioners Selected

The Judges of the Ventura Superior Court have selected **Philip J. Bonoli** and **Danielle S. Hall** as the Court's newest Superior Court Commissioners.

On June 8, 2026, **Presiding Judge Matthew P. Guasco** administered the oath of office to Commissioners Bonoli and Hall.

Commissioner Bonoli is now assigned to Department 34 at the Hall of Justice in Ventura, where he presides over child support matters and domestic violence and gun violence restraining order proceedings. Before joining the Court, he was Co-Managing Partner at BG Law LLP and previously practiced with LeClairRyan LLP, Soltman, Levitt & Flaherty, and Wright, Robinson, Ostheimer & Tatum. He earned his bachelor's degree from the University of Southern California and his Juris Doctor from Chicago-Kent College of Law.

Commissioner Hall is assigned to Department 23 at the Hall of Justice in Ventura, where she presides over mental health calendars, including LPS conservatorships, Riese petitions, habeas corpus matters, certification reviews, CARE Court, and AOT proceedings. Before joining the Court, she served as a Deputy Alternate Public Defender in Los Angeles County and previously worked as a Deputy

Public Defender in Orange County and in private practice. She earned her bachelor's degree from Loyola Marymount University and her Juris Doctor from Loyola Law School.

Superior Court Commissioners hear a wide range of matters, including family law, child support, domestic violence, civil harassment, traffic, criminal, and small claims cases. Commissioners must have been admitted to the California State Bar for at least 10 years and serve at the pleasure of the Presiding Judge.

### Email Submission Ends for Family Law Non-RO Ex Parte Filings

Effective July 1, 2026, non-restraining order ex-parte filings will be accepted through eDelivery. The non-RO email address [FamilyLawNonROExParte@ventura.courts.ca.gov](mailto:FamilyLawNonROExParte@ventura.courts.ca.gov) will be disabled. All submissions must comply with applicable filing requirements. For additional information regarding eDelivery procedures, please contact the Family Law Clerk's Office at 805-289-8610.

### Reminder: Court Call No Longer Supported at VCSC

As a reminder to all practitioners, Ventura County Superior Court no longer coordinates services with Court Call. All remote access will be coordinated via Zoom.

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## BEYOND THE BENCH: JUDGE BRIAN BACK

Retiring at the right time is great. I think my wife Kathy and I were prepared for retirement at the right time. Of course, there are adjustments . . . like no longer getting up in the morning to get to work in time to read all the reports, do the necessary research, to deal with whatever the unexpected thing that occurs each day. But Kathy and I have six children and 13 grandchildren. That means that our days in retirement are pretty darn busy with all that fun! (More on that shortly.)

Although I “officially” retired in 2018, I have had the opportunity to keep myself busy with the law. I am part of the Temporary Assigned Judges Program (TAJP). TAJPs can sit in any jurisdiction in the state. For a couple of years I covered in other counties, most often in Los Angeles. It was interesting to see how things were done in other jurisdictions. Of particular interest was covering the adult mental health court in LA. Four judges handle all the mental health courts in Los Angeles County (they have roughly 500 judges) with daily calendars of roughly 90 to 100 matters for each judge. The work was interesting, but the commute was grueling. For the last several years I have chosen to sit only in Ventura County where the commute is a lot better and it is great to reconnect with old friends and meet new friends at our court. I now concentrate on coverage in the juvenile justice court (FKA delinquency court) and the dependency court.

For several years I have been a member of the State Advisory Committee on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. That mouthful has recently been renamed the State Advisory Group on Youth Justice (SAG). It is comprised of a committee which is appointed by the Governor. It includes a diverse range of experienced individuals, and I am fortunate to have been a member for roughly 15 years. Each state must have a SAG as a prerequisite to receiving federal funds for juvenile justice purposes. Our committee receives the funds, solicits Requests for Proposals (RFPs) from throughout the state, and then we divide the proposals into groups to assess and eventually award monies to those proposals most deserving. (In the last round, I reviewed more than 60 proposals.) Funds are typically awarded over a period of 3 years. SAG has other responsibilities, including advising

the Governor on issues related to juvenile justice. Further information on this can be found on the website for the Office of Youth and Community Restoration (OYCR).

SAG also has certain subcommittees working on discrete issues. I currently head the RED subcommittee. RED is the acronym for Reducing Racial and Ethnic Disparities. The subcommittee consists of an impressive group of folks who have been working on this issue for decades. In a nutshell, the issue is this: at every decision point along the path to the juvenile justice system—for example, at the time of arrest, the filing decision, the initial detention decision, etc.—is a young person of a certain color, race, or ethnicity, being treated differently from another young person with a different set of characteristics? If so, what can jurisdictions do to address the issue? Our goal is to do what we can to keep young folks out of the juvenile system, and to help those already in the system to successfully transition out. To the extent that RED issues are present, our further goal is to successfully address those issues so that they are not a detriment to any youth.

Kathy and I have also found that our retirement years are greatly enhanced by the work and support we have been able to provide to folks right here in our own great County of Ventura. For years we have been involved with the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Oxnard and Port Hueneme and a wonderful mentoring program at the Fillmore Middle School which is coordinated through the Fillmore Boys & Girls Club and the Ventura County Community Foundation. In particular, Kathy has devoted a lot of time in the last few years to the development of kidSTREAM, a new science, technology, reading, engineering, arts and math museum designed for kids, and which will be opening in Camarillo, hopefully in June of this year.

We have also been involved with the Ventura County Family Justice Center (VCFJC), a collaborative center available to assist victims of DV, abuse, etc. It is a wonderful addition to our County and supports the annual Camp Hope for children who are victims of crimes or whose parents are victims. Of note, at this year’s Voices of Hope Gala, which benefits the VCFJC Foundation’s programs, I will be presenting an award which honors **Judge Colleen Toy White**.

In my retirement, it is also enjoyable to get together with friends and colleagues, some of whom are retired and some of whom are still on the bench. We’ve also had the opportunity to meet and spend time with our local neighbors as we, and they, never had time before. (A lot of them are also retired.) It’s great to stay active.

And speaking of active; back to those six kids and 13 grandkids. Spending time with them is the best thing we do during retirement. We are talking about dance recitals, basketball games, lacrosse games, gymnastics, plays, soccer, and the list goes on. We do daily calendar checks to make sure we don’t miss something. And of course there are overnights with the cousins, tea parties in the living room, hilarious moments with the crew, bad jokes, etc. We also have fun traveling with them. Two grandkids, three aunties and us at the Christmas markets in Germany and France. Three grandkids with parents and us in Mexico City. One daughter and one sister-in-law in Italy, Switzerland, Hungary and Slovakia. And at least once a year we have been successful in having the whole clan together right here in Ventura County. It is just so much fun to be with all of them on an individual and collective basis.

I was lucky to be (and continue to be) a judge in Ventura County. It is a wonderful job. I think this is easily discerned when reading the CITATIONS article on **Judge Jack Smiley**. (Great stuff Jack!) There was only one job I enjoyed more: working as a carpenter with my Dad when I was growing up in San Diego in the 1960s and early 1970s. That was a blessing, and it helped me develop a few skills which happen to be handy around the house! (And thanks to CITATIONS and Rachel Coleman for putting this together!)

So, that is some of what I am doing during retirement. There is more, but I have to get out in the yard to work.

*Judge Brian Back served on the bench in Ventura County for over two decades before retiring in 2018. Appointed by former Governor Pete Wilson in 1997 to the Ventura Municipal Court, Judge Back was elevated to Superior Court judge in 1998. He served as Presiding Judge from 2013 to 2014, and handled a wide range of cases during his judicial career, including family law, domestic violence, and criminal matters.*

# THE CASE FOR SABBATH

How Rest and Renewal Help Maintain Attorney Competence

By Carol Mack

Are you aware that there is a simple (but not necessarily easy) wellness approach to help maintain attorney competence? It's nothing new; in fact, it is found in ancient scripture. It's the idea of taking a Sabbath – really, resting from work for a time with the goal of spiritual renewal, increased clarity of perception, and a sense of peace.

Now, I'm not talking about actually observing the Sabbath in a religious sense, although I do recommend that. And I am not talking about the vacation we all know that we should take. Rather, I would like to suggest developing a habit of short pauses for rest and renewal during the workday.

Most faith traditions observe a Sabbath, a time for rest, a time for joy. It is a time to set aside our labors and experience peace. Interestingly, both the Jewish and the Cherokee traditions describe the Sabbath (new moon days for the Cherokee) as out-of-time or timeless. Thus, no matter how short the break is, it can be an opportunity to disconnect from the daily routine and embrace rest and restoration, both spiritually and practically.

We know that we should take time to rest. Why don't we? Is it because we are too busy? Because we are focused on specific goals that we have not yet reached? Or do we feel guilty for practicing simple self-care? We may tell ourselves that we will rest after we finish the current case or brief. But Rabbi Abraham Heschel, who has written a book on the Sabbath, tells us not to wait until the work is finished. He says, "Rest on the Sabbath as if all your work were done." Of course, it is helpful to have identified the next step in whatever process you are focused on, so that after a break, you come back refreshed and ready to continue.

What happens when we don't take time to rest? All too often, when we refuse to rest, illness forces us to do so. My sister is an ordained minister, now retired. Some years ago, amid all the pressures of shepherding a congregation, writing sermons, and preparing for funerals and weddings, she threw her back out and was forced to lie flat on the floor for several days while her back healed. She told me she believed God was telling her to rest, and she finally had to listen.

In addition to being a retired attorney, I am also a registered nurse. In nursing, clinical reasoning involves identifying cues from patients to create a list of concerns and a potential diagnosis, which guides development of a treatment plan. This process is analogous to the IRAC (Issue, Rule, Application, Conclusion) method of legal reasoning.

Both professions rely on education, experience, and perception to develop plans to meet client needs. Problems arise when exhaustion robs us of the capacity to use this type of reasoning effectively.

For nurses, when they are too tired to trust their wisdom to provide for their patients, they become task-oriented, counting their success in the number of things they accomplish, rather than the quality of care they can provide. You might recognize the same thing happening with attorneys. In order to continue to offer competent representation, we must guard against exhaustion.

This may be as simple as regularly taking a few minutes during each day to set aside the work and rest. Studies have found that resting or even napping during the workday increases productivity.

It is helpful to rest right there at your desk, but it is even more beneficial to get up and walk around outside. In fact, a study of taking short breaks at the workplace found that taking a break outdoors was far better for recharging than staying at a desk. Getting outside is also known to reduce work-related stress. It doesn't have to be a long break to get outside. My daughter, who works at a research institution, for example, regularly takes phone calls while walking around the lake adjacent to her building.

A nursing study of cancer-related fatigue found that "green nature" activities were an effective way of lessening that fatigue. And I know for myself, when I take the time to go down to the seashore, it renews my spirit and gives me energy for whatever tasks I am undertaking.

But what about the work that needs to be done? Everyone has to be concerned with earning a living, but remember that we are trading time for money. And yet, much of what we value most, including civility, wisdom, compassion, and rewarding relationships, take time and care to develop. It's important to take that time. Putting work aside, even for a short time, can help.

Research confirms that employees who take breaks during the workday have increased productivity, job satisfaction, mental health, and well-being. In addition, there is evidence that taking a break from making decisions allows people to make better decisions, an important part of professional competence. In other words, there is a huge return on investment of regularly spending some time away from work.

You may have seen the commercials for Saatva mattresses that ran during the Olympics. One featured gold medalist Jess Diggins, who said, "recovery isn't a break from training. It is the training . . . that's why I prioritize sleep." Perhaps rest should not be a break from practice – it should be part of your practice.

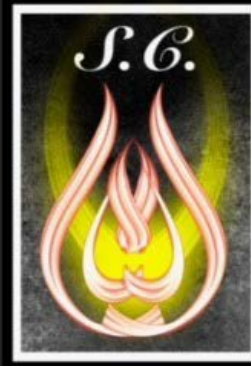
Have you ever faced a difficult dilemma, either in your practice or in your personal life? One that you wrestled with and couldn't resolve? You may have obsessed over what to do without seeing a clear path. One inspirational book, *Sabbath*, by Wayne Muller, suggests a practice that I call "Let It Be." It is just this: Imagine the situation that concerns you. Now imagine that it is moving toward resolution. As you sit with this image, you may find that you begin to recognize how to resolve your problem. There is nothing mysterious about this practice. We are merely quieting the noise to receive the answer that is already there. As the Beatles told us, "There will be an answer. Let it be."

Finding time for rest in our busy schedules is not necessarily easy, but it is well worth it. It takes practice, and it may mean calendaring breaks and time off. Try it for a few weeks and see if you are not more productive and more satisfied with your work.

**Activities for Rest and Renewal During the Work Day**

- Observe a few moments of silence
- Play a game
- Sit still and observe the cadence of your breath
- Take a walk outside
- Take off your shoes and stand barefoot on the earth
- Unplug from electronics for a while
- Eat a relaxed meal
- Practice mindfulness or relaxation techniques
- Take a short “power” nap
- Stretch
- Do something creative
- Meditate
- Listen to music
- Turn off the lights and sit quietly in the dark
- Color a picture
- Daydream
- Read a few pages of a book for pleasure

*Carol Mack is a retired attorney and registered nurse, member of the CITATIONS editorial board, and continuing educator in the field of health science.*



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# FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES MOURN THE LOSS OF MARK KIRWIN, 2022 RECIPIENT OF THE BEN E. NORDMAN AWARD

**P. Mark Kirwin**, a long-time Ventura attorney, husband to Angela, father, volunteer, beloved husband, and friend, passed away on May 18, 2026, three days before his 63rd birthday.



*Erik Feingold and Mark Kirwin*

Born in Bermuda and raised in Colorado Springs after his family immigrated to the United States, Mark carried what **Bill Grewe** called an islander's sense of shared responsibility, as well as an athlete's discipline, throughout his life. Mark switched from playing cricket, soccer, and sailing to ice hockey, skiing, and camping, and eventually to football as a defensive lineman at Cheyenne Mountain High School. He later competed in triathlons, qualifying for the USA Nationals and finishing two Ironman-length triathlons, as well as many marathons and ultra races. Mark coached AYSO soccer when their kids were little and earned his second-degree black belt in Taekwondo in 2016.

Mark obtained a BA degree in classical history from the University of Colorado, Boulder, and a law degree in 1991 from California Western School of Law in San Diego.

**Public service.** Like his parents, Mark strove to make the world a better place through humanitarian work. Internationally, he volunteered as a mediator with Mediators Beyond Borders and attended multiple United Nations climate conferences.

He served delivering disaster relief after surviving the 2004 Andaman Sea Tsunami with his family in Thailand, then co-founded the Kirwin International Relief Foundation with Angela. [kirfaid.org](http://kirfaid.org). They have volunteered alongside others to deliver disaster relief supplies directly to survivors of more than ten natural disasters, assessing at street-level what is being done and what

isn't and then working to fill the gaps between Big Aid and little people.



*Mark Kirwin helping out with Haiti Earthquake Relief, 2010*

Following the devastating Thomas Fire in 2017, Mark and his wife delivered \$500 to \$1,000 Target and Walmart gift cards to 50-some uninsured and underinsured local families who lost their homes and belongings.

Mark gave his time to the boards of the Downtown Ventura Lions Club and the Rotary Club of Ventura. He volunteered with World Central Kitchen in 2020, providing meals to laid-off workers in Ventura, and helped the Salvation Army distribute food to needy local families.

**Law practice and pro bono.** Mark practiced as a civil litigator, specializing in complex construction law, most recently, at Kirwin & Francis with his law partner, **James Kelly Francis**.

Mark served for years as a pro tem judge at the Ventura County Superior Court, volunteered as an immigration lawyer assisting the public in walk-in clinics serving DACA applicants, migrants and asylum-seekers, created and worked in the Thomas Fire Insurance Claims pop-up clinics and co-founded (with **Judge Charmaine Buehner**) the Ventura County Legal Aid Clinic.

Mark was a board member and officer of the Ventura County Bar Association, serving as President in 2018.

**Recognition.** All that public service did not escape notice. Among the many organizations bestowing awards on Mark were the Ventura Police Community Foundation, the Lions Club, the Rotary



Club, the Salvation Army – and the 2022 Ventura County Bar Association's **Ben Nordman Award**. (Link: <https://tinyurl.com/bdca6ejz>)

**That Special Quality.** When Bill Grewe nominated Mark for the Nordman Award, he noted that Mark stepped up, again and again. “I will call her.” “I’ll take care of it.” “Email me, remind me.” Mark showed up. He dotted the “i’s,” crossed the “t’s,” and always put the pin back in the hole, all with a relaxed manner. His only fault: He did not know how to say “No.”

2025 VCBA President **Guillermo “Bert” Partida** described Mark as his mentor and a good friend, “a Cool Dude!” who will be missed. Mark was a great humanitarian and a good lawyer. He was always civil but one knew not to get on the other side of Mark because that would be “problematic.” Mark and Bert shared in the love of the *Lord of the Rings*. On a humanitarian mission after the New Zealand earthquake, Mark not only helped rebuild a church but drank at the Green Dragon.



*Mark Kirwin and Steve Doll in Nepal, 2015*

**Joe Strohman's** daughter Marie and Mark's daughter Makani were good friends. "Mark and Angie's house was a very warm and happy space with a lot of activity. Mark seemed to be everywhere: Rotary Club, Lions Club, VCBA, DACA registration, the Walk-In Clinic, community and international events. He was either running, swimming or cycling. He served on our Law Day 5-K committee for many years. While in Tijuana a number of years ago on a Rotary/Rotaract house build, Mark showed me how to install windows on the house. He had a quiet and focused way of approaching life and all its problems whether legal or otherwise. He always had a positive attitude even while in a wheelchair and was never far from "soon getting up and walking again." Mark's life fits the definition of a hands-on "humanitarian."

**James Kelly Francis**, who practiced with Mark for over eight years, was "continually amazed by Mark's energy and generosity. While many attorneys might be exhausted after a long day, Mark's compassion and commitment to service never wavered. Mark was a kind and gentle man whose warm smile filled every room and immediately put people at ease. His calm demeanor reassured clients during their most difficult legal challenges. Above all, I will remember Mark as the most compassionate person I have ever known - always willing to lend a hand, always willing to give, and never hesitant to sacrifice his own time, resources, and energy for the benefit of others. His example inspired everyone who knew him, and his loss will be deeply felt."

**Erik Feingold** practiced with Mark. "Mark was my direct supervisor for about three years when I was cutting my teeth doing insurance defense work early in my career. I was immediately struck by his calm presence and patience. As with most young insurance defense attorneys, my firm threw me into the deep end immediately with little training and expected me to perform. Mark trained me with patience and grace against the backdrop of his considerable insurance coverage experience. He and I often carpooled to Santa Barbara. During this time, I got to know Mark on a more personal level; he shared stories of growing up in Bermuda, his extensive travels, his family, his passion for service, and of course his extreme athleticism. He inspired

me to be a competent and well-rounded lawyer. We took different career paths, but as fellow Venturans, surfers and cyclists we never lost touch. Mark's health took an unfortunate turn for the worse when he was traveling overseas. Ironically, Mark's health insurance company challenged the availability of air ambulance coverage for him to return home to obtain the care he needed to save his life. I helped Mark's wife Angie navigate the complexities of insurance claims and coverage, and communicating firmly - but politely, as Mark trained me - in my efforts to convince the carrier to reverse their position. I was glad to lend a hand and thought many times during these negotiations how grateful I was for the important lessons in decency, tact and strategy that Mark taught me and how these skills were now being used to help him. As Mark used to often say, "what comes around goes around." I will always treasure the life and career lessons Mark taught me, and I will miss him and his big smile dearly."

In Grewe's words, "Mark has quietly rolled up his sleeves, put his work on pause and helped. He was an under-the-radar, take no credit, kind of guy who cares about people and their differing ways of seeing the world. Whether Mark was traveling the world doing this work or volunteering locally, we were fortunate to have him carry our banner."

Mark is survived by Angela and their two adult children, Kai and Makani. In the near future, the family will plan a volunteer day of service to remember Mark.

*CITATIONS thanks Angela Grewe for her contributions to this article and Wendy Lascher for her usual great editing. Other authors include: **Joe Strohman**, a partner at Ferguson Case Orr Paterson, LLP; **Guillermo "Bert" Partida**, an attorney at Slaughter, Reagan & Cole, LLP; **Kelly Francis** of the Law Office of James Kelly Francis; and **Erik B. Feingold** is a partner at Myers, Widders, Gibson, Jones & Feingold, LLP.*

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# VENTURA COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION LOOKS TO “RAISE THE BAR” WITH NEW MENTORING PROGRAM

By Amber Lee



“Raising the Bar” is more than a mentorship program. It is an opportunity to support and guide the next generation of legal professionals. Created by Senior Deputy District Attorney Amber Lee, the program launched in 2025, as a partnership between the Ventura County District Attorney’s Office and the Office of the Public Defender. The program has expanded to connect practicing attorneys from all areas with college and law school students who are interested in pursuing careers in law. Through mentorship, students receive guidance in areas such as career development, law school admissions, resume building, bar exam preparation, networking, and general advice about the legal profession. At the same time, attorneys have the chance to give back in a meaningful and rewarding way.

For many students, the path to becoming a lawyer can feel intimidating. College students who are considering law school often have questions about applications, choosing the right schools, preparing for the LSAT, and understanding what a legal career actually looks like. Law school students face a different set of challenges, including finding internships, building professional connections, preparing for interviews, and eventually studying for the bar exam. Without someone to turn to for advice, the process can feel stressful and uncertain. “Raising the Bar” helps fill that gap by connecting students with attorneys who have already gone through these experiences and can offer practical insight and encouragement.

One of the most valuable parts of the program is the focus on career development. Students are able to learn directly from attorneys working in different areas of law, including criminal law, immigration law, family law, public interest, and many others. Mentors can talk honestly about their experiences, explain the realities of

the profession, and help students better understand which legal paths may fit their interests and goals. These conversations can make a major difference for students who are still trying to figure out where they want to go professionally.

For college students, the program can provide important support during the law school admissions process. Applying to law school can be overwhelming, especially for first-generation students or those who may not already have professional connections in the legal field. Mentors can help students review personal statements, prepare application materials, and offer advice on standing out during interviews. Having someone experienced to guide them through the process often gives students more confidence in their abilities.

For law school students, mentorship can be especially helpful as they begin preparing for their careers after graduation. Attorneys can review resumes, conduct mock interviews, and provide networking advice that students may not receive in a classroom setting. Learning how to present themselves professionally and build relationships within the legal community can have a lasting impact on their future opportunities.

Another important part of “Raising the Bar” is support during bar exam preparation. The bar exam is one of the most difficult and exhausting parts of becoming an attorney. Mentors who have already been through the process can share study strategies, offer reassurance, and help students stay motivated during a stressful time. Sometimes, hearing advice from someone who successfully passed the exam can make the challenge feel more manageable.

While students will benefit greatly from the program, the experience is equally rewarding for the attorneys who volunteer as mentors. Many attorneys remember the people who helped guide them early in their own careers. Mentorship allows them to pass that support on to the next generation. It gives attorneys the chance

to share their experiences, help students avoid common mistakes, and play a role in someone’s professional growth.

Mentors often benefit personally as well. Working with students can bring a fresh perspective and remind attorneys why they chose the legal profession in the first place. Students bring energy, curiosity, and new ideas that can make the experience meaningful for mentors too. In many cases, attorneys also strengthen their own leadership and communication skills through mentorship.

Beyond individual relationships, “Raising the Bar” helps build a stronger and more connected legal community. The program creates opportunities for students from different backgrounds to access guidance, resources, and professional support that they may not otherwise have. In doing so, it encourages diversity, inclusion, and greater access within the legal profession.

The program will pair attorneys with students for a six-month period, from October to April. The mentors and mentees will have the freedom to dictate the terms of their partnership in order to best serve the mentee.

At its core, “Raising the Bar” is about connection, growth, and opportunity. Students gain valuable support and direction as they work toward careers in law, while attorneys have the chance to make a lasting impact on future legal professionals. The program benefits everyone involved and helps strengthen the future of the legal field as a whole. Volunteer to help raise the next generation of the bar!



*Amber Lee is a Senior Deputy District Attorney for the County of Ventura.*

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# LOCAL GRADUATIONS



Attorneys Marc and Kristi Anderson with their Rio Mesa High graduate daughter, Libby.



Ron Bamieh's son, Sam, graduating from Ventura High School. From left to right, Sam's brother Henry, mom Jennifer, Sam, Ron Bamieh, and sister Ryanne.



Ben Baumer's daughter, Vivienne's 8<sup>th</sup> grade graduation from Ventura Missionary School. Left to right: Beth, Vivienne, Donovan, and Ben Baumer

# LILIANA VALDEZ AWARDED 2026 CARMEN RAMIREZ LEGACY SCHOLARSHIP

By Rachel Coleman



The 2026 Carmen Ramirez Legacy Scholarship to Support Public Service has been awarded to Liliana Valdez, who is an Oxnard native. Valdez is a third-year Sociology major at UCLA on the pre-law and pre-public service track. She highlighted her internships with immigration offices, the Ventura County District Attorney's Office, and other community-based organizations as giving her firsthand exposure to legal advocacy and the structural barriers faced by marginalized communities.

She is a first-generation college student and the daughter of Mexican immigrant parents from Oxnard. Valdez credits her parents as her greatest inspiration. Their hard work often goes unnoticed, yet their labor has always been driven by the desire to support their children's dreams. Their sacrifice allowed Valdez to "imagine a world far bigger than the one they were given, and their sweat is what enables me to sit in classrooms filled with privilege and pursue an education without carrying the same physical burdens they endured."

Valdez was also inspired by Carmen Ramirez, whose dedication to public service shaped her understanding of community-centered leadership. Much like Ramirez, Valdez is committed to a life of public service, mentorship, and community advocacy. She is already on her way even though she has not yet finished her studies. While attending college and working, she participated in programs that supported her during high school, such as the federal TRIO program and Upward Bound, to

assist high school students through college tours, mentorship, and access to resources that many first-generation students lack. Having navigated FAFSA, scholarships, and college applications largely without guidance, she "understands how transformative access to information and support can be for everyone community."

She currently serves as the Vice President of Corporate Relations for the Latin Business Student Association (LBSA) which is a business club at UCLA. In this role, her focus is on expanding access to professional resources for first-generation and low-income students, particularly in spaces where representation is limited. She also helped develop the Business Rotational Program, an initiative that connects students with professionals from firms such as NBCUniversal, Google, as well as others, through weekly discussions. By organizing students and building structured opportunities for engagement, she "hopes to create pathways into corporate and professional spaces that students like me have historically been excluded from."

Valdez's long-term goal is to become an attorney who advocates for communities while funding and creating educational programs for immigrants and children. She also noted that receiving the Carmen Ramirez Legacy Scholarship made it possible to continue her education at UCLA which would have otherwise been financially impossible for her and her family. Valdez is very grateful to be given this opportunity and to continue in Ramirez's footsteps in her advocacy for marginalized people and communities. Valdez will be officially recognized as the recipient of the Carmen Ramirez Legacy Scholarship to Support Public Service at the Ventura County Bar Association's 41<sup>st</sup> 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](mailto:rachelcoleman@live.com)

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## MEMBER SPOTLIGHTS:

## DONNA FORRY AND DAVID SHAIN

By Kathleen Maheu, Esq.



For nearly four decades, **Donna Forry** has dedicated her career to standing beside people during some of the most difficult moments of their lives. A deputy public defender with the Ventura County Public Defender's Office since being admitted to the California Bar in 1987, Donna has built a career around a simple but powerful belief: everyone deserves a voice. It's a principle that has guided her throughout her years of criminal defense practice and one that continues to inspire her work today.

A VCBA member since 1988, Forry has long been an active participant in the local legal community. She currently serves on VCBA's Judicial Evaluations Committee and has also devoted many hours to Ventura County's Mock Trial program, coaching teams from both Ventura High School and Santa Clara High School while serving as a scorer over many years. Although she didn't compete in Mock Trial herself as a student, she's helped generations of young advocates develop their courtroom skills.

Originally from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Donna earned her undergraduate degree from the University of Richmond before attending Pepperdine University School of Law. Asked why she chose to become a lawyer, her answer lends itself to her career as a Public Defender: "I realized I could help people who didn't have a voice."

That commitment to justice extends beyond the courtroom. Forry's favorite legal authority is Penal Code section 1096, which embodies one of the most fundamental principles of our criminal justice system—

the presumption of innocence and the requirement that guilt be proven beyond a reasonable doubt. It is difficult to imagine a statute that more perfectly reflects her professional calling.

Away from work, Forry enjoys a full and eclectic life with her husband, Dave Peters, owner of Jockamo Records in downtown Ventura. Their daughter has followed in her mother's footsteps, serving as a public defender in Stanislaus County. Completing the family are two cats, Aiko and Finney, who undoubtedly help make their century-old Craftsman bungalow feel even more like home.

That historic bungalow is, in fact, Forry's favorite place in Ventura County. If she hadn't become a lawyer, she imagines she would be restoring historic homes. She also finds peace sitting on the beach with a glass of wine or walking through the woods surrounding her cabin in Pennsylvania.

Music has been another lifelong passion. Forry has attended more than 100 Grateful Dead concerts, along with hundreds of other live performances over the years. Given the opportunity to interview historical figures, she would choose all four Beatles together, while also making room for renowned naturalists Jane Goodall and Sir David Attenborough.

When she's not working or enjoying live music, Forry stays active through kickboxing, weight training and hiking. She's equally happy cheering on the Dodgers, watching *Severance*, revisiting classics such as *When Harry Met Sally* and *The Fugitive*, or rereading *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Her culinary tastes are equally uncomplicated: fresh strawberries, especially when served with ice cream.

Her favorite vacations range from an unforgettable honeymoon in Curaçao to camping beneath the redwoods in Big Sur.

Asked what she prizes most in life, Forry's shares: "Freedom. My family, my health, my friends and my cats."

Forry leaves us with lyrics from Bob Dylan's *Hurricane*, which she cites as her favorite quote:

*How can the life of such a man  
Be in the palm of some fool's hand?  
To see him obviously framed  
Couldn't help but make me feel ashamed  
To live in a land where justice is a  
game.*

# CITATIONS

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Since 1985, **David Shain** has been a fixture of the Ventura County legal community, distinguished not only by his accomplished career as a trial lawyer but also by his unwavering commitment to professional service. A member of the Ventura County Bar Association for more than 40 years, Shain is a past president of both the VCBA and the Ventura County Trial Lawyers Association, a recipient of the Nordman Award, a former chair of the VCBA Pro Bono Committee, and currently serves as vice chair of the Judicial Evaluations Committee. Although retired after more than 20 years with Ferguson Case Orr Paterson LLP, Shain continues to contribute to the legal profession that has shaped much of his life.

Admitted to practice in the District of Columbia in 1978, New York in 1979 and California in 1983, Shain earned his law degree from Georgetown University Law Center after graduating from the State University of New York at Albany. Before relocating to Ventura County in 1985, he served as a public defender in Brooklyn, New York. His legal career in California focused primarily on plaintiff's personal injury litigation and criminal defense.

A native of Northport, New York, Shain says his move west was years in the making. Frequent visits to an older brother who had settled in California left a lasting impression, offering a welcome escape from East Coast winters. When he and his wife, Paula, finally made the move from New York City in 1985, they settled in Thousand Oaks, where they have remained ever since.

Shain traces his interest in the law to a childhood spent watching courtroom dramas, particularly *Perry Mason*. Although he jokes that younger lawyers may not recognize the iconic television attorney, the show's portrayal of criminal trial practice convinced him that the law was "a most exciting and noble profession." That belief has remained with him throughout his career.

Family remains at the center of Shain's life. He and Paula recently celebrated 42 years of marriage and are the proud parents of daughter Sarah and son-in-law Arie. Their newest source of joy is one-year-old grandson Benji, who keeps the family gathering often. The extended family also includes Loki, a Labradoodle who has earned the distinction of being the family's beloved "granddog." When asked what he prizes most, Shain's answer comes without hesitation: his family.

Away from the legal profession, Shain enjoys a wide variety of interests. An avid tennis player, he relaxes by spending time on the court or with a good book, particularly works on history and politics. He also has a lifelong appreciation for folk music and enjoys "dabbling" with an acoustic guitar. Had he not become a lawyer, Shain imagines he might have pursued journalism, or perhaps found himself competing in the finals at Wimbledon.

Shain's favorite local destination is the Westlake Athletic Club, just over the Ventura County line, and he recommends Moody Rooster in Westlake Village when dining out. He counts lobster among his favorite foods, enjoys British television mysteries along with classic films such as *Fargo* and *Goodfellas*, and follows both football and baseball. His preferred vacation destination is Europe, with Paris holding a special place among the cities he has visited.

If given the opportunity to interview any historical figure, Shain would choose Benjamin Franklin, admiring him as a true Renaissance man whose intellect, wit and practical wisdom helped shape the nation's founding.

As for his favorite legal authority, Shain selected Article I, section 1 of the California Constitution, recognizing the importance of the fundamental rights guaranteed to every Californian. And the favorite quote he shares with fellow attorneys comes from an unforgettable bar review instructor responding to a student's hope that the dreaded Rule Against Perpetuities would not appear on the exam: "Wishing doesn't make it so." True, indeed.



**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](mailto:kat@pglaw.law).

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### About Us

Our mission is to ensure children receive consistent financial and emotional support from both parents. We have a dedicated team of professionals that guide each family through the child support process, from case establishment to case closure. Let's work together to transform lives through the true power of child support.

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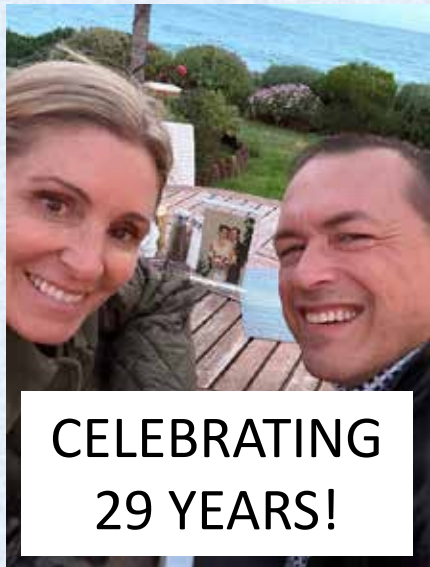
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