



OCTLA President
Cynthia Craig
KUBOTA & CRAIG, PC



Forging new traditions

A THANK YOU TO ALL THOSE WHO WORKED ESPECIALLY HARD TO MAKE OUR NEW VIRTUAL REALITY WORK

Traditionally, OCTLA holds its annual Installation and Awards Ceremony at the Balboa Bay Club in Newport Beach. The evening started with the warm greeting of a young valet. After exiting your vehicle in your new evening gown or freshly dry-cleaned tuxedo, you'd walk through the doors of the Club.

A buzz filled the air as you walked through the foyer to receive your name tag and continue to the grand reception hall. You exhaled as a gesture of hello from across the room caught your eye – a colleague you hadn't seen in a while. You raised your hand to wave and walk towards them, passing others offering greetings and sneaking in a quick hug or two along the way. As you eased toward your colleague, your anxiety dissipated as you began to fully appreciate the laughter, joy and energy of the crowd. You looked around and realized you were in the room with some of the top lawyers in the California.

Next thing you knew, you found yourself in line at the cocktail bar mingling or offering to "buy" a friend a drink. Engrossed in conversation and the opportunity to catch up with friends and colleagues, you'd join the overwhelming majority of attendees and completely ignore the dinner bell – postponing the inevitable reality of having to take your seat.

Although I never thought I would, I wholeheartedly miss those days.

Our reality is now virtual

So, our reality is now virtual. Organizations are forced to hold events virtually in the best interest of everyone's health and safety. Thanks to the tremendous support of our many sponsors, OCTLA's 58th Annual Installation and Awards Ceremony was held virtually on January 28, 2021. Although there was no Gala, there were a few small gatherings with families to honor the swearing in of the Board members, and maybe even a few evening gowns and tuxedos. The event was prerecorded in its entirety and broadcast on OCTLA's YouTube channel. Many of the sponsorships included a warm dinner catered by Jason's Catered Events, a wine basket and dessert. Thanks to the

production expertise of Kelly Deutsch and her team at Verdict Videos, we were able to compile the evening's address, congratulatory remarks and swearing in of the Board into an evening of fun and visual enjoyment.

The evening started with the incomparable wit of Judge Hurwitz. OCTLA will be forever grateful to Judge Hurwitz for volunteering to emcee the event and share the wisdom of the "Book of Shecky."

Each year OCTLA recognizes an outstanding jurist within our Orange County legal community whose career reflects judicial integrity, compassion, and civility. This year OCTLA presented this Award for Judicial Excellence to the Honorable Kirk H. Nakamura.

Judge Nakamura most recently served as the Orange County Superior Court Presiding Judge. He was tasked with the unforeseeable challenge of leading the Orange County Superior Courts through the COVID-19 pandemic. While the award was presented to Judge Nakamura, the Orange County Trial Lawyers Association recognizes the exceptional work undertaken by all members of court leadership in the most uncertain of times. Presiding court officials, supervising judges, including civil supervising Judge James DiCesare, and the court executive leadership, have all gone above and beyond to ensure that the courts continue to serve the Orange County community during these unprecedented challenges.

Each year the outgoing president bestows the Board Member of the Year Award to a board member who has shown excellence in leadership and participation. This year, John Dwork named Kevin Liebeck as OCTLA's Board Member of the Year. Kevin was instrumental in chairing the golf committee and tournament this year. While many organizations completely canceled their golf events, Kevin took the bull by the horns and pushed forward, adopting the unwavering mantra "we can make this work." And, with the help of the golf committee and Executive Director Janet Thornton, OCTLA was able to get it done.

In addition, each year the outgoing president honors an OCTLA member who has volunteered their time to the organization. This year's award went to Jennifer Turner of the Valentine Law Group. Ms. Turner worked as a volunteer committee member of the OCTLA legislative committee. She was involved in monitoring California legislation, coordinating and briefing our organization on legislative developments important to our members, and drafting legislative reports to our membership that were published in the *Gavel*.

I'd like to express my immense thanks to Justice Bedsworth for the inspiring words of his keynote address. Personally familiar with the time and commitment required to be an effective trial lawyer, Judge Bedsworth captured just the right tone for an evening meant to celebrate Orange County's trial lawyers. Justice Bedsworth also graciously officiated the swearing-in of our 2021 officers and board of directors.

I also want to take a brief moment of personal privilege to thank John A. Montevideo for introducing me as this year's President. I have known John Montevideo for many years. When he offered me the opportunity to work at DiMarco, Araujo and Montevideo many years ago, I never would have imagined that one day he would introduce me as the President of OCTLA. I thank him from the bottom of my heart for all his support, direction, encouragement and sage advice over the years.

Finally, thank you to Janet Thornton who works tirelessly for OCTLA and organized the participants, sponsors and Board to make this year's Installation a resounding success.

Although we've had to alter our traditions to adapt to the current and hopefully temporary "new normal," OCTLA is poised to take this year by storm and continue offering cutting-edge educational programs, networking and mentorship opportunities and signature events for OCTLA's many proud members. Congratulations and thank you to the entire 2021 OCTLA Board for your continued commitment to ensuring that we take no challenge alone.