



CAALA President  
**Minh Nguyen**  
NGUYEN THEAM, LLP

# What a beautiful, chaotic world

A BEAUTIFUL YEAR OF FIRSTS, EMOTIONS, LEARNING, CONNECTING, AND GROWING

What a beautiful, chaotic world we live in! [Cue the screeching tire sound.]

“Minh has lost it. What is he talking about? Israel and Hamas are at war and tens of thousands of innocent lives will be lost, half of whom are children and women. The current interest rate is 8.5% making it nearly impossible for young people to buy a home. AI is taking over the practice of law. The State Bar is intent on letting anyone practice law. Driverless cars are becoming a reality. Congress is a mess with members calling each other names and peddling nonsense. Democracy is at a breaking point.”

All true. We can either be paralyzed by the terrible things that are happening or we can become laser-focused on what we *can* control and take the opportunity to adapt and grow to make the world a better place. I choose the latter. In my world, we are better off with compassion, love, peace, truth, empathy, inclusivity, and understanding. As I look back on 2023, I see the achievements, beauty, goodness, kindness, and wonderful things we have accomplished this year. It has been a beautiful year of firsts, emotions, learning, connecting, and growing.

## CAALA Gala

We started the year with the first untraditional, traditional themed gala with red and gold décor punctuated by an Asian Dragon dance with Chinese drums. The theme was family, unity, and the American Dream. We honored Bernard Alexander (TLOY), Shannon Ward (RS), Hon. Michael Linfield (TJOY), and Nick and Courtney Rowley (Ted Horn Leadership & Service Award). I honored my mother, Minh Thu Thi Do, who inspired me to become a lawyer.

Judge Ruth Kwan swore in the most diverse group of officers ever: Ibiere Seck (President-Elect), Martin Aarons (1st Vice President), Elizabeth Hernandez (2nd Vice President), Christa Ramey (Treasurer), and Danny Abir (Secretary). Judge Kwan is a trailblazer herself.

We honored the attendees by keeping the program tight and on

schedule, which is no small feat given that in prior years, the gala ran long. Credit goes to the wonderful CAALA staff.

## Hall of Fame

In June, we inducted four legal titans to the CAALA Hall of Fame: Gary Dordick, Carl Douglas, Gretchen Nelson, and Brian Panish. Gary spoke about our collective responsibility to lead by example and to pay it forward. Gretchen recognized CAALA staff and all the unsung heroes who help us do what we do. Carl moved us with his tribute to this mother. Brian wrapped it up by exemplifying what it takes to create his own Irish luck through dedication, hard-work, and teamwork. All four spoke about the importance of family.

It is notable that the entire CAALA Executive Committee participated in honoring the legal titans: Jeffrey Rudman (Past President), Genie Harrison (Past President), Douglas Silverstein (Past President), Ibiere, Martin, Elizabeth, Christa, and Danny. This was intentional to include the entire leadership in honoring the HOF’s, a first for CAALA.

## Joint leadership conference with ASCDC, LA ABOTA, & LASC

CAALA, ASCDC, and LA ABOTA met with the Los Angeles Superior Court’s leadership, Presiding Judge (and CAALA Trial Judge of the Year) Samantha Jessner and Assisting Presiding Judge Sergio Tapia to find ways to improve access to justice. We are in agreement that we need more trial courts to help our clients obtain the justice that they deserve. We are awaiting the governor’s fulfillment of vacancies and will ask criminal court judges to handle civil trials to help with the backlog.

## CAALA Vegas

We had 3,567 attendees. The programming and networking were superb. It was elegant, gorgeous, and educational. We had the most financially successful Vegas conference ever as we bid adieu to the Bellagio Hotel and head back to the Wynn Hotel for the next two years and then the Fontainebleau Hotel in 2026.

## CAALA’s adoption of ethical advertising standards

CAALA has adopted new advertising standards for its members which aim to promote truthful advertising. Over the years, CAALA has championed the moniker “Trial Lawyer” and as such, many lawyers try to tie themselves to that moniker, or they deceitfully claim “billions in verdicts” that were actually won by other trial lawyers, or exult about winning awards that do not exist or that require payment for the “award.” We are CAALA and we hold ourselves to the highest standards of ethics and honor. Lawyers who do not comport themselves to our standards will no longer be welcome and have access to our resources.

## Final presidential message

In the next few years, we will have experienced several firsts. We will celebrate those firsts because they deserve to be honored and recognized for breaking bamboo ceilings, overcoming great odds and hardships, and being the first in our organization to do things and achieve things that others have not. We will celebrate them not because of the color of their skin but despite the color of their skin or their hardships. They are our leaders and will do great things.

I hope that for those who will be our future leaders that you know there is space and room for you within CAALA. We want you. We want to hear from you. You are our future. Justice depends on each of us to honor and respect this profession which is called the Practice of Law. You, and not AI, will deliver justice to our clients. Use AI responsibly. Protect consumers’ rights. Get involved in CAALA. It has given me so much and it will do the same for you.

Thank you everyone for this opportunity to lead you this year. I hope and pray that I lived up to your expectations and honored the trust and confidence that you gave me. I’ll leave you with the motto that I live by, which is inscribed in my office: “If It Is To Be, It Is Up To Me.” 🙏