



From the President

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A LOOK AT THE ANNUAL INSTALLATION CELEBRATION AND A TASTE OF WHAT LIES AHEAD

2025 kicked off with a boot-scootin' good time at the Orange County Trial Lawyers Association's (OCTLA) 62nd Annual Installation of Officers, Directors, and Awards Ceremony on January 18th at the Balboa Bay Resort in Newport Beach. This Nashville-themed extravaganza brought together more than 300 attendees for an evening of celebration, recognition, and camaraderie. A completely sold-out event, the ceremony honored the incoming officers and directors, as well as the esteemed Judge of the Year.

The Nashville vibe was palpable from the moment guests walked in, with many donning cowboy boots, bolo ties, and even Stetson hats in keeping with the Southern theme. Whether it was "Nashville Black Tie" or traditional black tie, the crowd embraced the country flair while enjoying the elegance of Newport Beach. The evening was further enhanced with a delicious three-course, Southern-inspired dinner and the unmistakable sound of country music filling the air between speeches.

The year in review

The program began with outgoing President Whit Bertch taking the stage to welcome all those in attendance. His opening remarks included a heartfelt tribute to the late John Burns, one of OCTLA's past presidents. Burns's memory was honored with a special memoriam, reflecting his many contributions to OCTLA and his dedication to the legal profession.

Bertch then presented a thorough year-in-review, highlighting OCTLA's achievements in 2024, which included a number of successful advocacy efforts and programs that strengthened the organization's position in the legal community. As part of the review, Bertch also recognized OCTLA's charitable partner for the past year, *A Quarter Blue*, and welcomed their president, Martha Wade, to the stage to receive a ceremonial check for \$240,000 – the funds raised during the November Top Gun Program to support the charity's mission.

Annual Awards presentation

The evening continued with the presentation of the coveted awards. The first two recognitions went to Atticus Wegman, who was named OCTLA Board Member of the Year, and Marc Ellis, who

received the OCTLA Member of the Year Award. Both recipients were lauded for their tireless contributions to the association and for their commitment to the principles of justice and legal advocacy.

Next came the prestigious OCTLA Judge of the Year Award, presented to Honorable Erick L. Larsh. Judge Larsh was recognized for his exceptional service on the bench and his unwavering dedication to upholding the law. His emotional acceptance speech was a testament to the strength of the legal community in Orange County, and he took a moment to thank the trial attorneys for their continued support throughout his career.

As the evening continued, the spotlight shifted to the installation of the new officers and board members. Jason Sanchez introduced (roasted) me as the incoming president before officially swearing in the new leadership team. The swearing-in ceremony was conducted by former OCTLA board member and current Orange County Judge, Honorable Eileen M. Solis.

After the oath was administered, the newly elected board members were presented with certificates of appreciation from three distinguished guests: U.S. Congressmen Lou Correa and Derek Tran, along with Orange County Board of Supervisors Vice Chair Karina Foley. Each spoke briefly, offering congratulations to the new leadership while emphasizing the importance of maintaining a strong legal community that advocates for justice.

The vision for 2025

In my inaugural speech, I outlined my vision for OCTLA in 2025, sharing the theme for my term: Stronger Together. I emphasized that while trial lawyers often work independently in courtrooms, we are most effective when we come together to support one another and advocate for the broader community. My goal for this year is to continue fostering the camaraderie that exists within OCTLA while also encouraging collaboration between the younger generation of trial lawyers and our seasoned veterans.

The landscape of the legal profession is shifting, and it is essential that OCTLA not only preserves its rich history but also embraces the influx of new members who bring fresh ideas and energy. To that end, I expressed my commitment to bridging the

gap between generations of attorneys, ensuring that the knowledge and wisdom of our veterans are passed down to the next wave of legal advocates. I believe that, together, we can continue to strengthen our association and our community.

Another major priority for me this year is increasing the diversity of our membership. As an inclusive organization, OCTLA is committed to reflecting the diversity of the community we serve. I outlined the importance of cultivating an environment where all attorneys, regardless of background, feel welcome and empowered to contribute. Diverse perspectives enrich our discussions, enhance our advocacy, and ultimately make us stronger as an organization.

In addition to focusing on internal growth, I also called on our members to support our counterparts in other trial lawyer associations. OCTLA shares common values with organizations such as CAOC, CAALA, CASD, and CAOIE, and it's important that we stand together in support of our profession and the ideals we all champion. I was thrilled that presidents from these associations were in attendance to show their support, emphasizing the collective strength of the trial lawyer community across California.

As the formal proceedings came to a close, the evening transitioned into a lively celebration with a Nashville twist.

Legendary trial attorney Bill Shapiro's band, Thunder Road, took the stage and had everyone on their feet, dancing to classic country tunes. Guests continued the Southern celebration with Nashville Hot Chicken sliders and enjoyed a coffee bar, while the signature treat of the night – Nashville-based Goo Goo Clusters – were handed out as a sweet, memorable gift.

The festivities would not have been possible without the incredible support of our sponsors, whose generosity helped ensure that this year's event was a huge success. Thank you to everyone who contributed and attended – your support made this evening truly unforgettable.

In next month's edition, I'll provide a recap of our annual strategic planning meeting in Coronado. Until then, let's continue to work together to uphold the values that make our profession so essential to the community. 🍷