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Editors Michael Bazzo
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Design and Production PIP Printing Riverside

Cover Design PIP Printing Riverside

Officers of the Bar Association

President

David T. Bristow
(951) 682-1771
dbristow@rhlaw.com

President-Elect

Daniel Hantman
(951) 784-4400
dh4mjg@earthlink.net

Vice President

E. Aurora Hughes
(909) 483-6700
hughesa@cwllaw.com

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Harry J. Histen, III
(951) 682-4121
harry@histenlaw.com

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Harlan B. Kistler
(951) 686-8848
hbkistler@pacbell.net

Past President

Theresa Han Savage
(951) 248-0328
theresa.savage@jud.ca.gov

Directors-at-Large

Jacqueline Carey-Wilson
(909) 387-4334
jcareywilson@cc.sbcounty.gov

Daniel E. Katz
(951) 682-1771
dkatz@rhlaw.com

Richard A. Kennedy
(951) 715-5000
richardakennedy@sbcglobal.net

Robyn A. Lewis
(951) 686-8848
rlewislaw@yahoo.com

Executive Director

Charlotte A. Butt
(951) 682-1015
charlotte@riversidecountybar.com

Officers of the Barristers Association

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(951) 686-1450
john.higginbotham@bbklaw.com

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Riverside County Bar Association
4129 Main Street, Suite 100
Riverside, California 92501

Telephone
951-682-1015

Facsimile
951-682-0106

Internet
www.riversidecountybar.com

E-mail
rcba@riversidecountybar.com

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LEO A. DEEGAN INN OF COURT

by Paul Grech

How many times have you thought to yourself that the practice of law is much different than the lectures we attended during three grueling years of law school? The pressures to make a living, advance in public or private law offices, attract clients, pay bills or just survive the stress of everyday practice are a far cry from the study of case law that largely defines an American legal education. These pressures have taken their toll on lawyers and on the public's perception of lawyers. We all joined the legal profession with a sincere desire to promote positive ideals of justice and the rule of law, but somewhere along the line found ourselves in the rough-and-tumble combination of business and politics that is the "real" practice of law. The media lionize the over-the-edge aggressive litigator, but where is the support in our profession for the quiet excellence and civility of the lawyers and judges who gave birth to the common law?

The Leo A. Deegan Inn of Court is a group of lawyers, judges and commissioners who have joined together in an effort to improve the levels of excellence, professionalism and ethical awareness in our legal community. As a chapter of the larger American Inns of Court, the Leo A. Deegan Inn meets once each month to "break bread," hold programs and host discussions on issues involving ethics, legal skills, civility and professionalism. We draw heavily on the traditional English model of legal apprenticeship, although modified to meet the reality of American practice. Membership in the Inn is composed of legal professionals in three categories: "Masters" – bench officers and highly experienced lawyers; "Barristers" – lawyers with experience, though not as experienced as "Masters"; and "Associates" – members who are relatively

new to the legal profession or to the Inn. In addition, each Associate is assigned a mentor, who is a Master of the bench or bar.

The Leo A. Deegan Inn has 64 members, divided into eight "teams." Each team includes one judicial Master and two attorney Masters, along with Barristers and Associates. The Inn meets once a month from September through May to eat dinner and hear a presentation from one of its teams. The debate and commentary among the presenters and the larger Inn foster a collegiality that reminds us that we are indeed members of a worthy profession.

The real work of the Inn gets done when members of the eight teams meet informally to plan their presentations. This is where the Associates, Barristers and Masters get to know and to rely upon one another, as they conceive, plan and later execute their presentation. In these smaller team meetings, Associates work with federal and state judges, who serve as Judicial Masters, as well as with Attorney Masters and Barristers. The goal is to communicate amongst one another a culture of high ethical awareness, civility and professional excellence.

Riverside has always been a special place to practice law. The Leo A. Deegan Inn of Court promotes a culture that makes our legal community unique. Membership in the Inn is limited to a few years for each member. Every year, during June, July and August, the Inn seeks new members. The goal is to include the larger legal community in the life of the Inn. This larger legal community is you. We are members of a time-honored profession. I invite everyone to play a part in creating and preserving a tradition of legal excellence, civility and keen ethical awareness. If this sounds interesting to you, please contact Sherri Gomez at (951) 689-1200.

Paul Grech, Jr., a partner with Grech & Firetag, is a criminal law specialist and is currently the President of the Leo A. Deegan Inn of Court.

