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C O N T E N T S

Columns:

- 3 **President's Message** by *Jacqueline Carey-Wilson*
- 6 **Barristers President's Message** by *Kelly A. Moran*

COVER STORY:

- 18 **2013 Installation Dinner**

Features:

- 8 **Leo A. Deegan Inn of Court**
by *the Hon. Jackson Lucky*
- 9 **MCLE Revisions Keep Hours at 25 for Now, Create New Provider Review System**
by *Laura Ernede*
- 10 **Five Reasons to Mentor in the RCBA's Mentoring Program**
by *Michael Gouveia*
- 11 **Mentoring: Lessons Taught and Lessons Learned**
by *Marlene L. Allen-Hammarlund*
- 12 **The RCBA Building – Its Beginning**
by *Christopher G. Jensen*
- 14 **The 2013 E. Aurora Hughes Meritorious Award for Service: A Tribute to Associate Justice Thomas E. Hollenhorst**
- 16 **2013 Conference of Delegates**
by *Michael L. Bazzo*
- 17 **Judge George R. Freeman and the Gordon Northcott Trial**
by *the Hon. Helios J. Hernandez*
- 20 **Sections and Committees of the RCBA**
- 24 **Our Lawyer Referral Service: What Do You Really Know About It?**
by *Larry Maloney*
- 25 **Choose Your Own Adventure: Bar Activities**
- 26 **Luis J. Rodriguez Leads the California State Bar as Its New President**
by *Sophia Choi*

Departments:

- | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Bench to Bar 22 | Classified Ads 28 |
| Calendar 2 | Membership 28 |

LEO A. DEEGAN INN OF COURT

by the Hon. Jackson Lucky

For the past several Septembers, I have looked forward to the annual first meeting of the Leo A. Deegan Inn of Court. The keynote speaker for each year's initial meeting is Terry Bridges, who tells us about our Inn's namesake, Judge Leo Deegan. The Inn's purpose is to foster professionalism, ethics, civility, and legal skills. Each year, Terry's speech inspires our Inn to achieve that purpose.

Terry paints a magnificent portrait of Judge Deegan. He describes Deegan's flowing white mane and tough-but-fair demeanor. I picture Deegan as Abraham Lincoln trapped in Andrew Jackson's body. According to Terry, when a lawyer appeared in Judge Deegan's courtroom, shoes were shined, shirts were pressed, and files were read again and again. Every detail counted. In Deegan's courtroom, the lawyers and the judge were professional and prepared. It was the kind of courtroom young lawyers imagine.

Fortified with this ideal vision of court, our Inn spends the next several months exploring how to recreate it. We hold a monthly dinner meeting, usually on the fourth Wednesday. At each meeting, a team of about eight lawyers, along with a judge and law student, present a topic that has been assigned by the Inn's board. The topics usually encourage lively debate in that area where zealous advocacy and professional ethics meet. Sometimes the disagreements are profound, but all members observe our core values of professionalism and civility during discussions.

The monthly meetings are informative and entertaining variations on a theme. Last year's theme was "The Leo A. Deegan Inn of Court Goes to the Movies." The board chose movies about lawyers that presented

ethical questions. Teams presented on bias and mental health issues by examining Philadelphia, Kramer vs. Kramer, and Michael Clayton. Others explored professional responsibility and client-conflict issues through films like Reversal of Fortune and The Firm. There is no mandated format. Some teams present skits, some lead discussions, and others invite a guest speaker.

Each presentation is scored by attendees, and the high-scoring team is announced each year. The winning teams are memorialized on a perpetual trophy. Team Varner, the winning team last year, presented "A Civil Action." The team performed a parody exposé à la Nancy Grace and Geraldo, complete with costumes, multiple set pieces, and a multimedia projector. With wireless microphones, they polled their "studio audience" for opinions on the real ethical dilemmas the fictional lawyers faced, such as competent representation and the perils of self-financing plaintiff's litigation.

The Deegan Inn seeks to help younger people interested in the law. Each team has a law student, who presents as part of the group. Additionally, the Inn has adopted the Law and Protective Services Academy at John W. North High School. Inn members, along with other legal and public safety professionals, mentor high school students who are interested in the law and related fields.

The Inn accepts applications every summer. Membership is by invitation only, and decisions are made in August. If you have questions, contact an Inn member or an Inn officer. This year's officers are Jack Lucky, President, John Michels, President-Elect, the Hon. Tom Cahraman, Secretary/Treasurer,

Sophia Choi, Alexandra Fong, Jeremy Hanson, and Connie Younger, Directors-at-Large, and Immediate Past President Robyn Lewis. For more information, the Inn's Executive Director, Sherri Gomez, is available at sherrigomez4@gmail.com.

I hope you will consider joining the Inn. Everyone should hear Terry Bridges speak about Leo Deegan at least once. More importantly, we need to hear new voices and new ideas. That is the way the Inn will continue to inspire a more professional, more ethical, more civil, and more skilled bench and bar.

The Hon. Jackson Lucky is Supervising Judge of Family Law for the Riverside Superior Court, Judicial Mentor for the Asian Pacific American Lawyers of the Inland Empire, and President of the Leo A. Deegan Inn of Court.



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