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## A LOOK BACK AT THE PEOPLE AND PROGRAMS THAT MADE CAALA VEGAS 2021 A HUGE SUCCESS

CAALA's 2021 Las Vegas Convention is in the books and, as advertised, we were back and better than ever. It always takes a village to plan and execute a convention for over 3,000 attendees, but CAALA Vegas 2021 posed more challenges than usual. The Convention was held at a new venue, Bellagio Las Vegas, with entirely new registration and check-in systems, new contractors and during a global pandemic. Overcoming all these challenges, CAALA Vegas 2021 delivered the highest attendance ever with 3,374 total attendees, phenomenal programming, and renewed connections for colleagues.

### The CAALA staff

There are many key contributors to whom we owe our gratitude for such a successful Convention in the most difficult of circumstances. But first and foremost, our gratitude goes to the CAALA Staff, whose professionalism is unparalleled: Liz Hagan, CAALA's Director of Membership and Programs; Kwedi Moore, Director of Development; Bill Smith, Director of Finance and Operations; Jordan Smith, Manager of Technology and Multimedia; Margie Ruiz, Membership Administrator; Martha Ruiz, Office Administrator; and Executive Director Stuart Zanville. They did incredible work planning the Convention. This small staff handled everything from the conference layout to educational programs, affiliate member services, the Allegiant Stadium party, and every minute detail including the "Friends of CAALA" floor stickers that we all loved.



As trial lawyers, we have a Trial Gear that we engage to get trial work done. Likewise, CAALA's staff has a Convention Gear. Year after year this small but mighty staff surpasses themselves and they did it again this year, against all odds.

### The Education Committee

Next, we owe tremendous thanks to CAALA's 2021 Education Committee Chair Christina Coleman and Vice Chairs Shannon Ward and Diana Diskin, and CAALA's 2021 Legal Support Staff Group Chair Lupe Flores and Vice Chair Rose Gutierrez. These dedicated leaders worked endlessly to make the 2021 Convention a fresh and dynamic educational program for lawyers and support staff. They each invested hundreds of hours into the planning and success of the Convention, and they delivered outstanding results. Ladies, your excellence shined through and CAALA is truly grateful for your skills and talent.

### Programs

There were fifty-eight women moderators and speakers at the Convention, and they were incredibly diverse. Our speakers included California's first self-identified activist transwoman trial lawyer, Mia Yamamoto. If you missed Ms. Yamamoto's speech, you missed one of the most raw, empowering, and inspiring speeches I have ever heard in my entire life. Ms. Yamamoto shared the story of coming out to her family and the legal community and called on all of us to support the trans community.



She acknowledged the Black Lives Matter movement leaders as being at the forefront of the civil rights movement and brought home the compelling truth that all battles for civil rights are interconnected.

Lisa Holder educated us on the state of the law supporting the use of implicit bias to prove intentional discrimination. Judge Kimberly Guillemet addressed the Los Angeles County Superior Court's commitment to expanding agency and access to justice for minority lawyers. I thought this was one of the most illuminating and empowering Elimination of Bias panel discussions I have seen at any legal seminar.

The Medicine for Lawyers seminars, at which extremities, the brain, and the spine, were focused on by plaintiff lawyers and



physicians, along with defense perspectives, were all packed with attendees. Day in and day out, I heard people saying these were the best medicine panels they had ever attended, and that they learned more at these panels than at any other seminar.

**The Allegiant Stadium party**

The Friday night party at Allegiant Stadium, the new home of the Las Vegas Raiders, was an unparalleled experience that included food, friends, and a private tour of the stadium. It was, in a word, epic.



**The mock trial**

Last but not least, we held a mock trial on Saturday afternoon instead of a Masters panel. The subject of the mock trial was an auto accident case and we teamed renowned plaintiff and defense lawyers for opening statement, defendant under 776, plaintiff direct and cross, and closing argument. Los Angeles County Superior Court Presiding Judge Eric Taylor presided over the trial after having just delivered an informative State of the Courts speech.

The mock trial session room held at least 1,000 people and was full. Presenters Ibiere Seck, Dana Fox, Deborah Chang, Juan Delgado, Arash Homampour, Lauren Lofton, Gary Dordick, and Donna Maryanski, gave dynamic demonstrations of various trial elements. They also participated in round-table discussions after each element to explain their decisions and to critique or compliment each other's performances. The room remained packed to the end of the day and the program was a terrific success due to the hard work of the presenters and our moderators including Shannon Ward, Janet Gusdorff, and Ese Omofoma.

**The exhibit hall**

We had a full exhibit hall from the opening session to the last day and we were all thrilled to connect with the fantastic affiliate members of CAALA. They are cherished friends and partners of this organization. Our appreciation for the work they do and the services they provide is immense. We are proud to partner with each of our affiliate members who ensure the success of our attorney and legal staff members by delivering the highest quality legal services possible to their clients.

**Sunday brunch**

My new favorite way to end the Convention is the Sunday morning brunch. We had over 400 attendees, along with their loved ones including, for many of us, our kids, and, in my case, my mother-in-law, for a relaxed, work-is-done breakfast. It was wonderful to gather together one last time before the official end





of the Convention and to be able to do so in a picture-perfect setting was truly a blessing.

**Upcoming: Women Trial Skills**

As we wind down from CAALA’s Vegas Convention, we are hard at work preparing for CAALA’s Women Trial Skills Seminar, which will be held October 15-16 at The Ritz-Carlton in Marina del Rey. As the great Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg told us, “Women belong in all places where decisions are being made.” At CAALA, we know that women belong in the courtroom, and we are dedicated to empowering them as trial lawyers. The Women’s

Trial Skills Program features an incredible slate of accomplished women teaching trial skills in a relaxed and comfortable setting. This seminar is always one of my favorites each year going back to its beginning during the presidency of Ricardo Echeverria. I encourage you to register; I know you won’t regret attending.

CAALA is, indeed, back better than ever, thanks to the incredible efforts of the CAALA Staff, the attorneys and legal staff who volunteered their time to plan and teach at the Vegas Convention, and the affiliate members on whose services we rely. Though CAALA Vegas is the largest trial lawyer convention in the country, it is truly a community. Our work continues, and we look forward to seeing you again soon to inspire, connect, and learn from one another.