



OCTLA President

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Happy 60th Anniversary, OCTLA

LOOKING BACK ON THE DAYS OF KENNEDY, THE PEN AND THE TYPEWRITER AND AHEAD TO CHALLENGES OF THE POST-PANDEMIC ERA

This year the Orange County Trial Lawyers Association celebrates its 60th Anniversary. It's hard to wrap my head around the fact that when our great organization got off the ground President John F. Kennedy was President, the country was in the midst of civil unrest, and Martin Luther King, Jr. gave his historic "I Have a Dream" speech. Man was still reaching for the moon and the U.S. had soldiers on the ground in Vietnam. If I was writing this article then, I might have been using a 1963 Montgomery Ward Signature 100 typewriter. The only forms of written communication for the masses at that time were the power of the pen or a typewriter, and if you wanted another person to read your letter, you had to either use snail mail or hand-deliver it to them. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, there were 82.7 million registered cars and trucks on the road in 1963. For perspective, in 2021 there were 289.5 million registered vehicles in the United States. The population of Orange County was just shy of one million; today it is over three million.

Since I was not alive in 1963, I decided to do some research on the early days of the OCTLA. Lucky for me, my esteemed uncle, Wylie Aitken, was President of OCTLA in 1972. Back in '72 there were approximately 50 to 75 members. The group would meet on a Thursday night at a place called the Charter House located across from Disneyland. "At that point we as a plaintiff bar group were somewhat outliers as opposed to the 'Real Bar.' We were a valiant little group in a very conservative county. The lead plaintiff lawyers were Vern Hunt and Art Hews."

OCTLA had four officers back then, three other board members, and a permanent treasurer, Glen Bashore. As Wylie put it, "There was no real money and no one wanted the job." Usually, the president's legal secretary acted in the

role of the executive assistant. At the end of Wylie's term, the membership grew to over 100. In comparison, according to Wylie, the California Trial Lawyers Association (currently known as Consumer Attorneys of California) had approximately 11 people on the governing board who, among them were Herb Hafif, Marvin Lewis, Robert Cartwright, Jack Werchick, Ed Pollack and Ned Good. Under the great stewardship of Herb Hafif, the CTLA grew to a statewide membership of approximately 4,200 members.

Diversity at OCTLA

Since the early days, OCTLA has grown tremendously. While the last few years have been extremely challenging due to the COVID-19 pandemic, membership is returning to pre-pandemic levels. OCTLA currently has just under 600 members. In the last 10 years we have elected the first African-American president of OCTLA, Vincent Howard, and the first openly LGBTQ+ president, Casey Johnson. I am the seventh female president of OCTLA and could not be prouder of the fact that the board being installed on January 21, 2023 consists of a culturally diverse group of individuals who are excited to work hard and honor the mission of OCTLA – to protect the rights of citizens and their access to civil justice.

It's that passion to protect the rights of our clients that has remained steady for 60 years. The goal in the beginning was to provide top-notch trial lawyer education for its members and that is still the goal today. In 1972, the organization did an entire series on the trial of a personal-injury case. Since I joined the board of OCTLA in 2005, that type of monthly education has been a consistent topic and one that the members grow the most from. However, how we meet and educate our members has morphed since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. No one can argue against the fact that

the pandemic shifted the presentation of information. Where in-person education meetings were the way, COVID-19 ushered in the new mode of video-presentations and Zoom meetings.

So, where does OCTLA go from here? One challenge the organization is facing is to increase attendance at OCTLA meetings and events. I plan on engaging our members through surveys to learn more about what our members are looking for from OCTLA. The term post-pandemic era gets thrown around a lot, but I believe OCTLA would be doing a disservice to our members if we do not recognize that society and the challenges facing our membership are different now.

What can OCTLA do differently or better to aid our members in the representation of their clients? This question is first and foremost on my mind. We are only effective if we have information from our membership to guide the decisions of the board. My second year on the board, then-president Brian Chase set out to plan for OCTLA's future. The result of this strategic planning was the current motto of OCTLA: *Take no challenge alone.*

I have always believed that this motto perfectly encompasses what OCTLA strives to deliver – a fellowship of attorneys who help each other. That is exactly what the attorneys set out to do back in 1963 and it continues to this day. While many of us practice the same area of law and can be seen as competitors, we answer the call on a daily basis to help our fellow members and provide legal analysis and advice whenever asked. That is what makes a trial lawyer unique. That is what I want to believe we will be doing 60 years from now at the 120th Anniversary of OCTLA. While I won't be there, maybe my daughter or son will be writing this column and reminding their members of what the OCTLA stood for when their mother was president. One can only dream. 📌