



From the President
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Using our voice to make a difference

RAISING \$260,000 FOR “JOY JARS” FOR CHILDHOOD-CANCER VICTIMS AND HONORING THE BEST AMONG US AT THE TOP GUN GALA

As I write my first article as OCTLA president, I am grateful to work with an organization filled with lawyers whose impact reaches far beyond the courtroom. On November 22, over 400 guests gathered for our annual Top Gun Awards Gala, where we honored our attorneys whose work has impacted the lives of their clients and the broader community. Among these awards was the induction of Greg Bentley into the Hall of Fame, recognizing his work in transforming entire industries and making them safer for the public. We also honored outstanding trial lawyers Bill Shapiro, Keith Bruno, Nick Rowley, Greyson Goody, and Tom Antunovich for their exceptional contributions to the practice of law and their communities.

\$260,000 for childhood-cancer patients

The most memorable part of the night was when a young cancer survivor took the stage to share her courageous journey and the impact that one little girl's legacy had on her life. That girl was Jessie Rees, a compassionate 12-year-old who battled cancer. Jessie's focus today is on helping other children fighting cancer. Her motto was “Never Ever Give Up,” or NEGU, and her mission was to ensure that every child battling cancer could find hope and strength to persevere.

Part of building that hope was through the creation of Joy Jars – 64-ounce plastic jars stuffed with toys, games, and small gifts, designed to give children joy during a difficult time and to share smiles, laughter, and hope. Jessie's vision was simple yet profound: to care for others and bring joy to children in the hospital. Because of NEGU, the Jessie Rees Foundation continues to touch the lives of countless children, delivering over 500,000 Joy Jars to children fighting cancer. Jessie's mission has spread far

beyond the United States, reaching children in 53 countries worldwide. I am so proud and honored that we had the chance to partner with this foundation.

Hearing Jessie's story through the lens of her father, Erik Rees, inspired me to consider how we, as the Orange County trial lawyer community, can give back. It reinforced my commitment as president to use this platform to make a meaningful difference not just for our clients but for the community at large. At the Top Gun Gala, with the help of auctioneer Keith More, we were able to raise over \$260,000 for the Jessie Rees Foundation – a testament to the generosity and compassion of our members. It was an incredible night, demonstrating the power of this community when we come together to support a worthy cause.

This experience also shaped my vision for OCTLA this year. Inspired by Jessie's courage and commitment to others, our mission is to use our voices to make a difference – not only in the courtroom but in the lives of those in our community. I am proud to lead this organization and look forward to what we can achieve in Orange County to effect positive change. As you read this article, I encourage you to reach out to me personally about charitable opportunities and to collaborate with other organizations. We are fortunate to have a strong network, including partnerships with CAOC, CAOIE, OCTLC, and CAALA, that amplifies our impact throughout the state of California. I also encourage you to visit the NEGU website to explore the many ways you can spread joy.

How will you contribute to the mission?

Being part of OCTLA is more than practicing law; it is about being part of a community that values service, compassion, and justice. Whether through mentoring young attorneys, advocating

important causes, or supporting charitable organizations, we have the ability to touch lives in ways that extend far beyond the courtroom. The generosity, dedication, and vision of our members are what make OCTLA a unique and powerful force in Orange County.

As we move forward, I encourage each of you to consider how you can contribute to our mission. Identify opportunities to volunteer, support local causes, or partner with organizations doing meaningful work. Together, we can continue to honor the legacy of individuals like Jessie Rees, ensuring that our profession is not only about achieving justice for our clients, but about making a broader, lasting impact on the community.

I also want to take a moment to thank outgoing OCTLA president Aaron Hicks. Through his efforts to make us stronger together, we were able to expand our mentorship program by connecting seasoned lawyers with new attorneys. Part of being stronger is joining forces to protect our justice system, ensure access to justice for our clients, and give back to the community that has given so much to me personally. I moved to Orange County to attend college at UCI in 2003, and the people and relationships I have built over the last 20 years are invaluable. I am grateful to be part of this community and committed to giving back.

I am honored to serve as the 2026 OCTLA president and excited for what we can accomplish this year. Let us remain committed to using our skills, resources, and voices for the greater good – continuing to inspire, support, and uplift those around us. The work we do as lawyers can change lives, and the charitable initiatives we embrace can extend that impact even further. OCTLA is more than a legal organization; it is a community capable of creating real and meaningful change, and I am proud to be a part of it. 🌟