

WLA

AWARD RECIPIENTS:

OWL AWARD: *Alicia Valdez Wright*

RISING STAR AWARD: *Janet Wallace*

By Tara Jacobi

The Women Lawyers Association created the Outstanding Women Lawyer Award to honor a local female attorney promoting the advancement of women within our community. The Outstanding Women Lawyer Award — otherwise known as the OWL Award — is presented annually, in March, in honor of Women’s History Month, followed by a speaker addressing elimination of bias for continuing education credits during our regular monthly meeting. Attorneys can count on obtaining bias credit locally in March each year.

The OWL Award’s primary focus is akin to our mission statement, which is to promote the advancement of women. However, in this instance, advancing women is not limited to advancing women just in the legal profession but advancing women in the community in general. Furthermore, the recipient need not be a practicing attorney, only a law school graduate. Therefore, she may be working to advance women in ways not involving practicing law. Finally, we tend to honor applicants who are doing something above and beyond in addition to their work responsibilities. These are the two primary criteria for receiving the OWL Award.

For instance, our first recipient, Angie King, was honored for her outstanding and diverse service to women. Angie King was the Women’s Community Center Board Chair for ten years, the coordinator of the National Organization for Women’s local chapter going back to the ’90s through the present, a past President of our organization, a past Vice President of California Women Lawyers, and a Committee member of the California State Bar Association on the Standing Committee on Women in the Law. These tasks are just a few of the activities she engaged in outside

her regular work. Our second recipient, Jacqueline Frederick, was honored for her service with California Women Lawyers, as well as being a mentor to other female attorneys. She has served as a mentor to young lawyers, represented victims of domestic violence and elder abuse pro-bono, and has been a volunteer attorney coach and judge with the Mock Trial program for many years. As Affiliate Governor for California Women Lawyers, she provides our Women Lawyers Association’s Board with legislative updates on issues that affect women and families.

Last year, the Women Lawyers Association decided to create the Rising Star Award. Janet Wallace is the inaugural recipient of the Rising Star Award. We created the Rising Star Award because we believed that the younger lawyers would always be competing against more experienced lawyers for the OWL Award, with the more experienced attorneys more likely to receive recognition. Furthermore, we need more instances, especially in our community, of outstanding but relative new lawyers being honored. Thus, the Rising Star Award was created with the distinction of the recipient having practiced for seven years or less.

OWL AWARD: ALICIA VALDEZ WRIGHT

This past March, we were proud to announce that Alicia Valdez Wright was the recipient of the 2014 OWL Award. Alicia Valdez Wright is the Family Law Facilitator for the San Luis Obispo Superior Court. She provides free assistance to self-represented litigants needing help with divorce, child support, restraining orders, guardianship and other issues. Alicia organized the Court-Community Meetings Regarding Self-Represented Litigants, which brings judges, legal service providers and court administrators together to share ideas and facilitate collaboration. Most pertinent,

in addition to her regular work responsibilities, and in the face of shrinking budgets, she founded and implemented the Incarcerated Women Legal Education Project providing incarcerated women with family law and domestic violence information to help lower recidivism. No small task in addition to her regular workload! We asked Alicia a few questions to learn more about her and find some inspiration:

What motivates you?

There is a growing number of self-represented litigants. Reports show that California has one lawyer for every 240 residents, but just one legal aid attorney for every 8,737 low-income individuals. So, if Dodger Stadium were filled to capacity with low-income individuals, there would be only six legal aid lawyers to help.

I'm motivated to find ways to provide meaningful equal access to justice. Locally, we continue to work closely with our justice partners who help meet the growing need for legal services. We also recently expanded our Walk-In Legal Clinic hours to include services Monday through Thursday from 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. in both Paso Robles and San Luis Obispo Courthouses. We also have workshops and individual appointments available. You can find more information about our services by calling (805) 788-3418.

Who inspires you?

Recently, at the first Court and Legal Services Partnership Summit in San Francisco, I was inspired by our Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye who addressed the staggering number of low and moderate-income individuals in need of legal assistance. She asked legal aid and self-help center lawyers to share ideas and innovative thoughts to create durable solutions. She also challenged us to rethink the delivery of legal services and create our own efficiencies.

RISING STAR AWARD: JANET WALLACE

Janet Wallace inspired the Committee to create the Rising Star Award. She is an attorney at Adamski Moroski Madden Cumberland & Green and a faculty member at Cuesta Community College. She serves

**WHEN WE STAND
TOGETHER, WE RISE
TOGETHER —
AND WHEN WE RISE
TOGETHER, WE CAN
SHATTER GLASS.**

as Vice President and co-chair of content for Ms. JD and on the Board of Directors of the Women Lawyers Association of San Luis Obispo. In 2015, Janet was named one of the Top 20/Under 40 by the San Luis Obispo Tribune.

What motivates you?

Hands down, without a doubt: kindness. The world needs more of it.

Who inspires you?

I got supremely lucky in the friend department when I joined the Board of Directors of Ms. JD. I'm honored to associate with such seriously brilliant masterminds who inspire me every single day. These friends include the first female CEO of the public-interest law firm Bet Tzedek, a Rhodes Scholar, a Fulbright Scholar, former Peace Corps volunteers, a woman named to Forbes' Top 30 Young Lawyers, Policymakers and Power Players, and a bunch of whip-smart attorneys and law students who run marathons, start companies, and create award winning constitutional literacy programs. I received the 2014 Rising Star award from WLA SLO in large part due to my work at Ms. JD, but, truth be told, many of my accomplishments are the result of a shared effort by this group of amazing women who live by the #womenhelpingwomen code.

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What challenges do you see women lawyers facing?

This question deserves a whole book dedicated to it (and, hey! I happen to be working on that very book with the American Bar Association). Briefly, though, pervasive gender bias, the motherhood penalty, the leak in the pipeline, the wage gap, and the glass ceiling.

What significant advancement do you wish to see women achieve in your lifetime?

In the legal profession, gender parity. The terrifying truth is, at the current rate of progress, the profession won't see gender parity during my lifetime. Not even close. We really need to ramp up our collective effort if we want to make it happen.


Globally, education for girls and women. Investment in education for girls and women has the highest rate of return to promote development and economic progress. Broadening access to education for girls and women results in greater participation in the labor force and political sphere, reduction in HIV/AIDS infection, lower child and maternal mortality rates, improvements in child nutrition, and a decrease in exploitation and abuse. These benefits transmit across communities and generations. Ultimately, education can reverse cycles of poverty and increase the equitability of the distribution of wealth in a society.

What do you hope for with women in the legal profession?

I hope that every woman has a champion in her life. I'm not talking about your average mentor, but a true advocate who will champion her worth. For those women who have already built a strong foundation, I hope that they will sponsor someone else. WLA SLO is starting a mentorship program that has the potential of building these bonds, and I look forward to watching the program develop in our community. When we stand together, we rise together — and when we rise together, we can shatter glass. Bring your hammers!

Author's Conclusion:

Thank you ladies for the thoughtful insight you've both graciously shared from your journey thus far. I know you both will inspire other women to work together to promote the advancement of women — together we can do this. Women Lawyers Association is now accepting applications for the 2015 OWL Award and Rising Star Award. Nominating an applicant is simple. You need only answer three short questions about the applicant as stated on our website e-mailing your answers to WLA. If you have any questions or concerns you may reach us at: womenlawyerslo@gmail.com. ■



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