



Late Winter Musings

by Greg Hazarabedian

As I write this in mid-February, OCDLA is active on many fronts. Several of our members are gaining the rich cultural/legal experience that is our Spanish Language, Law and Diversity Program in Baja. This is a unique chance to enhance your Spanish language skills, and learn about the Mexican legal system from the inside out, talking to lawyers, judges, and even prison officials. This year the Mexican regional newspaper *El Sudcaliforniano* covered our presence in Baja with two cover-page stories. If you have not been, please consider it in the future. It truly is an amazing experience and there is only one other way I know of to see the inside of a Mexican prison, and I don't recommend it!

Moving back home, our Legislative Committee (chaired by Bob Homan) has been meeting weekly in Salem. We review the many bills, both good and bad, being introduced in the legislature that potentially affect our clients (and sometimes us). We determine what OCDLA's position should be on each relevant bill and what priority to give it.

Our substantive issues lobbyist Gail Meyer is doing an outstanding job representing our interests in Salem, but she couldn't do it without the support of the many OCDLA members who give their time and expertise to the effort. This combination—a full-time lobbyist plus OCDLA members who volunteer by serving on the Legislative Committee, doing legal research, consulting with Gail, testifying, serving on legislative workgroups, and lobbying elected representatives—is what will maintain our organization as an effective force in the capital. So, when Gail or someone else asks you to lend a hand in Salem please make the time, we're depending on you.

Speaking of OCDLA member volunteers, it will soon be the season for nominations to the

OCDLA Board of Directors, with elections to follow at our Annual Conference in Bend this June. The OCDLA members who serve the organization at the board level play a vital, yet often unseen role. For those who are not sure what a board does, here's a description that applies to the OCDLA board reasonably well:

- Determine the organization's mission and purpose
- Select the executive
- Ensure effective organizational planning
- Ensure adequate resources
- Manage resources effectively
- Determine and monitor the organization's programs and services
- Enhance the organization's public image
- Serve as a court of appeal
- Assess its own performance

(From the National Center for Nonprofit Boards "Ten Basic Responsibilities of Nonprofit Boards," 1988).

Our mission and purpose are clear, and we are extraordinarily well served by our Executive Director John Potter and his staff; so the first two don't present much of a challenge. After that things get decidedly less easy and the remaining responsibilities require thoughtful deliberation. We have grown into a one-million-dollar-a-year organization, and our board is increasingly being asked to decide matters involving substantial sums of money.

Continued on next page.

OCDLA Life Member **Greg Hazarabedian** is the Association's President. He is the board liaison to the Legislative Committee, and also serves on the Capital Defender, Law School Outreach, and Website committees. Greg is director of Public Defender Services of Lane County in Eugene.

In my last column I alluded to the fact that we were buying property in Eugene to permanently house the OCDLA office. Your board made the policy decision some time ago that purchasing property was a prudent move for our organization as we turn thirty years old, you know, something like: OK, we're thirty; time to get a place of our own. We then identified a suitable property in Eugene, made an offer and thought we were well on our way to buying office space. But, instead of now sharing details of our completed purchase with you (and no doubt hitting you up for money), I'm here to report that unforeseen difficulties with that particular property popped up and your board has decided, after a period of months, to take back our earnest money...and keep looking.

That is just one example of the weighty responsibility your board carries. I'm grateful that OCDLA continues to find such dedicated and capable members to step forward and manage the organization's affairs. When you see information in this publication or on our website about upcoming vacancies on the board, please think about it. Many of us volunteer our time with many other community groups; please think about making service on the OCDLA Board of Directors part of your civic contribution in the future. ☞

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