



# CITATIONS

NOVEMBER - TWO THOUSAND TWENTY FOUR

## JACQUELYN D. RUFFIN 2024 BEN E. NORDMAN PUBLIC SERVICE AWARD WINNER

*By James Perero*

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# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By Joshua S. Hopstone

On October 17, 2003\*, my former law partner, **David L. Shain**, hosted a pro bono services event in the offices of the Ventura County Bar Association as Chair of the Volunteer Lawyers Services Program. Dubbed a "Legal Aid Summit," the invitation stated "All legal aid providers in the County are invited to share information about the program and the services they provide. All EA's are invited and encouraged to attend."

On October 17, 2024 – 21 years later *to the day* after that Legal Aid Summit occurred — the VCBA Community Outreach Committee hosted a similar pro bono forum at the offices of Ferguson Case Orr Paterson LLP. In attendance were representatives of all of the main organizations providing volunteer-based pro bono legal services within Ventura County, including:

Ventura County Legal Aid (VCLA)

California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA)

Free Clinic of Simi Valley

Conejo Free Clinic

Swap Meet Justice

Santa Clara Valley Legal Aid

Grey Law

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Mixteco Indigenous Community Organizing Project (MICOP)

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The energy and optimism exhibited at the pro bono forum cannot be understated. All of these organizations work tirelessly, and often without public acknowledgment, to fulfill the duties of public service that are incumbent upon all attorneys and inherent to the mission statement of the VCBA.

A roundtable of introductions highlighted the who-what-where-when of how these organizations serve and operate, and reflected remarkable diversity among them. Some are limited to certain legal



practice areas. Some are limited to certain geographic regions. Some operate exclusively in-person, while others are exclusively remote-based. Some provide direct client representation, while others are limited to non-retained legal advice. Some have financial criteria for eligibility, while others help anyone who walks through the door. I, and others, were astonished to learn about the breadth of methods and services available, and at the regrettable disconnect between organizations that had persisted for so many years before now. Without exception, everyone met someone new and learned something new about the field in which they themselves operate.

In breakout discussion groups, pro bono organization representatives and attorneys in private practice shared experiences and challenges from past practices and operations and brainstormed ways the VCBA and its attorney members could better support public service. Workable ideas under discussion, that your VCBA Board of Directors are now working to further develop and implement, include maintaining an up to date spreadsheet of participant organizations; establishing a listserv of legal aid organizations serving Ventura County; developing a presentation and protocols for local college, university, and law school students to volunteer and engage; expanding the existing A.S.K. program to public presentations on the basics of practice areas commonly seen in legal aid clinics (e.g. Unlawful Detainer); and planning toward a larger scale symposium next year that includes

participation from public agencies offering legal-related services to community members in need.

From the VCBA's perspective, our 2024 pro bono forum was a resounding success. The encouragement, praise and appreciation we have received from its participants since then ensures that we will not have to wait another 21 years (until October 17, 2045) to meet again.

If you or anyone you know is interested in volunteering or becoming more involved in pro bono service, please contact the VCBA, or me personally, at any time.



**Joshua S. Hopstone**  
*is a partner at Ferguson Case Orr Paterson LLP. His practice focuses on business and real estate litigation, trust/probate litigation, and appeals.*

*\*NOTICE OF ERRATA – The President's Message in Citations' October 2024 edition erroneously stated the VCBA's last pro bono event was held in 1999.*

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CITATIONS  
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# Have You Heard?



Ferguson Case Orr Paterson, LLP is thrilled to announce that as of January 1, 2025, **Ian Elsenheimer** will become a partner. Ian has made a name for himself handling business transactions and litigation, public agency matters, forming and operating homeowners' associations, land use planning, real estate financing and transfers, and property tax strategies. A 2018 graduate of USC's Gould School of Law, Elsenheimer also earned graduate certificates in Technology and Entrepreneurship as well as Business Law.

Elsenheimer and his family live in the Ojai Valley. He enjoys family time, surfing, playing volleyball, traveling, and Los Angeles Lakers basketball.

Ferguson Case Orr Paterson, the largest private law firm in the Tri-Counties, offers a wide variety of practice areas from its offices in Ventura (where Ian is based) and Westlake Village. 805-659-6800.



## Judge Aizman and Judge Kawai Formally Enrobed

The formal enrobement ceremony for **Judge Diana Weiss Aizman** and **Judge R. Paul Kawai** took place on Friday, October 25, at 4:00 p.m. in Courtroom 22 of the Hall of Justice in Ventura.

## Dennis Zentil Passes Away



Attorney **Dennis P. Zentil** passed away on October 3, 2024. Born in 1947, Zentil grew up in Redondo Beach and moved to Newbury Park in 1977 with his wife and children, where he lived until 2023. Zentil practiced law for 42 years until his retirement in 2018.

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Mr. Derrick's ADR practice draws in part on his experience over 20 years as an accomplished appellate lawyer. Before entering the legal profession, he co-founded, operated, and eventually sold a specialized information publishing business. He has degrees from two of the world's top five universities.

John Derrick's journey into mediation began in the appellate system in 2008 when he went on the Court of Appeal mediation panel in Los Angeles, on which he continues to serve. Today, he is a full-time mediator and arbitrator handling cases at all stages of the litigation timeline throughout Southern California and beyond.

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# Jacquelyn D. Ruffin - 2024 Ben E. Nordman Public Service Award Winner

By James Perero



An excellent album is a complex unity of music and message. If you only listen to the catchy single, you miss the artist's complete vision. Attention to the entire thing is rewarded with pleasure, wonder, and (perhaps) the ability to see with new eyes.

If **Jacquelyn D. Ruffin's** receipt of the Nordman Award is the single, her background and impact on our community is the album. And (wo)man, it's a great listen.

For me, the opportunity to call Jacquelyn my friend and partner has been an incomparable privilege. She crafts solutions to real problems. She sets her own high standards for accuracy and thoroughness. She excels in specificity. She listens. She conveys truth with grace. She deeply cares for and about her clients. She builds and leverages relationships for the group win.

It is a joy to share some of what I know personally and have learned in preparing this article. Perhaps it will help us see what Ruffin sees, so that we can all grow in our commitment to excellent lawyering and community service.

All along her journey, Ruffin has sought by her work to benefit others. When A.S.K.ed about the genesis of her interest in community service, Ruffin laughs and says, "My mother would tell you I've been like this since I was a little kid." She continues a generational tradition. Ruffin shared this in her President's Message for the February 2022 edition of Citations ("PM 02.22") which is available at <https://www.vcba.org/citations-magazine/>, where she also announced her signature community outreach program, Attorneys Sharing Knowledge ("A.S.K.™").

Initially raised in Ventura County, Ruffin went to middle and high school in Cincinnati. During her senior year, she

heard the siren song of *Sequoia sempervirens*. The University of California at Santa Cruz proved fertile ground for developing her commitment to the natural environment. (See, PM 08.22 and PM 10.22.) A student of our interconnectedness, Ruffin graduated in four years with a degree in environmental studies and sociology.

Ruffin then spent two years with AmeriCorps serving youth in the Bay Area before moving to Dakar, Senegal. While there, she worked with international human rights organizations where she researched and wrote in support of anti-violence and women's rights initiatives. (See, PM 01.22.)

She returned to the U.S. and found work in healthcare and education before starting a family in Ventura. As for her turn to law, she credits a phone call with a close friend about life direction. She offhandedly joked, "Maybe I should go to law school." When they stopped laughing, a pathway materialized.

Ruffin recalls studying for the LSAT in the middle of the night while caring for her infant daughter. Admission to UCLA Law School led to daily trips between Ventura and Westwood. Close friends helped with childcare so Ruffin could study, and her husband could work. (For more information on the latter, see PM 06.22.) Her academic pursuits included evaluating the terrestrial social impacts of space exploration policy. (See, PM 05.22.)

Since admission to the bar in 2011, Ruffin has practiced law with Myers, Widders, Gibson, Jones & Feingold, LLP, where she became a partner in 2018. Her professional affiliations have included League of California Cities, California Council of School Attorneys, Ventura County Black Lawyers ("VCBL") (President, 2014-2020), Women Lawyers

of Ventura County ("WLVC") (President, 2020), and the Ventura County Bar Association (President, 2022).

**Tina Rasnow** is effusive in her praise for Ruffin. "Jacquelyn is a perfect recipient of the Nordman Award and its principles of service." Rasnow, who nominated Ruffin for the award, notes that Ruffin does not work for recognition. "Jacquelyn has a quiet, humble approach to her work as an attorney and in her work for bar organizations. In everything she does, she looks to build consensus and community."

Rasnow is particularly impressed by A.S.K., and notes that "it is going to help people for years and years and years."

Rasnow credits Ruffin's combination of empathy ("She sees and cares about needs in the community") and intelligence ("She figured it out") as central to her effectiveness. Its source is no mystery to Rasnow. "She's lived overseas. Her husband comes from another country. She has a broad understanding of other cultures and perspectives and what that means for the people who live in Ventura County—whatever their background."

**Vanessa Frank** thinks of Ruffin as a "North Star" lawyer. In her view, Ruffin "is the kind of lawyer other lawyers should aspire to become." Frank appreciates that with A.S.K., "Jacquelyn created something that people want to be a part of. She got the wheel turning on a virtuous cycle."

On a personal level, Frank sees in Ruffin a gracious attentiveness. "Jacquelyn takes the time to understand people. An example of that is her referring me clients I can actually help—which is a small subset of people facing immigration challenges."



**Rabiah Rahman** is grateful for Ruffin's "wisdom, depth and thoughtfulness." Reflecting on her community service, Rahman says, "A.S.K. is just one example. Jacquelyn has been working behind the scenes for years."

Rahman recalls Ruffin's work through WLVC with Girls, Inc., a nonprofit that provided mentors to youth. On Saturday mornings, Ruffin would spend time with kids housed at the juvenile detention center. Rahman notes, "As a parent, I have a deep appreciation for Jacquelyn's willingness to give time to other people's children."

Since finishing law school, Ruffin has been involved with VCBL. Rahman points out that long before we knew George Floyd's name, Ruffin was coordinating and participating in meetings between attorneys of color and heads of law enforcement throughout the county.

Rahman draws a straight line between that work and VCBL being positioned to take a leadership role in the County's response to calls for law enforcement reform in 2020. "Jacquelyn's talent for building connections laid critical groundwork for VCBL's participation in creating the Board of Supervisors' Public Safety Racial Equity Advisory Group."

**Damon Jenkins** appreciates in Ruffin a friend and colleague who is present to her family, succeeds professionally, and gives back to the community. As Jenkins balances family, the law, and service, he sees in Ruffin a model. "Thinking about Jacquelyn motivates me to not slack and keep pushing. Just last week, I was at Oxnard High School as part of an A.S.K. panel speaking with youth about the criminal justice system."

Ruffin's clients confirm that her commitment to service is matched by formidable skill. These clients cherish her counsel and work product.

Ann Marie Garcia started a nonprofit committed to first responder mental health, The Frank Garcia Foundation (<https://fgarciafoundation.org/>). "I'm so glad I found Jacquelyn," she remarks. In Ruffin, she found technical expertise. "The compliance issues were overwhelming, but Jacquelyn and

attorney **Junajoy [Frianeza]** and paralegal Monica [Young] have been there every step of the way." Garcia also found compassion. "Jacquelyn told me she was deeply moved by my story and that she believed in me. As the single mother of two young children, what I am doing is really hard. And it wouldn't be happening at all without the support of Jacquelyn and her team." (For information about Ruffin's consideration of attorney mental wellness, see PM 03.22.)

Angela M. Landers, co-chair of Juneteenth Celebration of Ventura County ("JCVC") [www.juneteenthoxnard.org](http://www.juneteenthoxnard.org), expresses the organization's "gratitude for Jacquelyn's services and unwavering support." Landers writes that "celebrating Juneteenth here in Ventura County for the past 30+ years is our way of honoring our ancestors and celebrating freedom from slavery." When JCVC decided to formally incorporate as a nonprofit, it sought Ruffin's help. She and her staff "have shown the highest standard of professionalism and care. Jacquelyn has stood by us in our endeavors within our community and in the county."

Dr. Victor Hayek of the Conejo Valley Unified School District appreciates Ruffin's nuanced approach to real estate and contracting matters. "She not only does great work," Hayek notes, "she also has the political astuteness to think through how her work and its related issues impact us as a public agency. The work she does trickles down in support of our mission to serve over 17,000 kids and 2,500 employees across 30 sites."

Elizabeth Atilano, the executive director of the Ventura County Schools Self-Funding Authority and California Schools Employee Benefits Organization, explains that "Jacquelyn works directly with top administrators at our local education agencies within our organizations." Atilano continues, "They appreciate that she is knowledgeable, detailed, and pointed. No gloss, not a bazillion words. She gets to the point: here is what you can do or cannot do, here is a way forward." Atilano notes that Ruffin's work supports student education and services for tens of thousands of Ventura County residents.

Heather Baker founded CLEAN International (<https://cleaninternational.org/>), which protects and provides clean water worldwide. When Baker first thought about starting this global nonprofit, Ruffin was one of the first she discussed it with. "She has served so many nonprofits and individuals in their missions to help other people that she has had a compound effect of good that sometimes cannot be seen or measured," says Baker. "Jacquelyn's consistent giving of herself has had a ripple effect worldwide."

On reflection, an integral part of what Ruffin sees is this: people are human beings, first and foremost. And human beings are of inestimable value. Through discipline and hard work, she has consistently put her talent, skill, and position to use in the service of others. Ruffin's story and impact deepens my appreciation for the Nordman Award and (graciously) encourages me to consider the value of that to which I am committed. I invite you to join me in that exercise as we recognize and celebrate Ruffin's contribution to our profession and community.



**James Perero** is a  
Managing Partner with  
Myers, Widders, Gibson,  
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*The Ben E. Nordman Public Service Award is given annually by the Ventura County Bar Association to recognize outstanding community contributions made by a Ventura County attorney. The award was conceived by Ben E. Nordman, one of the founding members of Nordman Cormany Hair & Compton, a Ventura County institution until it closed in 2013. Sadly, Nordman passed away before the first recipient was honored in 1986.*



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# Women Lawyers of Ventura County Holds Annual Scholarship Dinner

By Monique Fierro



On October 10, 2024, Women Lawyers of Ventura County (WLVC) held its annual scholarship dinner and silent auction. It was a night of celebration and joy. I began the program sharing what an immense honor and privilege it was to serve as the 2024 WLVC President and to stand in the place where so many wonderful women lawyers in Ventura County have before. Past WLVC Presidents in attendance included the **Hon. Justice Tari Cody**, the **Hon. Charmaine Buehner**, **Tina Rasnow**, **Jill Friedman**, **Jacquelyn Ruffin**, **Lauren Nicholson**, **Katie Becker**, **Karen Oakman**, **Renee Dehesa**, and **Jody Prior**.

Thanks to the amazing turnout and generous sponsors, including but not limited to, Myers Widders Gibson Jones & Feingold and National Trust & Probate, who committed to the highest level of support as the Scholarship Sponsors, WLVC was able to give the highest scholarship amount in its history of \$5,000 to Gabriela Macias

Mota. Mota attends the Ventura College of Law and hopes to pursue a career in public interest.

**Mandee Sanderson** was awarded the Holly Spevak Award for her outstanding work representing children as minor's counsel for over 23 years. Sanderson also gives back to the community through Girl Scouts, teaching Sunday School, and serving as Parish Council. Sanderson has made it her life's mission to help children and, as her daughter stated, "always trying to do what's right, it is her guiding light."

The **Hon. Patricia Murphy** was honored with the Legacy Award in recognition of her contribution to the advancement of the aims and rights of women and girls. Judge Murphy has been a mentor and invaluable resource for aspiring women judges, tirelessly supporting their journeys in a traditionally male-dominated field. Her commitment to fostering the next

generation of leaders speaks volumes about her character and dedication to justice.

With 2024 coming to a close, WLVC looks forward to a bright future as it continues its work to advance the interests women and girls in the community and in the legal profession.



**Monique Fierro** is a civil litigation attorney with Myers Widders Gibson Jones & Feingold LLP, where she practices in the areas of education, employment, civil rights and personal injury cases. She can be reached at (805) 644-7188 or [mfierro@mwgjlw.com](mailto:mfierro@mwgjlw.com).



## Barristers Corner

### Nominations for 2025 Barrister Board Positions are Now Open

The Ventura County Barristers, a section of the Ventura County Bar Association, provides annual programming to assist the newer members of our Bar with networking, mentoring, and educational opportunities. Each year, Barristers organizes entertainment events (e.g. Trivia Night, Wine & Cheese Night and Meet the Bench), hosts MCLEs (e.g., Bridging the Gap), and connects new lawyers (and law students) with attorneys in fields of expressed interest. The 6-8-member Board of the Barristers coordinates these events and is always looking for additional members (including law students).

Do you know someone who would be a great addition to the Barristers Board? Would you like to be a member?

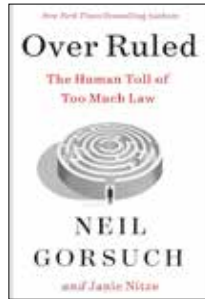
If you are interested, the following seats are available for nomination for next year's Barristers Board:

Member at Large (3), Secretary, Treasurer  
Vice President, and President

Nominations may be emailed to [ielsenheimer@fcoplaw.com](mailto:ielsenheimer@fcoplaw.com) (subject line: Barristers Nomination) and must be received by 11:59 p.m. on November 30, 2024. Nominations may only be made by eligible Barristers (described below).

Nominees will be confirmed for eligibility. A "Barrister" is any member in good standing of the Ventura County Bar Association who, on January 1 of a given year, meets at least one of the following requirements: (i) is under the age of thirty-six (36) years; (ii) has been admitted to practice law in any jurisdiction for a period of seven (7) years or fewer; or (iii) has been in practice in any jurisdiction for a total of (7) years or fewer. Active law students who are members of the Ventura County Bar Association are considered "Student Barristers" and may serve on the Board as a Member at Large, but may not serve as an officer of the Board.

If you would like more information or to see a Barristers Board meeting in action, please e-mail Ian Elsenheimer at [ielsenheimer@fcoplaw.com](mailto:ielsenheimer@fcoplaw.com) for information regarding the next meeting. The Barristers Board generally meets on the first Thursday of every month.



## Over Ruled, The Human Toll of Too Much Law

A review of Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch's new book  
By Lindsay Nielson

I just finished a most interesting book written by Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch. It is probably not what you would think. It deals with the impacts on ordinary citizens that the ever-expanding profusion of laws (both federal and state) have created. The book shows that the increasing volume of new laws affecting all aspects of human life in the United States virtually guarantees that all citizens, unknowingly, are committing some criminal act (many of which are a felony) in some area or another.

The book traces the history of Congress's rule making binge starting from its earliest days before the creation of the Federal Register, where rules are published. In 1936, when created, the Federal Register totaled just 16 pages. More recently, it has averaged an annual increase of more than 70,000 pages. In 2021 it totaled over 200 volumes containing more than 188,000 pages. The single Appropriations Act of 2021 added 5,000 pages alone. It is a wonder that anyone, including highly educated lawyers, much less common citizens, could find, read or even comprehend what is contained in those documents.

Justice Gorsuch has provided human examples of how this intricate web of incomprehensible rules has trapped and even caused citizens who were merely doing what they believed was guaranteed in the Constitution – such as owning a business or even just doing innocent things like driving a snow mobile on a mountain trail – ran afoul of these rules.

He highlights examples of how the Federal bureaucracy can be aggressive and ruin people's lives, their ability to earn a living, or bankrupt them when they attempt to prove their innocence. Most were unable to hire sophisticated lawyers to interpret and argue their cases. In some cases, public interest legal advocates took on the cases that made it through the years of litigation and eventually found their way to the Supreme Court.

The book contains many examples of government overreach. Some involve famous people, but most stories spoke of ordinary people doing what they thought was right. One such example was the matter of Marty Hahne. Hahne liked magic, and after college he would perform at children's birthday parties. He used a live rabbit (Casey, a three-pound flop eared little guy) for his show. In 2005, after a children's show at a library, a woman with a badge from the Department of Agriculture asked if he had a license to use the rabbit. This wasn't a wild animal. This wasn't a circus, carnival or a zoo as the law presumed. Hahne thought it was a joke. It wasn't. The law required him to have a contingency plan for the rabbit for any emergency. It spelled out the type of cage he could use when transporting this "wild animal" including having stickers labeling the cage "Live Animal" and "This Side Up." The plan also had to spell out how to transport the animal. "I lift it by the handle on top" he told the dour federal agent. She did not see the humor or the common sense in his response.

The irony of this tale is that had Casey, the rabbit been raised for food, no license would have been needed. Marty could have killed the rabbit in front of the agent without legal consequence.

There are other examples and an interesting history of this expanding area of government.

This book is an easy, fascinating – *if not a bit frightening* – read.

Over Ruled, The Human Toll of Too Much Law (304 pages) was released by Harper Books on August 6, 2024, and is co-authored by Janie Nitze. Available at major retailers now.



**Lindsay Nielson** is a lawyer and receiver. You can contact him at [nielsonlaw@aol.com](mailto:nielsonlaw@aol.com).



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# VCBA Volunteer Appreciation

By Sandra Rubio

Thank you for all your support. The VCBA has over 120 volunteers that serve on various committees and boards. We are honored to have such a strong legal community and membership.

Current, past and future presidents in attendance included: David Shain, Michael Case, Kendall VanConas, Richard Norman, Bill Grewe, Joshua Hopstone, Bert Partida and Dien Le.

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**Michael Marcelo**, Senior Child Support Attorney  
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**Elina Avagimova**, Child Support Attorney  
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