



**James Arendt** (Law '89)



**Donn Furman** (Law '93)



**Edward Hunt** (Law '74)



**Leland Sterling** (Law '74)

## Meet the Hall of Fame Inductees for 2024

BY **DIANE SKOUTI BAIZA**, ALUMNI LIAISON

Most highly accomplished people share traits in common that contribute to their success. They often exhibit multi-faceted talent and smarts, in addition to having reached a pinnacle of academic pursuit. The four newest inductees to the SJCL Hall of Fame share these attributes in spades.

The roster of their combined pre-law academics include: our beloved Fresno State, the University of Washington in Seattle, Biola College, UCLA, the California Baptist Seminary, the Andover Newton School of Theology at Yale, Claremont Graduate School, and Harvard. Before becoming lawyers they served as an MFC Counselor, taught high school, became a U.S. Air Force Instrument-rated pilot, a county assessor, a deputy sheriff/SWAT and dive team member, police trainer, furniture builder, and manager for the vending machine company, Vendo.

Many of these roles continued full-time while they attended law school. Once established in their legal careers, these over-achievers climbed to ever greater peaks.

Donn Furman (Law '93) was a lifelong environmentalist and advocate. His love for rivers, fly fishing, hiking, and all

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Inductee **Leland Sterling** receives The Hall of Fame plaque from Dean **Janice Pearson**.



## A Message From the Dean

Five years ago, the SJCL family was enjoying the fabulous party celebrating the 50TH Anniversary of the founding of the law school. The event brought together wonderful people and memories that many of us had not visited in years.

Three months later, March of 2020, the COVID pandemic shutdown began. SJCL immediately transitioned to a fully online legal education. Staff and faculty worked from home, with a minimal team on campus briefly and in rotation. Students and faculty adapted quickly to Zoom.

It seemed like the pandemic might change everything. Yet subsequent classes have performed outstandingly on the California bar exam. Under American Bar Association standards, 75% of a graduating class must pass the bar exam of a school's state within two years of graduation. The class of 2020 reached 80% within two years. The class of 2022 reached 94% within one year, a rate higher than 56% of the ABA accredited schools nationwide. It now stands at an extraordinary 97% passing. The class of 2024 just passed the July bar on their first attempt at 74%, now only 1% away from the standard and destined to blow past it!!!

This November SJCL was 55 years old. Between the pandemic and that date, one dramatic change occurred for SJCL. First year enrollment dropped significantly. SJCL entering classes averaged 70 before the pandemic. The class to enter in fall 2020 was already committed to law school and 77 enrolled. Thereafter, the entering classes have dropped to 51 in 2021, 44 in 2022, and 47 in 2023. Only 21 of the 2022 entering class advanced to the second year and only 23 of the entering class of 2023 advanced.

The reduced overall enrollment from an average of 170 to 140 obviously has major financial implications for SJCL. It also has implications for the San Joaquin Valley at large. The legal community is facing difficulty in hiring legal professionals, particularly in public service positions – District Attorney, County Counsel, City Attorney, and Public Defender Offices. Nearly all 2024 graduates who passed the bar had employment waiting. Recently, SJCL held its second career fair. Twenty-two firms and public entities participated with well over 100 open positions available. Yet, individuals are not enrolling in a career field that would give them personal, professional, and financial fulfillment.

SJCL will adapt. The strength of the academic program will not change. Your support of SJCL is crucial in two ways. First, of course, financial gifts to the law school are extremely important. But, important to the whole community, if you know talented people you feel would make good lawyers, refer them to SJCL. As demonstrated by the bar results above, one need not go deeply in debt or hundreds of miles away to become a great lawyer.

Sincerely,

Janice Pearson  
Dean

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# Inter Alia

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**Vision:** To be the premier provider of legal education, scholarship, and service in the San Joaquin Valley.  
**Mission:** To educate and develop individuals to become highly skilled attorneys and problem solvers who will benefit their communities through public and private service. In seeking this vision and attaining this mission, SJCL shall embody the values of civility, excellence, integrity, intellectual inquiry, and service.

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# Alumna Traci Fritzler-Kirkorian Honored in Top 10

At the age of 13, Traci Fritzler-Kirkorian (Law '97) knew she wanted to be a lawyer.

BY DIANE SKOUTI BAIZA, ALUMNI LIAISON

It was her beloved stepdad, Jerry Chitjian, who said that her habit of talking – constant talking – made her original plan to be a paralegal, less suitable. Jerry's untimely death, just before Traci's 16th birthday, confirmed her resolve for a career practicing law, partly for herself and partly to honor Jerry. "He had always been interested in law and I think, wanted to be a lawyer himself," Traci said, "So it became my ultimate goal."

Traci's attainment of that goal was a mere steppingstone toward all that she has accomplished. In October Traci was honored as one of the Marjaree Mason Center's Top 10 Professional Women of the Year. This highly prestigious honor is given to those who exemplify leadership while positively impacting their profession. In Traci's case, significant contributions to the betterment of the community as the Assistant District Attorney for Fresno County, and her earlier work across numerous departments were recognized. A premier event in the Central Valley, over 1,500 peers and supporters attend the Top 10 Professional & Businesswomen Awards program each year.

What does it take reach such a pinnacle? For Traci it began in high school when she discovered a love and talent for debate and the Model United Nations. She went on to major in history at UCLA with an emphasis in Armenian Studies. A favorite history professor encouraged her to consider teaching, but her heart remained set on law. She even had thoughts of politics, perhaps, after law school.

Having grown up around agriculture and working part-time jobs in a packing house, she had an interest in local ag policy. But those thoughts changed once Traci served some internships during law school. Her first was with the Public Defender's office, then the criminal division of the courts, and later with the District Attorney's Office. "(Those internships) caused me to fall in love with the law," Traci says. During law school she became a certified law student and had the opportunity to work on a high-profile case involving a



**Traci Fritzler-Kirkorian** (center) receives the Marjaree Mason Center Top Ten Professional Women award from Marjaree Mason CEO **Nicole Linder** (left) and President of the Board **Kerri Horn**.

sheriff's deputy who misused his badge to assault women. "I sat 2nd chair during that trial and helped make decisions about who we should cross examine," Traci said. "It was an amazing experience."

After law school Traci received a fellowship to work with then-Governor Pete Wilson, in Sacramento. She worked for a year in the Department of Food and Agriculture and assisted with policy, but soon realized she preferred a return to Fresno and the D.A.'s office. Coincidentally, they happened to be hiring. "I love the justice system and the ability to help victims." During the case she assisted in law school, she spent much of her time seeking justice for the victims.

"There is a history of racial injustice – and the belief that justice is skewed toward a minority group with white people getting preference," she said. "We talk about it more now than ever, but it's always been there. In that case, our victims were prostitutes and drug addicts. Some may ask – justice for them? They are committing illegal acts. But it doesn't matter who or what they are. A crime by law enforcement was committed against them. It showed

me that we need to protect everyone. All genders, races, and even criminal actors, deserve the same protection."

Traci explained that she sees her job as holding people accountable, but also using her position to change the lives of law breakers for the better. "Some of them are worthy and deserving of discretion. Sometimes the answer is prison, but sometimes it's not," she adds. We all want to see our community thrive. By helping the "bad guys," Traci says she can try to bring them back into the community as successful individuals. For her, "that's really satisfying".

In her 26 years at the D.A.'s office, Traci has worked the usual rotation of departments. She began in misdemeanors, then moved to what were once called justice courts in outlying areas like Sanger and Coalinga. There she dealt with felons. She later moved to a trial team and after that, the specialty teams that included domestic violence, sexual assault, homicide, gangs, and financial fraud.

Once she joined the specialty team in domestic violence, Traci says her career path diverged. "I had a strong connection with juvenile prosecution. I felt that was

# Women's Equality Day Celebration

BY **LOGAN TENNERELLI**, DEAN OF STUDENTS

The League of Women Voters of Fresno held their annual Women's Equality Day celebration on August 26, 2024, at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Fresno. At the behest of Rep. Bella Abzug (D-NY), in 1971 and passed in 1973, the U.S. Congress designated August 26 as "Women's Equality Day." The date commemorates the 1920 certification of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution, granting women the right to vote. This was the culmination of a massive, peaceful civil rights movement by women that had its formal beginnings in 1848 at the world's first women's rights convention, in Seneca Falls, New York. The observance of Women's Equality Day also calls attention to women's continuing efforts toward full equality.

This year, the League honored Retired Judge Jane Cardoza with the Women's Equality Day Award. In 1996, Fresno voters elected Ms. Cardoza to the bench, making her the first Latina Judge on the Fresno County Superior Court. In 2020, Judge Cardoza was selected by the League of Women Voters of Fresno as one of the 100 Notable Women who made a difference in the Fresno Community. Currently, she is a board trustee of San Joaquin College of Law, the 2024 League of Mexican American Women Vice President of Membership, and on the Advisory Board of Fresno State University College of Arts and Humanities.



**Blanca Delgado Mendoza** (4L) was awarded the 2024 Ruth Bader Ginsburg Scholarship at the League of Women Voters' Women's Equality Day.

The Werner Lipton Award for Advocacy and Volunteerism was awarded to Gloria Hernandez. Gloria began volunteering for the United Farm Workers as a young student. She worked as a paralegal for the California Rural Legal Assistance focusing on violations of workers' rights and housing and access to benefits. Later, she served for 20 years as a Patients' Rights Advocate investigating complaints of abuse against her clients.

The League also celebrated Blanca Delgado Mendoza, San Joaquin College of Law 4L and winner of the 2024 Ruth Bader Ginsburg Scholarship supported by dona-

tions from League members and the Farber family. Blanca was born in Michoacan, Mexico. After immigrating to the United States, she attended Fresno State where she earned degrees in Criminology and in Chicano Studies and Spanish. Blanca is currently an intern for Central California Legal Services, Treasurer of Law Students for Community Advancement (LSCA) and a member of Delta Theta Phi, where she is on the Community Service Committee.

SJCL congratulates all of the honorees!

where I could make the most difference for kids in trouble." Rehabilitation, boot camp, and other programs within the juvenile facilities brought about clear and obvious changes in those kids, Traci said.

In the years that followed Traci worked with grant funded programs like "Project Sentry" in the juvenile division, among others. In 2015 she returned to the juvenile unit as Chief Deputy District Attorney, her career high thus far. "We developed an offender/victim reconciliation program where we brought them together to create a disposition everyone could accept," Traci said. "This was instrumental in putting to-

gether the juvenile behavioral health court for juveniles with mental health diagnoses.

Throughout her career Traci has devoted her efforts to too many programs, committees, and projects to list. Now six years into her current role as Assistant District Attorney under D.A. Lisa Smittcamp (Law '95), Traci works mostly with policy development and management. Her supervisory role covers the Chief Deputy District Attorney, the Juvenile Unit, Domestic Violence, Financial Fraud, and the Misdemeanor Unit. In addition, Tracy appears in Unity Court (previously human trafficking court), even though it's

no longer her assignment, because juvenile justice has remained a passion.

Ever the goal maker, like her 13-year-old self, Traci's ultimate plan now is to work until she reaches her 30/60. Thirty years on the job by the age of 60. She is only five years away from that one, but she hasn't ignored her college history professor's encouragement to teach. She began teaching Constitutional Law at Fresno City College last year and says she loves it. She hopes to eventually become a history teacher, perhaps at a university, with a focus on Armenian Studies, thus continuing her legacy of leadership and service.





# THE Supreme Court is OFF THE RAILS

## ARE WE PAST THE “Zone of Danger?”

BY LOGAN TENNERELLI, DEAN OF STUDENTS

I met my husband, Vince Tennerelli, when we were students at the University of Chicago Law School in 2006. This year, we teamed up on September 19 for SJCL’s 2024 Constitution Day Lecture, yielding an in-person audience of 50+ people and an online audience of 20+. (Offering my Fresno City College students extra credit for coming can’t hurt, right?)

We focused on a few of this year’s Supreme Court landmark decisions. No term in recent memory has featured so many major cases on topics as varied as presidential immunity, bump stocks, and voting rights. The overarching theme: the Court, like the county, is deeply divided. Out of 59 Supreme Court decisions this term, nearly half were 6-3, split among the justices on ideological lines with a supermajority of Roberts, Thomas, Alito, Gorsuch, Kavanaugh, and Barrett, and the dissent of Sotomayor, Kagan, and Jackson.

### Changes to the Administrative State

The Roberts Court will perhaps be remembered most for its power grabs. In two cases this term, it drastically curtailed the power of federal agencies, claiming greater power for the judiciary.

Because Congress is not equipped to micromanage the day-to-day administra-

tion of the legislation that it passes, it must rely on federal agencies—under the supervision of the president—to carry out laws and policies. Agencies like the Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, Energy, and Transportation regulate industries and disperse funds Congress has allocated for specific programs.

In addition to rulemaking, some agencies have the power to investigate and adjudicate allegations in-house through a system of proceedings using Administrative Law Judges (ALJs), rather than through Article III judges. In federal district court, parties in civil cases sometimes have a right under the Seventh Amendment to trial by jury. However, there is no jury right for statutory claims brought by the government in its sovereign capacity; for example, ALJs rather than juries adjudicate claims related to revenue collection, customs and immigration laws, and relations with Native American tribes.

In 2010, Congress passed Dodd Frank in response to the 2008 financial crisis. The Act aimed to improve financial market stability, protect consumers, and prevent excessive risk-taking. Congress authorized the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to use ALJs to conduct evidentiary hearings and impose fines on individuals who violate Dodd Frank. On June 27,

2024, the Supreme Court ruled 6-3 in *SEC v. Jarkesy* that such hearings violate the Seventh Amendment.

The scope of the decision remains unclear. For example, does it apply to all agencies that use ALJs, or just the SEC? Does it apply to federal statutes that create mandatory arbitration (rather than internal adjudication)? One thing is clear: the SEC does not have the resources to bring every case before a federal court, nor do district courts have time to hear every case. Thus, the practical effect of this decision, I opined, is certain to be more white collar crime.

The following day, the Court dealt another blow to administrative agencies in *Loper Bright Enterprises v. Raimondo*. Loper addressed the previously settled question of how much deference federal judges owe agencies when interpreting the statutes they administer. In 1984, in *Chevron USA v. Natural Resource Defense Council*, the Supreme Court articulated a two-part test. First, judges examine the statute in question to see if Congress’s intent is clear. If it is, then the agency is obliged to follow the letter of the law. But if the statutory language is ambiguous, the second step requires the reviewing court to determine whether the agency’s choice in

how to carry out the law is reasonable. If so, courts deferred to such interpretation.

*Chevron* is one of the most cited cases in American law. The pros? It helps agencies function. They can implement statutes knowing that the industries they regulate will have to follow their guidance. Moreover, experts in specialized fields are better suited than unelected judges to interpret complicated statutes. The downside of deference? “Agencies have a lot of power,” Vince said, “and the meaning of the same statute can change drastically depending on who is in the White House.”

In *Loper*, Justice Roberts, writing for the majority, held that *Chevron* was inconsistent with the Administrative Procedure Act of 1946, which instructs a court reviewing an agency action to “decide all relevant questions of law” and “interpret . . . statutory provisions.” Vince contended this may not be as “earth-shattering as some think it will be. For one thing, it only impacts rulemaking based on a statutory ambiguity or silence without an express delegation. Second, agency factfinding is still entitled to deference. And, Roberts emphasized that a case’s reliance on *Chevron* isn’t a sufficient basis for overturning it, in light of *stare decisis*.”

I disagreed: it has tremendous implications for almost every aspect of our lives, from climate change to workplace safety

to food and drug regulation. One problem with giving judges unrestrained interpretive authority, I think, is that the roughly 850 federal district court judges are an ideologically diverse bunch, to say the least. Thus, an agency’s guidance might be found to bind an entity in one jurisdiction but not bind the same entity in a different jurisdiction.

### Ballot Eligibility

In *Trump v. Anderson*, the Court held for the first time that states could not determine eligibility for federal office, including the presidency, under Section 3 of the Fourteenth Amendment, which prohibits insurrectionists from holding office. In 2010, in *Shelby County v. Holder*, the Court declared the preclearance requirements of the Voting Rights Act conflicted with the constitutional principles of federalism and state sovereignty. The ruling has made it easier for state officials to engage in voter suppression. So, Congress can’t enforce the 15th Amendment by imposing checks on states with a history of egregious crimes against democracy. Why? States have exclusive power to control elections. But, per *Trump v. Anderson*, states can’t enforce the 14th Amendment by kicking insurrectionists off the ballot. Why? Congress must do that. While the logic of the cases is inconsistent, the effect is the same: empowering Republican candidates.

### Criminalizing Homelessness

In *City of Grants Pass v. Johnson*, the Court (6-3) upheld a municipal ordinance imposing civil fines, bans from city parks, and even jailtime on people for sleeping outside in public, or in cars parked on public property. The town had no public areas designated for sleeping and no shelters available, meaning there was nowhere for the unhoused to go. In 2018, the Ninth Circuit declared such ordinances a violation of the Eighth Amendment cruel and unusual punishment clause. Unsurprisingly, the Supreme Court disagreed. To quote Justice Sotomayor’s dissenting opinion, this decision leaves the unhoused “with an impossible choice: Either stay awake or be arrested.”

In practical effect, this means local governments can use their criminal laws against the unhoused. In Fresno, the City Council passed an ordinance in August that “no person may sit, lie, sleep or camp on a public place at any time.” Violations carry a fine of up to \$1,000 or one year in jail. Another ordinance passed in September gave the City greater authority to remove homeless people from inside stores and from the sidewalks of shopping centers.

We concluded the lecture by highlighting the enormous implications that the upcoming election will have on the future of our constitutional rights.



Professor of Law **Vicente Tennerelli** and Dean of Students **Logan Tennerelli**





**Nicea Darling** (Law '12) and Vice President of Legal Services at Community Health Systems, shared the bios of the 2024 Hall of Fame Inductees with over a hundred friends, family, and colleagues looking on.

things water inspired him to become the Executive Director of The Committee to Save the Kings River. His testimony before Congress resulted in the protection of 92 miles of the Kings River under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Among the many groups and organizations he led, Donn formed the San Joaquin River Parkway and Conservation Trust, and the Sierra Foothill Conservancy. He later became a Deputy City Attorney for the City and County of San Francisco and was considered one of California's experts on water law. He served as the in-house attorney for the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission until his retirement in 2014. Donn's passion to save California rivers was matched by his interests as a writer, musician, traveler, and gardener. Donn Furman passed away in October of 2023.

Another posthumous inductee, Edward Hunt, served as a pilot in the U.S. Air Force. Upon his discharge, he attended college and worked full time as the Fresno County Assessor in the real property division. He remained an assessor throughout law school and joined the Fresno County D.A.'s office upon passing the bar. With crime rates soaring in Fresno during this time, Ed took a tough stance against gangs and drugs. Upon his election as Fresno County District Attorney, Ed and former Sheriff Steve Magarian, established

specialty prosecution teams like the Multi Agency Gang Enforcement Consortium (MAGEC), which still operates today. Ed's war on crime led to the Narcotics Task Force and the Three Strikes law. His down-home and folksy personality allowed Ed to serve as Fresno County's Chief Law Enforcement Officer for five terms and a total of 20 years, longer than any DA in Fresno history. Ed Hunt passed away in April of 2012.

Another inductee whose legal career began in law enforcement, James Arendt (Law '89), graduated from UCLA with a degree in political science. Upon returning to Fresno he enrolled in the Police Academy to become a Peace Officer. As a Fresno County Sheriff's Deputy, James

served in several areas, among them: patrol, detective, SWAT team, boating enforcement, and dive team. He continued in law enforcement throughout law school with the goal of providing legal representation for those who serve the public. Upon establishing his legal career as an attorney, James continued to serve as a reserve officer for many years. With his insider's experience in law enforcement James has successfully represented public entity employees like police officers, district attorneys, investigators, and judges, in addition to employees of cities and counties, school districts, and private business interests. In addition to his practice, James also serves as an instructor on civil liability in law enforcement at the State Center Regional Training Facility at



Inductee **Leland Sterling** with his daughter.



Fresno City College. He is a board member of Crimestoppers and the Federal Bar Association. He is an adjunct faculty member who teaches Standards and Training in Corrections to supervisors, and has taught Peace Officers Standards and Training to supervisors and Field Training Officers. James is a frequent speaker at seminars and conferences due to his expertise.

If there was an award for the most varied career path taken by an inductee, Leland Sterling would win it, hands down. From the start of his college career, Leland was a high achiever. He graduated cum laude from Biola College where he served as the Men's President, the graduating class speaker, and the captain of the baseball team. He then graduated magna cum laude from the California Baptist Seminary, where he served as student body president and the graduating class speaker. Next, he earned a master's in Sacred Theology from the Andover Newton School of Theology at Yale Divinity School, and he followed that up with graduate programs in psychology and counseling at both Claremont Graduate School, and Harvard. Leland served internships at four separate hospitals and obtained a MFC Counseling license. After serving as an ordained minister in several churches he provided counseling services at Lemoore Naval Air Station. That's when he saw, first-hand, a gap between the needs of people in crises, and the ability of the legal system to address them.

When SJCL opened its doors in 1969, Leland enrolled to help fill that gap by studying law and the legal process. Throughout law school he worked as a high school teacher by day, and attended law classes at night. At SJCL he was active in student affairs, wrote for the school newspaper, won the faculty scholarship award (three years in a row), served as student body president, and was the valedictorian of SJCL's very first graduating class.

Upon his admission to the bar, Leland began his career in law as a deputy district attorney for Fresno County. He became a skilled prosecutor and was assigned to several high-profile cases. He and two colleagues formed the first Sexual Assault Team and Victim Witness Program for the county. He became a speaker at mental health facilities, churches, and schools against domestic violence. He trained volunteers in counseling victims, and installed



Inductee **James Arendt** told the crowd he had never planned on being a lawyer. "I went to law school for two reasons: to pay my parents back for their support during my time at UCLA, and to increase my chances of attaining a good promotion in the Sheriff's Office!"





a red hotline phone at his home, so victims in trouble could call him 24-7.

Later, Leland worked as a litigator, at the firm of Brewer and Montgomery in Tustin, California. When his daughter Lisa graduated from Santa Clara School of Law, the two of them opened a practice in Newport Beach: Sterling & Sterling. They handled both civil and criminal matters, some family law, and some entertainment law. Known for rarely turning down a case, Leland took many pro bono. Drafting contracts for entertainers, like the singer Gwen Stefani, was part of his daily routine. He served as a mediator for the Orange County Bar Association and sat as Judge Pro Tem while in Southern California. In addition, he joined a legal team on a radio show called "Talk to Terrell," and Leland became known as "The Silver Fox of the Desert," as he answered legal questions live on the air.

Upon returning to the Valley, Leland was selected out of 100 applicants to become the PA announcer of the Visalia Oaks minor league baseball team. Supposedly in retirement, he was invited to take a position with the Tulare County District Attorney's Office, where he worked another eight years. Upon his actual retirement due to failing eyesight, Leland continued to volunteer with the Tulare County Public Library Reading Center teaching adults to read.



(L-R) Academic Dean **Justin Atkinson**, staff members **Diane Steel** and **Victoria Denny**, with **Jackson Grode**.



Judge **Don Penner** shared stories about his friend and colleague Inductee **Ed Hunt**.





**Shawn Joost**, Director of Pro-Bono and Strategic Partnerships at CCLS, presents a session on Advance Estate Planning to local seniors.

## Senior Citizen's Law Day Exposes Need



As a major segment of the U.S. population reaches senior status, issues impacting those 50 and up are taking center stage. One needs only to note the prevalence of TV commercials hawking life insurance, medications, and mobility gadgets to identify the target audience.

The desire to be well-informed and proactive on issues like elder fraud, wills and trusts, and tenant rights drew a crowd of over a hundred to SJCL in October for Senior Citizen's Law Day.

Sponsored by the SJCL Alumni Association with assistance from Central

California Legal Services (CCLS), this annual event has provided free seminars by attorneys and subject area experts on these important topics for many years. This year, however, was a first for such a large turnout. It was standing room only in room 213 and the representatives from CCLS, who provide individual appointments with attorneys during the event, were deluged with appointment requests.

We are pleased to provide such a useful and valued community service and encourage any alumni who practice in areas of interest to seniors to join us for next year's event.

Thank you to our speakers, the CCLS volunteer attorneys and assistants, and volunteers who joined us this year:

Heidi Falany (Law '17), CCLS

Judith Logan, CCLS

Shawn Joost, Presenter, CCLS

Brittany Adame, CCLS

Sherry Price, CCLS

Victoria Xiong, CCLS

Jimmy Wu, CCLS

Angle Campbell

Carlos Majin, CCLS

Lori Danielson, CCLS

Zoe Lark, CCLS

Craig Waters (Law '16) Presenter, Alumni Association

Detective Harris Vang, Presenter, Clovis Police Department

Deborah Boyett, Alumni Association

Marla Garcia, Alumni Association

Fabian Perez, Alumni Association

Victoria Ledezma Chavez, SJCL Student

Alyssa Coles, SJCL Student

# Media Coverage of High Profile Cases: When Entertainment Overshadows Justice

BY **MIIKO ANDERSON**, CERTIFIED CRIMINAL LAW SPECIALIST, SJCL ADJUNCT PROFESSOR

The media coverage surrounding Sean “P. Diddy” Combs’ criminal case stands as a stark reminder of journalism’s sacred responsibility to serve justice and truth. What we’re witnessing instead is a troubling erosion of these principles, where sensationalized reporting undermines both the accused’s right to a fair trial and society’s understanding of serious issues like human trafficking. The emergence of tasteless jokes across mainstream media and social platforms isn’t merely unprofessional—it represents a dangerous descent into the trivializing of grave allegations that demands our immediate attention and correction.

Beyond the superficial headlines lies a missed opportunity of profound importance. This case could serve as a crucial platform to address human trafficking’s devastating impact on Black communities and other vulnerable populations – an epidemic that demands serious discourse and action. Yet the coverage, across both traditional media outlets and social media platforms, has largely abandoned this responsibility, choosing instead to amplify sensationalism through self-proclaimed experts whose credentials often amount to little more than social media followings or tangential connections to the entertainment industry.

In this digital age, the emergence of social media has fundamentally transformed the landscape of news coverage, creating what can only be described as a double edged sword. While these platforms have admirably democratized voices and provided valuable perspectives from historically silenced communities, they’ve simultaneously unleashed a torrent of misinformation that threatens journalistic integrity. The instantaneous nature of social media, coupled with its insatiable demand for engagement, has created an environment where thoughtful analysis frequently succumbs to the allure of viral content.

This troubling dynamic is perhaps most evident in the proliferation of unvetted “experts” whose commentary has effectively erased the crucial distinction between ce-



**Miiko Anderson**, a retired Senior Prosecuting Attorney, is an International Subject Matter Expert and Global Trainer. She served as an adjunct professor at SJCL teaching Human Trafficking.

lebrity gossip and legitimate news coverage. These voices, lacking substantial legal or investigative expertise, flood our screens with superficial analysis that does more to confuse than clarify. The legitimacy inadvertently granted to these perspectives through their presence on mainstream platforms represents a critical failure in our duty to inform the public responsibly.

The consequences of this failure extend far beyond the current case. The casual transformation of serious allegations into meme worthy entertainment creates a chilling effect that reverberates through communities already hesitant to report crimes. This isn’t merely about media missteps—it’s about the very real possibility that future victims will choose silence over justice, having witnessed how their experiences might be reduced to social media fodder.

Particularly devastating is the impact on survivors of trafficking and individuals involved in commercial sex work. The implicit biases they face, now magnified

across traditional and social media channels, erect nearly insurmountable barriers to disclosure and justice. Their reluctance to come forward stems not from weakness but from the rational fear of a system that has repeatedly shown its willingness to prioritize entertainment value over human dignity.

The racial dynamics at play add another layer of complexity that demands careful navigation. As media outlets cover a Black male defendant in the criminal justice system, they must thread the needle between acknowledging serious allegations and avoiding the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes—all while protecting the fundamental right to a fair trial. This balancing act requires a level of journalistic sophistication that seems increasingly rare in our click driven media environment.

The path forward demands a fundamental recommitment to responsible coverage that examines the complex intersections of power, vulnerability, and justice. Media



## Congratulations July 2024 Barpassers

Stephanie Adams,  
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Badesha, Adam Balakian,  
Raquel Chavez, Marisol  
Cruz Rodriguez, Mason  
Dupras, Ryan Dupras,  
Madison Erickson, Nancy  
Flores Castaneda, Zachary  
Jones, Sumeet Kaur, Joseph  
Lascano, Nathan Maltes,  
Blanca Maravilla, Marcus  
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Oseguera, Ann-Marie Padilla,  
Carlos Pedroza, Michael  
Prentice, Hannah Ravizza,  
Samantha Schales, Lisa  
Talley, Jacqueline Vazquez,  
Christopher Whitehead, Kyle  
Zoldoske, and Gail Zurek



outlets and social platforms must elevate their standards, recognizing that their role in society extends far beyond generating engagement metrics. This includes fostering meaningful dialogue about systemic issues while maintaining unwavering respect for due process.

To achieve this, coverage across all platforms must prioritize several critical elements: protecting judicial integrity, amplifying qualified expert voices, educat-

ing the public about trafficking's systemic nature, avoiding sensationalism, providing essential context, and balancing the democratization of voices with responsible journalism standards. These aren't merely guidelines—they're moral imperatives for any media platform claiming to serve the public interest.

As we move forward, we must recognize that this case represents more than just

another celebrity scandal. It offers a critical opportunity to reexamine how we cover serious allegations while protecting both victims' dignity and defendants' rights. The role of media, both traditional and social, must evolve beyond mere reporting to foster meaningful dialogue about serious societal issues. Only through this transformation can we hope to create a media landscape that serves justice rather than undermines it.



The 2nd floor hallway was filled to capacity by law firms with job openings and students/new attorneys looking to fill them.

## Calling All Law Students

While it may be difficult for a group of attorneys to agree on anything, the 35 who attended SJCL's Resume Exchange and Career Fair in October concurred: filling vacant positions for attorneys, law clerks, and interns is nearly impossible these days.

Representatives from 22 local law firms and agencies brought out their fancy tablecloths and displayed employment brochures and freebie table gifts to attract the attention of would-be student interns and new attorneys. The chip bag clips, squishy stress balls and logo-tinned mints were no match, however, for the life-long dreams of becoming a prosecutor in the D. A.'s office or joining a firm to practice a specific area of law. The attorneys who attended, many of whom were SJCL alumni themselves, lamented over the struggle to fill long-standing openings.

Law students like Rebeca and Blanca Delgado, both 3L's, came to the event hoping to take advantage of the shortage

by seeking internships that could provide experience in their areas of interest. For Rebeca it's a legal specialty other than the Department of Corrections, where she currently works. Blanca works as a substitute teacher during law school but thinks her area of interest will be in criminal and civil law.

Ryan Heller (Law '22), a Deputy District Attorney at the Merced County D.A.'s Office, says his office is funded for 24 non-management attorney positions, but they currently only employ 16. With eight open positions, they have expanded their search for attorneys far and wide. "We have one attorney who came from France!" Ryan said. "She had passed the California bar and was living in San Francisco when

she saw our job announcement, and then came to Merced."

The D.A.'s office in Kings County has sweetened their pot by increasing the benefits they offer to attract more attorneys. They advertise a wide variety of legal focus areas, a great office support system, and a pleasant working environment as perks of their jobs.

A look at SJCL's digital job board (sjcl.edu) shows 46 job and internship notices dating back to August. The comments by the visiting attorneys and the number of vacant positions provide all the proof one needs to confirm the high demand for legal professionals. Predictions say the trend will worsen dramatically over the next ten years. It's a very good time to be an attorney.









Founder of the Chapman Law P.C. **Andrea Chapman** (Law '17) (center), and **Zena Sin-Zaragoza** (Law '20) (left) who is a partner, show off their new billboard. Andrea served in the U.S. Navy before law school as an Aviation Structural Mechanic. She is a passionate supporter of veterans and active-duty service members and currently serves on the board of the D.A.V. Charities of Central California.



**Whitney Hendricks** (Law '19) was selected as Employee of the Quarter in July at the Fresno City Attorney's office. "How many people can genuinely say they love the people they work with," Whitney said. "I am so lucky to have the best group of people around me!"

## Staff Member Baby Shower



Members of the NALC team and SJCL's admin staff threw a very special luncheon and baby shower for our own **Linda Barreto**, NALC Managing Director, in October. Linda and her husband are expecting a new addition to their family and we are all thrilled for them!



## Central California Legal Services' inaugural Together for Justice Dinner



Seven SJCL students and two Fresno City College students joined Dean of Students **Logan Tennerelli** at Central California Legal Services' inaugural Together for Justice Dinner in mid-October. Formerly titled Champions of Justice, the event was renamed to reflect the evolution of the scope of legal aid services, partnerships, and advocacy. From left: **Livreet Kaur Sandhu** (Fresno City College), **Emily Carr** (1L), **Rebeca Delgado Mendez** (4L), **Karen Lopez Pena** (4L), **Karan Nagra** (4L), **Blanca Delgado Mendez** (4L), **Deyci Nunez Garcia** (2L), and Dean of Students **Logan Tennerelli**.

## First Day of Fall Term Treats



Thanks to the generosity of the SJCL Alumni Association, law students were once again greeted by a table of goodies on the first day of the fall term. The alumni provide these quarterly treats as a way to lend their support to current students. If you'd like to get involved and be part of these activities, please visit the Alumni section of our website at [sjcl.edu](http://sjcl.edu).



# On the Move

**Jared Bertoni** (Law '20) is now an attorney at State Compensation Insurance Fund in Fresno.

**Erika Esqueda** (Law '22) is now an Associate at Gordon Rees Scully Mansukhani, LLP.

**Elizabeth Thomasian** (Law '14) is now a Partner at Gordon Rees Scully Mansukhani, Fresno office, practicing personal injury and property damage.

**James Proctor** (Law '23) is now a Litigation Law Clerk at Loya Casualty Insurance Company.

**Bradley Kalebjian** (Law '14) is now practicing transactional law for business and agricultural clients at Cutts Law in Fresno.

**Diana (Hyunjin) Malcolm** (Law '23) has been promoted to Deputy City Attorney for the City of Fresno.

**Karen Lopez** (4L) is now a Law Clerk at McCormick, Barstow, Sheppard, Wayte & Carruth.

**Kelly Lynn Campbell** (Law '23) is now an Associate Attorney at Baron Family Law in Sacramento.

**Clare Demera** (Law '21) is now an Associate Attorney at Gordon Rees Scully Mansukhani, LLP.

**Janelle Di Mino** (Law '22) is now an Associate Attorney at O'Hagan Meyer where she practices Labor & Employment Law.

**Tomas Ross** (Law '13) has been admitted into the American Board of Trial Advocates, San Joaquin Valley Chapter.

**Seth Mehrten** (Law '13) has joined Littler Mendelson P.C. as a shareholder in the Fresno office. His legal focus is employment-related litigation.

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Please keep us in your loop by completing the form at [www.sjcl.edu/onthemove](http://www.sjcl.edu/onthemove). Emails and phone calls are welcome too. Contact Diane Skouti at [dskouti@sjcl.edu](mailto:dskouti@sjcl.edu) or (559) 326-1463 to share your news!

## In Memoriam

**Clinton Arnold Cummins** (Law '90) passed away suddenly August 28, 2024, at the age of 77 at his home in Sequim, Washington. Clint graduated from Fresno State with a degree in Fine Arts/Industrial Technology and Arts and earned a teaching credential as well. Prior to law school he worked as a teacher, social worker, and Social Security Administration claims supervisor. After graduating from SJCL and passing the bar he embarked on a career in law as a defense attorney for the State Compensation Fund of California. He remained working there until his retirement in 2011.

**Harry G. Brown** (Law '87) passed away October 2, 2024, at the age of 97, in Gilroy, California. Prior to his career in law, Harry was the owner of tire shops. When illness finally prevented him from practicing law in the courtroom, he returned to managing the tire shops. Harry had happy memories of his time in law school and enjoyed noting his fondness for classmate Jim Witherow and Dean Jan Pearson.

**Lloyd George Carter** (Law '94) passed away on August 10, 2024, after suffering from several health issues. Born in Fresno, Lloyd became a record-setting shotput star at Roosevelt High School in 1966. He graduated from Fresno State and worked for 21 years for United Press International (UPI) at the Fresno Bee. He was known as a crusading journalist and, due to his research and reporting, Lloyd became an expert on water issues in the Central Valley. Upon graduating from law school, Lloyd built a new career as a Deputy Attorney General for the State of California. He retired from public service in 2011. In addition to his careers, Lloyd was an accomplished musician and enjoyed decades of singing and making music with friends.

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We strive to honor and recognize those SJCL alumni who have departed. If you know of anyone who should be acknowledged, please contact us at: [dskouti@sjcl.edu](mailto:dskouti@sjcl.edu)



# Thank you FOR YOUR SUPPORT

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If we have made an error, please contact Victoria Denny at 559/323-2100 or vdenny@sjcl.edu.



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