

Family and service

By Mike Arias



If you happen to see me any time soon, you'll probably see me with a big smile on my face. That's because I've been so fortunate to experience two huge life-changing events recently. The first happened in October when I was married to my long-time partner and incredible supporter, Sarah Diegel. It was an amazing night filled to the brim with two things that are important to me – my family and friends – along with good food, plenty of libations, music, dancing – and lots of fun.

The second event is also life-changing and is something that is also very special to me – being installed as the 57th president of this incredible association, Consumer Attorneys of California. It is truly an honor and a privilege to lead this organization that's meant so much to me, to thousands of trial attorneys and to tens of thousands of ordinary people who have been harmed by negligence, harassment and discrimination, unsafe products, unsafe medicine and unfair business practices. I am in awe of the accomplishments of the men and women who have served before me. I will do my best to maintain – and hopefully exceed – the levels of leadership and success they achieved.

I must tell you that these two events are both momentous and humbling to me, and both say everything about me, my values and my moral foundation. If you know me at all, you know these two events are the best examples of my core values of FAMILY and SERVICE, and those two words tell you everything that's important to me.

Some 35 years ago, I was considering following in my stepfather's footsteps and starting a career in the military. Becoming a lawyer wasn't even a thought in my mind until a very considerate and helpful lawyer-turned-economics professor and academic advisor suggested I give law school a shot. I must admit I had no idea what I was doing, I had never met a lawyer

and I wasn't sure what I would or could do with a law degree.

I never expected that one day I would be called on to serve my brother and sister trial attorneys and lead this amazing and important organization. I am truly humbled by this opportunity.

CAOC is remarkable because of the plaintiff trial attorneys who join as members and serve as volunteer leaders, but also because of the highly professional, dedicated and long-serving professional staff who work so hard to achieve CAOC's mission of seeking accountability from those who do wrong. No trial lawyer association in the country has a better and more effective professional staff. I have had the pleasure for many years of working closely with Nancy Drabble, Nancy Peverini, Laurie Klimchuck, Lea-Ann Tratten, Eric Bailey, Lori Sarracino, Darlene Golladay, Samantha Helton-Farmer, and the rest of the CAOC team. No staff performs better with limited resources than CAOC, nor is any better at successfully fighting against the incredibly well-funded corporate lobbyists that they battle in Sacramento every day.

For the past year I have served as President of Consumer Attorneys Association of Los Angeles, and I spent literally hundreds of hours talking with *and* listening to CAALA members, both young attorneys and seasoned veterans. I can't tell you how much I learned from those conversations and I believe that the lessons I learned can be shared with every one of California's trial lawyers and trial lawyer associations.

I began to do that three years ago when I organized the Trial Lawyers Association Congress that brings together the current and future leaders and senior staff of every California TLA. It was my goal and hope that the TLA leaders learn important lessons from each other and that the sharing of information and advice will be a goal of the entire TLA community. I promise you

that we will continue to share and work together. We are truly all in this together, and whether you are a brand-new trial lawyer or a 20-year veteran, in a small town or a big city, in Northern California or the South, we all face the same challenges and obstacles and we can succeed if we work together.

CAOC is an extremely successful organization, with record membership and a list – that's too long to print – of successful and incredibly important legislative victories. But even though we have a Democratic Statehouse and a Democratic-controlled Assembly and state Senate, we cannot rest on our laurels, we must keep fighting. I promise you that I will work as hard as I can to lead that fight.

I believe in organization, planning and strategy. I have given a lot of thought to what we need to do to continue to stay successful. I believe there are four cornerstones to that continued success. We need to ADVOCATE, EDUCATE, COMMUNICATE and BUILD RELATIONSHIPS, not only with each other and the thousands of CAOC attorney-members and leaders, but also with our elected officials without whom we cannot successfully win those fights for our clients in the halls of the State Capitol.

In future months you will hear a lot from me about how we can *Advocate* (for our clients), *Educate* (our younger attorneys and legislators), *Communicate* (with each other, the media, the public and elected officials) and most importantly *Build Relationships* (with each other and the legislators) that are critical to the success of CAOC and the work we do on behalf of our clients.

Thank you for giving me this incredible opportunity. I am truly humbled, but I am also extremely excited to continue the work we must do. I hope to hear your stories, thoughts and suggestions – and I will be happy to share mine. ■