

**PRESIDENT'S COLUMN
FEBRUARY 2007**

WE ARE PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS WHICH MAKE US STRONGER

**By
Gayle M. Blatt**

Gayle M. Blatt is CASD's President for 2007. She is a partner in the firm of Casey, Gerry, Schenk, Francavilla, Blatt & Penfield where she concentrates her practice on complex product liability, personal injury, wrongful death, and pharmaceutical litigation. Ms. Blatt received her B.A. from Hofstra University in 1982 and her Juris Doctor, magna cum laude, from California Western School of Law in 1985. Ms. Blatt may be reached by e-mail at: gmb@cglaw.com.

CASD is a strong organization with a tremendously firm infrastructure. Now in its 47th year, we are strong because of the commitment and contributions of our employees, our Board and our members. WE can advance our mission because we work at it every day. For the last nine years, Chris and S.J. have supported us throughout many triumphs and many challenges. S.J. has moved on, however we are now so pleased to welcome Bonnie Benitez as our new Executive Director. While S.J. cannot be replaced, we are confident that Bonnie will bring experience, personality, and dedication to the job with a new enthusiasm that will serve our organization well. Bonnie, Chris, and Julie will be a great team.

Bonnie's experience with non-profit organizations began over a decade ago when she founded an organization in Arizona based out of the Valley of the Sun Community Center. She oversaw the entire operation for several years and at one point, was supervising 150 volunteers. Lest you think this was no big deal, at the same time she was attending college full time! Following college, Bonnie attended USD law school and became a lawyer. Most recently, Bonnie served as General Counsel to the California Association of Marriage and Family Therapists (CAMFT). There she gained a great deal more non-profit experience. We think she will be of great assistance to CASD as we go forward into the future. In particular, having come from CAMFT, an organization of more than 25,000, she is looking forward to meeting and forming relationships with our members. Bonnie is dynamic and personable and brings with her a great number of exciting ideas to strengthen our membership and our member benefits and I am confident that our relationship with Bonnie is one that will make CASD stronger.

Another relationship which makes CASD stronger is our relationship with Consumer Attorneys of California. As you probably know, it is only through the hard work of CAOC that we are now enjoying our two-year statute of limitations as well as the 75-day notice period for the Summary Judgment motions, which are only a few of CAOC's many accomplishments. As always, CAOC continues to work on our behalf and that of the clients we serve throughout the state of California. The current President, Ray Boucher, has committed to create even greater teamwork between our organizations this year.

True to its commitment to reach out to San Diego lawyers, CAOC held its Annual Convention at La

Costa in November. The speaker panels included some of our best, including Steve Boudreau, Richard Huver, Harvey Levine, Dave Casey, Robert Francavilla, John Rice, Jude Basile, Cynthia Chihak, Judge Steven Denton and the list goes on and on. The convention was inspiring and we all ought to appreciate CAOC's efforts to get San Diego more involved in its fine work. If you are not a member, you should be. CAOC is our lifeline in Sacramento. We have no voice without it, so when CAOC calls, we all need to respond. If you are not a member, please seriously consider joining and supporting CAOC's efforts.

Another vital relationship we should embrace is with the American Association for Justice (AAJ), formerly know as ATLA. AAJ is always hard at work, on behalf of all plaintiff attorneys and their clients, communicating positive messages to the public about the civil justice system and the positive results trial attorneys have achieved resulting in greater safety for consumers. AAJ is getting the message out that what we do is good for society and that plaintiff lawyers are the promoters and preservers of justice for those who cannot obtain it for themselves. AAJ is devoting significant resources to educating the public that trial lawyers are part of the solution, not the problem.

AAJ's commitment to CASD is clear. Not only did it allow our web site and media connect committees access to all of its research, polling information and the results thereof, but AAJ also provided us with a live presentation of the messaging information it has spent years gathering. Last year, AAJ sent one of its communications directors to San Diego to meet with CASD's Media Connect Panel so that we too may get our message out to the community. Improving the image of lawyers is important to all of us and AAJ is helping us make it happen. Communications is only one of the areas in which AAJ promotes the ideals for which we stand. If you are not a member, please ask yourself why not. We are stronger because of our relationship with AAJ. The more common members we share, the greater our strength.

On a final note, this year I am committed to reaching out to create stronger relationships with the other local legal associations. I intend to meet with as many leaders and members as possible to determine how CASD can serve our mutual interests better. It is my goal to create lasting, mutually beneficial partnerships. We share more in common with many lawyers in town than we have differences. The addition of new and diverse members can only strengthen CASD. **If you are interested in working with me on this mission, please give me a call.** I welcome your participation and look forward to your assistance in creating an even stronger CASD in the coming year.