



PHOTOGRAPH BY GRAHAM BLAIR

The San Diego County Bar Association's new president, Andy Albert, comes to us by way of New York City and Teaneck, New Jersey, but he proudly notes that his ethnic roots are Russian Jewish on both sides of his family. His grandfather immigrated to the United States from Russia the day that President McKinley was assassinated, and his mother, Marcia, arrived from Bolshevik, Russia, when she was 2 years old.

Andy's father, Dan, served the United States during World War II in the Signal Corps and later established a successful career as both a lawyer and an insurance broker. Most important, he provided Andy with a role model of trustworthiness and caution. During World War II, Andy's mom wrote equipment manuals for the U.S. war effort while his dad served abroad. After Andy's older sister, Judi, was born, his mother became a stay-at-home mom until Andy went to school, after which she embarked on a long career as an English teacher

MAKING THE INTRODUCTIONS: ANDY ALBERT

BY JAMES W. TALLEY

and school librarian. Andy credits his mom for instilling in him the drive and ambition that has made him successful. Andy also notes that while his sister Judi inherited the artistic genes in the family, he inherited the practical genes.

After high school, Andy attended George Washington University, majoring in political science. In the early 1970s, George Washington's campus was a hotbed of activist rock groups and politicians, including Joe Cocker, Leon Russell, William Kunstler, Gene McCarthy, Tom Hayden and Michael Tiger (attorney for the Chicago Seven). Andy was particularly impressed by Michael Tiger, who influenced his decision to pursue a career in the law.

WITH ONLY \$1,000 IN HIS POCKET, ONE SUITCASE FULL OF CLOTHING AND NO CAR, HE ENROLLED IN L.A.'S SOUTHWESTERN LAW SCHOOL'S NIGHT PROGRAM, COINCIDENTALLY ON THE SAME DAY THAT PRESIDENT NIXON RESIGNED.

After graduating from George Washington University, Andy worked as a waiter at the Cellar Door restaurant in Washington, D.C., where high-profile performers, including Bonnie Raitt, Boz Scaggs and Richie Havens, performed. In the second year of his post-college "vacation," he relocated to Santa Barbara for 12 months and then decided it was time to focus on becoming a lawyer. With only \$1,000 in his pocket, one suitcase full of clothing and no car, he enrolled in L.A.'s Southwestern Law School's night program, coincidentally on the same day that President Nixon resigned.

continued on page 32

Making the Introductions *continued from page 31*

While attending law school, Andy learned that success is based not solely on who or what you know but also on how hard you are willing to work. In his first year, he won the Book Award for Contracts and finished third overall in his class. In his third year, he landed a clerking job with L.A.'s nationally known personal injury defense attorney John Costanzo who had a tremendous influence on his career. Costanzo taught him, among other things, that success as a lawyer required a good reputation and treating people fairly.

Ultimately, he realized that the defense side of personal in-

jury law was not for him and joined the Plaintiff's Law Firm of Thon and Matz, which later became Matz, Brody and Albert. During these years, he met and married his wife, Vickie, in 1985, who brought with her two young children, Michael and Tia, whom Andy raised as his own. He and Vickie have since had a son together, Max, who is currently a student at the L.A. Film School. As Andy puts it, his "marriage to Vickie is the best thing that ever happened in [his] life." He also credits her with giving him the inspiration to run for election to the Bar board and the presidency.

continued on page 34

BLUEPRINT FOR THE FUTURE

San Diego Lawyer: You have had the unique opportunity to be the first San Diego County Bar president elected a full year before taking office. How has that affected your approach to the presidency?

Albert: It has been very beneficial. I have had a full year to think about, plan and set goals, and map out the means of accomplishing the goals I have set for 2006.

SDL: What goals have you set for next year?

Albert: My primary goal is to continue to raise the stature of the San Diego County Bar Association, both in the local community and the legal profession. Specifically, I want the San Diego County Bar Association to be seen as the centerpiece of our county's legal system.

SDL: How do you intend to tackle the challenge of achieving your goals?

Albert: First, we will continue to work closely with the local judiciary and our local legislators to restore adequate funding for the San Diego County courts' operations. We are also considering hiring a lobbyist to raise our profile in Sacramento.

SDL: I understand that you and other Bar and bench leaders are involved in efforts to do precisely that.

Albert: Yes. I recently joined former County Bar President Tom Warwick, South Bay judge Yvonne Campos and the Bar's executive director Sheree Swetin in attending and participating in the State Bench/Bar coalition in Sacramento.

SDL: What can our members expect regarding plans for a new Bar Center?

Albert: We will begin the process of building the new Bar Center on the Bar's parking lot property at the corner of Union and B streets, which will become the beacon of the county's legal community.

SDL: What is the current status of that project?

Albert: Unfortunately, our original plan to coordinate that development with the local judiciary is not possible presently due to the state court funding crisis. We can't wait any longer to develop our own property, so we are going to aggressively seek out development proposals and move the project forward without delay.

SDL: Finally, would you give us an outline of your approach to leading the County Bar in 2006?

Albert: I want to see our profession defined by the best of who we are rather than the worst. I will work to get as many of our members out in the community, and in front of community groups, to give the public a more accurate understanding of who we are. I want to get the message out about the many good things that lawyers accomplish in the community.

I also believe that it is important to be proactive. It's a fact that our detractors have been all too successful in unfairly making the legal profession the scapegoat for society's ills. We need to employ the same resources, including a lobbyist, that they have used to attack us and detract from the positive and important work of both lawyers and the judiciary.

I personally look forward to getting out among lawyers and non-lawyers alike to share the important message that our uniquely American judicial system must be preserved.

—James W. Talley

Making the Introductions *continued from page 32*

His association with Thon and Matz culminated in the settlement of a huge Orange County toxic dump case for a large group of homeowners. With the financial fruits of this case, Andy relocated his Plaintiff's law practice to Carlsbad in 1987, where, after a brief solo practice, he established a partnership with Michael Berlin, which lasted from 1988 to 1994. Thereafter, he joined the law firm of Higgs, Fletcher and Mack, where, despite the firm's specialization in defense work, Andy focused on plaintiff's work. While with Higgs, Fletcher and Mack, Andy was fortunate to work with his friend Craig Higgs who describes Andy as "an extremely skillful plaintiff's lawyer who is thoroughly committed to his clients." Craig also notes that "Andy is terrific with juries because he has an uncanny ability to put people at ease with his sincerity and sense of humor." In August of 1987, Andy joined his current law firm with Steve Boudreau and Joel Wohfeil, whom he describes as "terrific lawyers who are also great friends."

One of the opposing counsels in the Orange County toxic dump case was Jeff Miller of the California Attorney General's Office, who now sits on the San Diego federal bench. Judge Miller says he got to know Andy very well during that litiga-

tion and describes him as "a brilliant lawyer and a consummate gentleman." Judge Miller also applauds Andy for his longstanding commitment to legal education, especially for young and inexperienced lawyers, through the Inns of Court and Bridging the Gap programs. In addition, Andy has served on the San Diego Trial Lawyers Association board of directors and the SDCBA Bench-Bar Media committee.

Andy believes that a lawyer's greatest gift is serving the legal community and has clearly practiced what he preaches through his extensive service to both the North County and San Diego County Bar associations. As Judge Miller puts it, "Andy is the total package as a lawyer and will be a wonderful ambassador for our profession as president of the San Diego County Bar Association. The SDCBA is very fortunate to have Andy Albert lead it into the year 2006." ■

James W. Talley, an attorney with Escondido-based Galyean, Talley & Wood, serves on the County Bar board of directors.

Editor's Note: *Andy Albert's mother, Marcia Albert, passed away on September 7 of this year.*