



AMERICAN BOARD OF TRIAL ADVOCATES  
ORANGE COUNTY CHAPTER



# 2026 INSTALLATION OF OFFICERS & AWARDS PROGRAM

SATURDAY  
JANUARY 31, 2026

VEA NEWPORT BEACH



**Michael P. Maguire, Esq.**

Proudly congratulates our incoming Executive Committee and tonight's honorees

**Deborah Tropp-Thompson**

President

**Elizabeth L. Kolar**

Secretary

**Jennifer L. Russell**

President-Elect

**Jeffrey T. Roberts**

Membership-Chair

**Kimberly Valentine-Gibson**

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**Jeff I. Braun**

Trial Lawyer of the Year

**Daniel M. Hodes**

Joseph D. McNeil  
Civility Award

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ORANGE COUNTY CHAPTER  
AMERICAN BOARD OF TRIAL ADVOCATES

# ANNUAL INSTALLATION DINNER GALA

SATURDAY, JANUARY 31, 2026

## PROGRAM

Welcome by outgoing President - Juan C. Delgado  
Introduction of incoming President - Deborah Tropp-Thompson  
Welcome by incoming President - Deborah Tropp-Thompson  
Acknowledgement of Special Guests - Deborah Tropp-Thompson  
Installation of President and Executive Committee - Honorable Ray Ikola  
Update on ABOTA National - William D. Shapiro, National President  
Update on ABOTA Foundation - Pamela S. Traut, Foundation Vice President  
Presentation of Joseph D. McNeil Civility Award to Daniel M. Hodes - Introduction by Keith P. More  
Presentation of Trial Lawyer of the Year Award to Jeff I. Braun - Introduction by Robert B. Gibson  
Acknowledgement of Past President – Juan C. Delgado  
Closing Comments by Deborah Tropp-Thompson

## SALAD

Heirloom Tomato & Burrata – Arugula, Frisee, Balsamic Glaze, Lemon Olive Oil, Sea Salt \*Veg \*GF.

## ENTREE' DUO

Filet Mignon and Chilean Seabass – Purple Sweet Potato Mash, Cilantro Chimichurri \*GF  
Vegetarian Entrée Selection: Butternut Squash Ravioli – Goat Cheese, Sage Brown Butter, Baby Squash \*Veg

## DESSERT

Chocolate Truffle Mousse Cake – Blackberry Coulis, Goose Berries, Pistachio Brittle \*Veg  
or  
Mango and Passion Fruit Mousse – Coconut Cake, Passion Fruit Coulis, Seasonal Berry Compote \*Veg

*Please Enjoy Dancing and Music By Rogue Radio*

# THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

*By Deborah Tropp-Thompson, Esq.*

I am honored to be installed as the 2026 Orange County ABOTA Chapter President this evening. It is undoubtedly a privilege to serve our organization, but for me it is also a call to service. A call I not only take very seriously, but that I approach with integrity, innovation and a deep belief in the tenets of what ABOTA stands for: Preservation of the 7th Amendment; Right to Trial by Jury, the Rule of Law and the Independence of our Judiciary.



In addition to those tenets, I have enormous passion and dedication for the ABOTA Foundation. The Foundation programs that promote Civics Education, Professional Education and Public Awareness are the very essence of how ABOTA reaches hundreds, and even thousands of people each year.

Having served as the 2025 National ABOTA Foundation President I witnessed first-hand the impact that each of our 94 Chapters across the Country has on their communities. Their impact reaches students of all ages, their educators, the members of their local Judiciary, their prospective jurors, those less fortunate in their communities and all local attorneys in their area. What a gift that truly is.

As incredible and rewarding as serving as National Foundation President was, it is comforting and exciting to now be able to focus my efforts closer to home, with our local OC Chapter.

As Chapter President, my goal is to have 2026 be a year full of Civics Education programming, Professional Education

opportunities, Jury Appreciation events, charitable work and camaraderie among our long-standing members and our newest and brightest members.

I am extremely fortunate to be able to serve this year alongside my fellow Board Members, Jennifer Russell, Kim Valentine, Elizabeth Kolar, Jeff Roberts, and Jennifer Leeper. I could not ask for a better group of energetic, hardworking people that care deeply about ABOTA and our OC Chapter.

On a night like tonight, my mind is full of thoughts of some of the people that have touched my life. Some that are still with us, and some that have passed on. People whose influence helped shape and guide me, and in some way helped lay the path to this moment. My father, Henry Hirsch who I lost in 2016, my Husband Dave, Joe McNeil, my mentor and long-time ABOTA member who passed away in 2006, and Chapter leaders Mike McGuire, Doug DeGrave and Linda Marks. I have learned that the best way to show appreciation to those in my life that had a meaningful impact, is to internalize their lessons and translate that inspiration into actions and habits. Evolving into a better version of myself by adopting their wisdom and virtues.

Thank you so much for joining us this evening and celebrating ABOTA and the Orange County Chapter. I hope you enjoy this evening, and we look forward to seeing many of you at our events this year! □

With Gratitude. Deb Tropp-Thompson

# THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

*The Incoming 2026 OC Chapter ABOTA Executive Committee*

**PRESIDENT**

Deborah Tropp-Thompson

**PRESIDENT-ELECT**

Jennifer L. Russell

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Kimberly Valentine-Gibson

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Elizabeth L. Kolar

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**MEMBER AT LARGE**

Jennifer L. Leeper

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Juan C. Delgado

**2024 PRESIDENT**

Pamela S. Traut

**NATIONAL BOARD REPRESENTATIVES**

Garrett R. Chambers

Daniel Hodes

Allison L. Grandy

Greg Amundson

# CODE OF PROFESSIONALISM

*As a member of the American Board of Trial Advocates, I shall:*

Always remember that the practice of law is first and foremost a profession.



Encourage respect for the law, the courts, and the right to trial by jury.



Always remember that my word is my bond and honor my responsibilities to serve as an officer of the court and protector of individual rights.



Contribute time and resources to public service, public education, charitable and pro bono activities in my community.



Work with the other members of the bar, including judges, opposing counsel, and those whose practices are different from mine, to make our system of justice more accessible and responsive.



Resolve matters and disputes expeditiously, without unnecessary expense, and through negotiation whenever possible.



Keep my clients well-informed and involved in making decisions affecting them.



Achieve and maintain proficiency in my practice and continue to expand my knowledge of the law.



Be respectful in my conduct toward my adversaries.



Honor the spirit and intent, as well as the requirements of applicable rules or codes of professional conduct, and shall encourage others to do so.



American Board  
of Trial Advocates

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**CONGRATULATIONS  
TO DEBORAH TROPP  
ON HER  
INSTALLATION AS  
2026 ORANGE  
COUNTY ABOTA  
PRESIDENT**

**AS 2025 NATIONAL FOUNDATION PRESIDENT, DEB RAISED OVER 1.8 MILLION DOLLARS FOR THE ABOTA FOUNDATION, THE HIGHEST ANNUAL AMOUNT IN THE HISTORY OF THE FOUNDATION.**

**AN INCREDIBLE ACHIEVEMENT THAT WILL ALLOW THE ABOTA FOUNDATION TO CONTINUE WORKING ON ITS EXCEPTIONAL PROGRAMMING RELATING TO CIVICS EDUCATION IN OUR CLASSROOMS, PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION AND CIVILITY MATTERS PROGRAMS FOR LAWYERS, AND PUBLIC AWARENESS REGARDING JURY DUTY.**

**CONGRATULATIONS DEB ON A JOB WELL DONE!**



# PAST PRESIDENTS

THE ORANGE COUNTY CHAPTER RECOGNIZES  
THE PAST PRESIDENTS FOR THEIR CONTRIBUTION IN FOSTERING  
THE IMPROVEMENT IN THE ETHICAL AND TECHNICAL STANDARDS  
OF PRACTICE IN THE FIELD OF ADVOCACY  
AND PRESERVING THE SEVENTH AMENDMENT  
OF THE CONSTITUTION

Robert C. Todd 1968	Joseph S. D'Antony 1989	Eric V. Traut 2010
John K. Trotter 1969	Richard P. Booth, Jr. 1990	Edward R. Leonard 2011
Roger Liljestrom 1970	Patrick C. Quinlivan 1991	Hon. Thierry P. Colaw 2012
Ronald A. Ruston 1971	Benjamin F. Card 1992	Mark P. Robinson, Jr. 2013
Richard E. Madory 1972	William J. Howard 1993	Christopher P. Wesierski 2014
Robert J. Smith 1973	Theodore R. Howard 1994	Thomas S. Dillard 2015
Homer J. McCormick, Jr. 1974	Ned Reilly 1995	Robert B. Gibson 2016
W. Patrick McCray 1975	Scott A. Smith 1996	Hon. Linda S. Marks 2017
James R. Hammerton 1976	Margaret Holm 1997	Hon. Michael J. Strickroth 2018
Gregory Munoz 1977	Mark V. Franzen 1998	Hon. Peter J. Polos 2019
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Jack A. Rose 1980	Carroll A. Salmacia 2001	William C. Haggerty 2022
John R. DiCaro 1981	Christopher J. Day 2002	Yoshiaki C. Kubota 2023
Martin A. Yester 1982	Michael P. Maguire 2003	Pamela S. Traut 2024
Anthony D. Dragonette 1983	Alton J. Smith 2004	Juan C. Delgado 2025
Gerald Sokoloff 1984	Gary L. Chambers 2005	
Jay Cordell Horton 1985	Mark P. Poliquin 2006	
Joseph D. McNeil 1986	Garrett S. Gregor 2007	
Thomas B. Cummings 1987	Douglas M. DeGrave 2008	
Marjorie W. Day 1988	Larry N. Willis 2009	

## IN MEMORIAM

Orange County Chapter

**Peter J. Gates**

**Scott A. Martin**

**Ronald B. Schwartz**

**Frederick W. Werve**





**IS PLEASED TO CELEBRATE  
THE INCOMING ORANGE COUNTY  
ABOTA OFFICERS, AWARD WINNERS  
AND GREAT FRIENDS:**

**DEBORA TROPP-THOMPSON**  
PRESIDENT

**JENNIFER L. RUSSELL**  
PRESIDENT ELECT

**KIMBERLY VALENTINE-GIBSON**  
TREASURER

**ELIZABETH I KOLAR**  
SECRETARY

**JEFFREY T. ROBERTS**  
MEMBERSHIP CHAIR

**JENNIFER S. LEEPER**  
MEMBER—AT-LARGE

**JEFF I. BRAUN**  
TRIAL LAWYER OF THE YEAR

**DANIEL M. HODES**  
JOSEPH D. MCNEIL CIVILITY AWARD



# PAST PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

*By Juan C. Delgado, Esq.*

As it has been every year, 2025 was a busy year for our Chapter and I take great pride in having led our Chapter in another great year for us.

On the National ABOTA level, several of our members, no one more so than Deborah Tropp-Thompson, the 2025 ABOTA Foundation President and our 2026 Chapter President, were involved in the day-to-day activities of ABOTA and the ABOTA Foundation.

We had a great turn-out at the CAL-ABOTA Hawaii Conference. Our own Chapter's Keith More was honored as the 2025 CAL-ABOTA Community Service Award Recipient and Daniel Hodes was recognized as our Chapter's Joseph D. McNeil Civility Award Recipient.

On the membership level, we held our Annual Installation Dinner Gala, Spring Dinner, Golf Tournament, Judge's Night and Holiday Dinner. We had great turnouts and never have I been so proud as an attorney as when I saw sworn in as president of our Chapter.

On the legal front, our members presented "Civics Matter" seminars to high school students, law school students and attorneys. We also get involved when the Orange County Superior Court reaches out to us to help defend their judges who get attacked for following the "Rule of Law."

On the civics front, in May we participated in the Orange County Superior Court's Jury Appreciation Week. For four days that week, several of our members were at Superior Court branches to speak to incoming jurors about the significance of jury service, the 7th Amendment and ABOTA.

In September, we were again involved in Teacher's Law School with the Orange County Dept. of Education and the Orange County Superior Court. Our chapter was active in not only assisting in the preparation for the event but in having speakers



explain to the educators ABOTA's mission and the importance of the 7th amendment's right to jury trial.

Community engagement is of utmost importance to our Chapter. During the 2024-2025 school year our members participated in over 15 Mendez Tribute Monument Park presentations to elementary, middle school and high school students.

In March, two of our members gave up four weeks of their time to prepare a classroom at Kaiser Elementary School in Costa Mesa for and to do a mock trial.

In June, two of our members presented at the Constitutional Rights Foundation – Mock Trial Summer Camp on the CA Evidence Code and the questioning of witnesses to prepare them for their mock trial competitions.

In November, one of our members spoke at the Orange County Superior Court's Young Men's and Women's Civic Leadership Conference to over 180 high school students on the importance of civic involvement along with the Court's judges and local politicians.

I am most proud of our Chapter's generosity. We agreed to serve at as a Chapter Sponsor for the 2026 National ABOTA Meeting & Leadership Conference. We donated \$8,000 as part of our Law School Scholarship Program. We donated almost \$25,000 to the various charitable organizations we work with to help them meet expenses incurred in their projects. At our Holiday Dinner, our members donated over \$8,000 in gift cards for Orange County Project Youth to help them in their mission in serving Orange County families. Since 2023, our members have donated over \$22,000 to them. Bravo to our members.

2026 will be an even greater year for our incoming president Deborah Tropp-Thompson. I wish her and our incoming Board of Director the best and I just know they will lead our Chapter to even better and greater things in 2026. □



# Judicate West is Proud to Support American Board of Trial Advocates Orange County Chapter

Congratulations to this year's Honorees

**Jeff I. Braun, Esq.**

TRIAL LAWYER OF THE YEAR

**Daniel Hodes, Esq.**

JOSEPH D. MCNEIL CIVILITY AWARD

and all the Incoming Officers

**Deborah Tropp-Thompson, Esq.**

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**Jennifer L. Russell, Esq.**

PRESIDENT-ELECT

**Kimberly Valentine-Gibson, Esq.**

TREASURER

**Elizabeth L. Kolar, Esq.**

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**Jennifer S. Leeper, Esq.**

MEMBER-AT-LARGE



*Results Beyond Dispute<sup>SM</sup>*

# ABOTA FOUNDATION

## *Looking Ahead to a Promising 2026 for the ABOTA Foundation*

*By Lynn Leonard, Esq.  
2026 President, ABOTA Foundation*



The year 2026 promises to be an exciting and impactful year for the ABOTA Foundation as we build upon the remarkable success and visionary leadership of our outgoing President, Deb Tropp. During her tenure, we launched the Endowment Program—an initiative designed to secure the Foundation’s future. We are proud to share that over \$1,000,000 was raised in its inaugural year, laying a strong financial foundation for the years ahead.

In 2025, the Foundation hosted an inspiring Civics Summit in Philadelphia titled, “Empowering Students through Civics Education: DEMOCRACY STARTS HERE.” Fifty dedicated teachers from across the country participated in this transformative event. These educators will now bring the knowledge and passion gained at the Summit to tens of thousands of students—the next generation of American citizens, voters, and jurors.

Our commitment to advancing strong civics and professional education continues in 2026 with programs like Civility Matters, which engages high school students, law students, and practicing attorneys. We encourage every chapter to host at least one of the Foundation programs this year. One particularly exciting opportunity is to replicate the Corpus Christi chapter’s innovative trial of Alexander T. Wolf, a hands-on mock trial allowing second and third graders to determine the guilt or innocence of the Big Bad Wolf—an engaging way to bring the justice system to life for young learners.

The Foundation will maintain its tradition of offering

monthly webinars—free CLE sessions open to the entire legal community—with chapters and committees taking the lead as hosts. We will also introduce quarterly virtual webinars for teachers, sharing

key content from our summits to broaden our reach and impact nationwide.

In partnership with National ABOTA, we plan to offer CLE opportunities for members at both International and National meetings this year. To further increase public awareness, we aim to expand Juror Appreciation luncheons to more chapters and promote the JAM Stricker program across all 50 states by enhancing our social media presence and securing funding for sticker distribution.

None of this vital work would be possible without the generous financial support of ABOTA members. We are deeply grateful to all who “level up” and contribute. Please consider supporting the Foundation by donating to the Endowment or becoming a Sustainer. Additionally, we plan to reach out to the broader community to increase corporate support and raise public awareness of our mission, further strengthening our financial stability.

I am honored to serve alongside Pam Liosi-Traut, Foundation Vice President; Yoshi Kubota, Treasurer; and Marquette Wolf, Secretary in 2026. Thank you all for your continued commitment to the ABOTA Foundation. Together, we are making a meaningful difference in preserving the legacy of the civil jury trial and empowering future generations. □



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**JEFF I. BRAUN**

**ON BEING NAMED ORANGE  
COUNTY ABOTA TRIAL  
LAWYER OF THE YEAR**

# ABOTA NATIONAL PRESIDENT

*By Bill Shapiro, Esq.  
2026 National President*

Fellow ABOTA Members, I am humbled and energized by the opportunity to serve this remarkable organization. For more than 67 years, ABOTA has been the gold standard for civility, integrity, and excellence in trial advocacy. Our nearly 7,000 members across the country are not just great lawyers; we are the preservers of the 7th Amendment, the Rule of Law and champions of the American system of justice by jury.

In 2026, my theme will be simple but powerful: “Together, We Elevate.”

We will elevate our members, our profession, our public image, the Rule of Law, Judicial Independence and the role of the civil jury trial. To do that, I have set several goals for the year ahead. I share them with you so we can hit the ground running—together.

- Leadership should feel approachable and inclusive. I want every member to feel comfortable picking up the phone or sending an email with ideas. Your voice matters, and the best ideas so often come from the field, not just the boardroom.

- I intend to travel connecting with and speaking to our members, leaders, judges, and meeting with the media—to proudly explain what sets an ABOTA lawyer apart. The public and the bench need to hear this message now more than ever.

- We will keep our national meetings engaging, on time, welcoming, and worth every minute our Board and members invest to attend. Leaving you relaxed and energized.

- We will operate within the 2026 budget our National Board has approved — period. Fiscal discipline itself is an act of respect to every member who pays dues.



- By the end of 2026, [www.abota.org](http://www.abota.org) will be transformed, providing easy access to programs offered by both National and the Foundation, membership services and more. Our goal is to have a website that we are all proud to share.

We will produce a short, high-quality video showcasing ABOTA’s activities, educational efforts at every level from the Trial of the Big Bad Wolf to our National Trial College and Masters in Trial programs. This video will recap what ABOTA is.

- The plan is to leave a little of ABOTA with everyone, making sure our image is held high. Making sure our name and logo is widespread, we’ll feature our

quality ABOTA merchandise on the new website and at every national event. Wearing the ABOTA logo is a badge of honor—let’s make it easy and fun for members to show their pride.

These are not just my goals; they are our goals. None of this happens without you! As an invitation only organization, we want members to join us in the effort to live ABOTA’s ideals every day, in and out of the courtroom.

I ask only two things of you in 2026:

1. Bring your ideas—the good, the bold, and even the crazy ones.
2. Join in the work. There is a role for everyone who wants one.

Together, we will elevate ABOTA to new heights while staying true to the principles that have guided us since 1958. I can’t wait to get started.

With great appreciation and determination, □

William D. Shapiro  
2026 National President





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INVESTIGATIONS



# *Congratulates*

## 2026 PRESIDENT & OFFICERS

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PRESIDENT

**JENNIFER L. RUSSELL**  
PRESIDENT-ELECT

**KIMBERLY VALENTINE-GIBSON**  
TREASURER

**ELIZABETH L. KOLAR**  
SECRETARY

**JEFFREY T. ROBERTS**  
MEMBERSHIP-CHAIR

**JENNIFER S. LEEPER**  
MEMBER-AT-LARGE

## HONOREES:

**TRIAL LAWYER OF THE YEAR**  
**JEFF I. BRAUN**

**JOSEPH D. MCNEIL CIVILITY AWARD**  
**DANIEL M. HODES**



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# CONGRATULATIONS

**Deborah Tropp-Thompson**

*President*



and to the incoming  
*Executive Board* members



26021 Acero, Mission Viejo, CA 92691  
(949) 265-9272



26021 Acero, Mission Viejo, CA 92691  
(714) 547-8377

# TRIAL LAWYER OF THE YEAR

## JEFF BRAUN

Jeff is the son of parents who migrated to Israel from Bulgaria when it became a State. He arrived in the LA area at the age of two, raised by his mother, Ora, and his grandparents, Mimi and Miko. When his mom remarried, he landed in Bakersfield and was adopted by his stepfather, Michael.

Growing up, he spent most days on a soccer field but eventually gravitated towards the stage performing as an actor and lead singer of a rock band. With his parents determined to raise a doctor, he passed on his admission to the American Musical Dramatic Academy on Broadway, and instead attended the University of California, Irvine.

After a year of pursuing medicine, it became clear to him that he was better suited for the art of performing in a courtroom, inspired by the antics of Judd Nelson as Stormy Weathers in the film *From the Hip*.

In 1989, he graduated from UCI with a BA in psychology and a minor in drama. He next attended McGeorge School of Law, where he became part of its National Trial Advocacy Team with his current business partner, Deborah Tropp, and best friend Robert Gibson.

After law school, he joined Gilbert, Kelly, Crowley, and Jennett, eventually becoming a partner, learning from his mentor and fellow OC ABOTA member Jeff Crafts. There, he was fortunate enough to have tried ten cases to a defense verdict, all within his first five years of practice. After also spending time honing his trial skills with the firm Sedgwick, Detert, Moran and Arnold, working for another mentor and fellow OC ABOTA member, Curtis Parvin, Jeff teamed up with Deborah Tropp and Joseph McNeil in 2000 to start the firm McNeil, Tropp & Braun, LLP (“MTB”).

Being a partner with Joe was a life and career-changing experience for both Jeff and Deb. As many in our chapter know, Joe exhibited every positive trait of an attorney, including charisma, compassion, attention to detail, and most importantly, civility. Spending years with Joe helped Jeff understand the important qualities of a lawyer, separate and apart from success in a courtroom.



Recently celebrating the 25-year anniversary of MTB, Jeff and Deb have worked to continue the legacy of Joe while building the reputation of a well-respected firm practicing in areas of civil litigation throughout courtrooms in California and Nevada. Jeff represents numerous clients in the fields of general liability, commercial and rideshare transportation, products liability, governmental tort claims, and business litigation.

In 2025 Jeff took three cases to verdict, two in Los Angeles County and the other in Orange County. In those cases, claimed injuries included severe traumatic brain injury, aggravation of acoustic neuroma, trigeminal neuralgia, and orthopedic surgeries for the spine, hips, and shoulders. The trial demands by the plaintiffs in those cases were \$40 million, \$7 million, and \$2.5 million. In two of the cases, the jury brought back verdicts for 5% or less than the ask. In the other, the result was 20% of the ask. Currently, Jeff is gearing up to defend a client at trial in the tragic case involving the passing of two young children crossing the street in Westlake Village.

From 2014 to 2024, he has been selected by his peers as a Southern California Super Lawyer with a focus in injury defense. Since 2020, he has been recognized as one of America’s Top 100 Civil Defense Litigators. He is a Lifetime Fellow and Past President of the Orange County Chapter of ABOTA. He has also successfully argued before the Nevada Supreme Court in the case of *Richards v. Republic Silver State, Inc.*

He remains actively involved with his five children, Ryan (29), Chase (27), Lauren (24), Charlotte (7), and Jonah (4). He enjoys practicing law and traveling with his wife Kendall. He continues to coach his youngest children in the American Youth Soccer Organization, where he previously served as the Newport Mesa Regional Commissioner. He is also a past board member for Costa Mesa United, an organization devoted to the development of youth sports and a past member of the Costa Mesa Youth Sports Council. In his spare time, he enjoys playing golf and boating with friends. □

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JAMS is a proud supporter of the

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# 2026 OC ABOTA Annual Installation Dinner

and we congratulate the honorees and incoming  
board members.



The way forward™

[jamsadr.com/orangecounty](https://jamsadr.com/orangecounty)

# JOSEPH D. MCNEIL CIVILITY AWARD

## DANIEL HODES

The Orange County Chapter of the American Board of Trial Advocates (ABOTA) has selected Daniel M. Hodes as the recipient of its prestigious Joseph D. McNeil Civility Award, recognizing an attorney whose career exemplifies the highest standards of ethics, integrity, and professionalism in the practice of law.

This award is reserved for lawyers who lead by example, those who consistently demonstrate fairness, courtesy, and dignity in their dealings with clients, co-counsel, opposing counsel, and the judiciary. For colleagues who have worked alongside or across from Hodes in the courtroom, the honor comes as no surprise.

Throughout his career, Hodes has earned a reputation not only as one of California’s most accomplished medical malpractice trial lawyers, but also as one of its most respected. His professional accolades are extensive: a four-time OCTLA Top Gun honoree, inductee into the OCTLA Hall of Fame, and a three-time finalist for CAOC Trial Lawyer of the Year. He served as President of OCTLA in 1999, spent ten years on the CAOC Board of Governors, and has been an ABOTA member since 1995. Today, he serves as ABOTA’s National Board Representative, further underscoring his peers’ trust in his judgment and leadership.

Those accomplishments sit atop an extraordinary record of results, with more than 150 seven- and eight-figure verdicts and settlements on behalf of patients and families harmed by negligent medical or hospital care. Yet those who know Hodes best say his legacy cannot be measured by verdict totals alone.

Dennis Ames, an attorney who knows Dan well, said “I’ve been litigating with Dan Hodes for probably 30-40 years, and I can only say Dan is the consummate professional. I always consider litigating with him (as opposed to opposing him) because his ethical standards are limitless, the work that he does is always fully prepared, appropriate and I have nothing but the highest regard for Dan both professionally and personally.”



Hodes’ path to plaintiff-side advocacy was shaped by perspective. He spent the first six years of his career representing physicians and hospitals, an experience that gave him a deep understanding of medical systems and defense strategy. In 1987, he made a pivotal decision to represent those most impacted by medical errors. That calling has guided the rest of his career, including the founding of Hodes Milman, the firm he established 18 years ago.

Throughout that journey, he has remained a tireless educator and mentor and is a frequent lecturer on medical

malpractice trial practice. He combines technical mastery with practical wisdom and emphasizes professionalism as a strategic and moral imperative.

That philosophy is perhaps best captured in Hodes’ own words:

“Civility and integrity are not ornamental virtues of the law, they are its operating system. When we treat opponents, courts and clients with respect and honesty, we preserve not only our credibility, but the public’s faith in justice itself.”

This reflects a worldview that aligns squarely with the purpose of the Joseph D. McNeil Civility Award. Named for a lawyer revered for his grace and ethical leadership, the award honors those who understand that how cases are litigated matters as much as how they are resolved.

Outside the courtroom, Hodes’ discipline and resolve are no less remarkable. He holds multiple Guinness World Records for water walking across some of the world’s most challenging channels. He has also completed eight marathons and a half Ironman, feats that mirror the endurance, preparation, and focus he brings to his legal practice.

In honoring Daniel M. Hodes, ABOTA’s Orange County Chapter is recognizing more than a distinguished career. It is celebrating a lawyer who has shown that excellence and civility are not competing values, but complementary ones, and that the highest calling of the profession is to advance justice with skill, humility, and respect. □



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DANIEL M. HODES  
JOSEPH D. MCNEIL CIVILITY AWARD

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# PAST AWARD RECIPIENTS

## TRIAL LAWYER OF THE YEAR

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2004 Dennis Ames  
2005 Andrew Hollins  
2007 Nancy Zeltzer  
2008 Margaret Holm  
2009 James Traut  
2010 Mark Poliquin  
2011 Doug DeGrave  
2012 Pete Gates  
2013 Rob Gibson  
2014 Juan C. Delgado  
2015 Chris Wesierski  
2017 Tom Wianecki  
2018 Terrance Schafer  
2019 Eric Traut  
2020 Not Awarded (COVID)  
2021 Jennifer Russell and Stephen A. Rosa  
2022 Gerald Klein  
2023 Douglas Guy  
2024 Jennifer S. Leeper  
2025 Jeff Braun

## VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR

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2019 Kim Valentine  
2020 Pete Callahan  
2021 Not Awarded - (COVID)  
2022 Jeffrey Roberts  
2023 Seymour Everett III  
2024 Keith More

## THE JOSEPH D. MCNEIL ATTORNEY CIVILITY AWARD

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1997 Joe McNeil  
1998 Byron Beam  
1999 Scott Smith  
2000 Dave Brobeck, Jr.  
2001 Ben Card  
2002 Ken W. Nielson  
2003 James Reed  
2004 Pete Callahan  
2007 Richard Madory  
2009 Thomas Cummings  
2010 Dan Sullivan  
2012 John DiCaro  
2013 John C. Adams  
2014 Ronald Schwartz  
2015 Michael Maguire  
2016 William Haggerty  
2017 Eric Traut  
2018 Robert Gibson  
2019 Sean Burke  
2020 Geoffrey Gray  
2021 No Recipient - (COVID)  
2022 Richard Morton  
2023 Brian Easton  
2024 Sharon A. Hodges  
2025 Daniel Hodes



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Past President and First Orange County Recipient of the ABOTA National Champion of Justice Award, Peter "Pete" Gates was a renowned trial attorney and the very essence of civility. A professional role model to many of us, he practiced with humor and a quiet grace that concealed one of the sharpest legal wits to ever command a courtroom.

Day Resolutions salutes and honors the life and memory of a legal icon, Pete Gates. He will be sorely missed, but long remembered.



**Proud Sponsor of the  
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Congratulations to this year's honorees:

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## **And Congratulates our 2026 Honorees**

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**DANIEL M. HODES, JOSEPH D. MCNEIL CIVILITY AWARD**





2019 ABOTA NATIONAL FIRST LADY

*Cindy Maguire*

We lost not just a former First Lady of ABOTA, but someone who has been a dear friend, mentor, confidant, and a treasured part of our lives for so many years. Devoted and dedicated to family. Cindy was always welcoming, with care, concern, and love of others so special, she made everyone who knew her feel like family. Her smile, the gleam in her eye, joyful nature and infectious laughter will remain and be forever cherished.



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