

OREGON STATE BAR BULLETIN

OCTOBER 2022

Celebrating Oregon Lawyers

The Bar's Best
2022 OSB Annual Awards

Personal Connections
Pro Bono Challenge Winners

Being Heard
50-Year Member Judge Leslie Roberts

40 Years of Service
Judge Mary Mertens James



Oregon lawyers continue to go above and beyond when it comes to advancing access to justice in this state, as well as improving the overall legal profession. It's time to celebrate those who have made substantial differences this year as we take a look at the annual Oregon State Bar award winners, Pro Bono Challenge winners and the newest 50- and 40-year members of the bar.

The *Oregon State Bar Bulletin* (ISSN 0030-4816) is the official publication of the Oregon State Bar. The *Bulletin* is published 10 times a year (monthly except bimonthly in February/March and August/September) by the Oregon State Bar, 16037 S.W. Upper Boones Ferry Road, Tigard, OR 97224. The *Bulletin* is mailed to all members of the Oregon State Bar, a portion of the dues for which is allocated for the purpose of a subscription. The *Bulletin* is also available by subscription to others for \$50 per year, \$90 per two years, within the United States. Individual copies are \$5; back issues are \$5 each, when available. Periodicals postage paid at Portland, Oregon 97208. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Oregon State Bar, P.O. Box 231935, Tigard, OR 97281-1935.

— President's Public Service Award —

Hon. Melvin Oden-Orr
Diane Sykes, Joshua Ross, Nicholas J. Henderson

For significant contributions to the public through efforts involving pro bono services; coordination of local public service law-related events, such as those associated with Law Day; service with community boards or organizations; or similar activities that benefit the public.

Throughout his career, in both his professional and personal lives, Multnomah County Circuit Court Judge Melvin Oden-Orr has worked in service of others.

According to Oregon Women Lawyers and the Oregon Chapter of the American Bar Association, which jointly nominated him for the award, "Judge Oden-Orr's passion for insuring fair and just outcomes, particularly for those who are and have been historically marginalized, overlooked and oppressed, epitomizes each and every aspect which the OSB President's Public Service Award is intended to highlight and celebrate. He is someone who has shown, not just

through his career, but in how he spends his precious free time off the bench, an unwavering commitment to improving Oregon's legal community and the society which he serves."

The honoree views this commitment to community service in a straightforward manner: "I am a giver; that's what I am," he says. "I feel I have something to offer to someone who can use it. I find out where I can be helpful and go toward doing that."

Oden-Orr began to develop his life's theme at an early stage. A Detroit native, he was raised from the age of 4 in south central Los Angeles. The area he grew up in was impoverished, and many people there were receiving government aid, he says. Oden-Orr set a goal to help people seek economic independence and become more in charge of their destinies. This included promoting those wanting to start their own businesses.



President's Public Service Award: Hon. Melvin Oden-Orr.
 Photo by Jonathan House.

After serving in the Marine Corps, Oden-Orr went to UCLA on the GI Bill, becoming the first in his family to attend college. He majored in political science, and then earned a law degree from the University of Illinois College of Law, but not with the intention of becoming an attorney. Only later did he come to the realization that "I could use my law degree to help minority and small businesses. From that time on, it became a major focus of mine."

After three years at what is now Lane Powell, Oden-Orr worked for TriMet, part of that time as assistant general counsel, spending a significant portion of his tenure there working to help businesses along North Interstate Avenue stay alive during the disruption caused by the construction of the MAX light-rail Yellow Line. He later opened his own firm, which he ran for 11 years.

"The thing I enjoyed most about solo practice was, I could go out and talk to small businesses, minority- and women-owned," about various legal matters that affected them, including real estate transactions and business matters, he says.

In 2016, he took a position as the chief hearings officer for the city of Portland. At the end of the following year, Gov. Kate Brown appointed him to the Multnomah County Circuit Court bench.

Oden-Orr was founding chair of the Oregon State Bar's Diversity Section, and was honored with the University of Illinois College of Law's 2001 Outstanding Recent Alumni Award for Community Service. This past spring, as part of the National Center for State Courts' Blueprint for Racial Justice project, he organized "The Toolbox for Understanding and Solving the Diverse Jury Problem" web series and moderated a panel of legal scholars discussing "Implicit Bias and Juror Decision-Making."

During the time of the protests in 2020, in anticipation of the placement of barriers around the new central courthouse, Oden-Orr suggested a project to allow young people to "express their feelings as Portland was being torn down," by creating images that reflect "their aspirations for the justice system" — what it is and what it should be, he says. The project encouraged youth organizations in the county to contribute murals on the barriers. What Oden-Orr appreciated most about the project was the opportunity it provided him to be able to give talks and answer questions from youth while meeting over video or in parks.

Oden-Orr also helped spearhead Multnomah County's Impartial Jury Project, which is aimed at minimizing the impact of implicit bias in jury trials.

"A lot of the things I do are collaborative," Oden-Orr says regarding the project in which he participated with three other judges. "The seeds of the idea were mine, but I was extremely happy with the ideas my colleagues contributed."

He says he considers that and his multiple other civic endeavors successful "as long as I keep in mind what I hope to accomplish."

— *Cliff Collins*

From 2017-18, a group of perpetrators claiming to be attorneys defrauded approximately 40 immigrants in Oregon. The offenders promised assistance in preparing and filing immigration paperwork, assuring them that they could obtain residency. However, the scammers left Oregon with no intention of providing immigration services. Their empty promises left the immigrants and their families without money and without hope.

When the Oregon State Bar initiated a UPL claim against the perpetrators, Josh Ross of Stoll Berne and solo practitioner Diane



President's Public Service Award: Nicholas J. Henderson (left), Diane Sykes (middle) and Joshua Ross (right). *Photo by Jonathan House.*

Sykes stepped up to act as counsel for the bar. Together, they spent numerous hours collecting statements from victims about the hardships they experienced. They obtained a judgement, but because the scammers had left Oregon, there was no expectation of being able to recoup the victims' losses.

The bar requested that Nick Henderson of Motschenbacher & Blattner join forces with Ross and Sykes to attempt to recover on the judgment. Henderson undertook collection efforts and worked diligently to provide restitution for the victims.

The group of lawyers banded together for approximately three years to fight for justice. Together, they were able to recover one of the largest monetary awards ever in relation to a UPL claim in Oregon, which led to their recognition this year.

"I'm humbled and honored to receive this award for the work my colleagues and I did on this case," shares Henderson. "This work was important because it helped people who were preyed upon by an unscrupulous out-of-state lawyer. That lawyer's conduct had the potential to tarnish the legal system in the eyes of the community. I was impressed by the bar's commitment to take care of people in our community and preserve the standards of our profession."

Ross explains that while he worked this case, he drew upon the advice that was instilled in him from others throughout his career.

"My first mentor — who remains my mentor to this day — was Judge Rick Haselton who has inspired me in too many ways to describe," Ross says. "Rick (as he insists we call him) is a 'law guy' for all the right reasons, including teaching those fortunate enough to know him to use law to achieve justice. I hope, in some small way, we did that here. I do my best to honor Rick's lessons by pursuing these types of public service opportunities. Here, helping the Oregon State Bar to be in a position to send checks to victims of this scheme, was very rewarding."

Sykes shares, "Receiving this award inspires me to continue to use the privilege of a bar license to address community needs. My favorite part of this work is helping people to overcome challenging times. I appreciate the work of the Oregon State Bar, Legal Aid and Oregon Law Center, and members of the profession who advocate for the under-represented and those who strive to make this a better world for all."

— Brooke Strickland