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JUDGE GAIL A. ANDLER (RET.): RECIPIENT OF THE 2024 FRANKLIN G. WEST AWARD

by DANIEL S. ROBINSON

As the Orange County Bar Association's 2024 Awards Chair, it is my great honor and privilege to announce that the recipient of the 2024 Franklin G. West Award is the Honorable Gail A. Andler (Ret.).

The Franklin G. West Award is the highest honor conferred by the OCBA. It was established in memory of the Honorable Franklin G. West, who epitomized the very best of Orange County's legal community, and is bestowed annually to an outstanding attorney or judge who has demonstrated a lifetime of achievements that have advanced our system of justice and the law.

Throughout her career as a lawyer, a jurist, and now as a neutral, Judge Andler has consistently exhibited a level of professional exceptionalism, leadership, and volunteerism that serves both as a guiding light for practitioners within our legal community and a distinguished example of what it means to be an Orange County practitioner, extending far beyond our county. For all of her accomplishments that have advanced our system of justice and provided invaluable help to those in need, and for her ability to realize remarkable achievements while maintaining her trademark sense of humility, humor, and kindness, Judge Andler is immensely deserving of the OCBA's highest honor.

Time on the Bench

Judge Andler graduated *cum laude* from UCLA and obtained her juris doctor from Loyola Law School. After graduation, she worked in private practice and as a deputy district attorney for the Ventura County District Attorney's Office. But all the while, her true dream was to become a judge.

As a seven-year-old growing up in Chicago, Illinois, Judge Andler remembers perching herself weekly in front of the family television to watch the newest episode of *Perry Mason*. It definitely made an impression because, thirty years later, that little girl would be sworn in as a judicial officer of the California Superior

Court. "I remember watching *Perry Mason* and being fascinated with the trial scenes and the role of the judge," recalls Judge Andler. "It was the place where people would be able to get justice from juries, and the judge was there to make sure it happened."

Appointed to the Municipal Court by Governor Pete Wilson in 1994 and elevated to the Superior Court in June 1997, Judge Andler served as an Orange County Superior Court judge for twenty-two years. In 2007, Judge Andler was selected to serve on Orange County's Complex Civil Litigation Panel, an assignment for jurists that possessed "training, experience, interest in business and complex litigation, and commitment to engaging in ongoing judicial education." Judge Andler served ten years on the Complex Panel and two terms as Presiding Judge of the Orange County Superior Court Appellate Division. She also served on the executive committee of the National Conference of State Trial Judges. Based on her experience as a Complex Court judge, Judge Andler was elected president of the American College of Business Court Judges, served as chair of the Business and Corporate Litigation Committee of the American Bar Association's Business Law Section, and co-authored *The Business Courts Benchbook*.

As a jurist, Judge Andler quickly established a reputation for integrity which remains today. Orange County Presiding Judge

Maria Hernandez remembers the first time she appeared in front of Judge Andler in the 1990s: "She was a municipal court judge in the Central Justice Center. There was a group of us (public defenders and district attorneys) that were trying a ton of misdemeanor cases and those were the really fun days where we all beat up on each other in courtroom because we were quasi-new trial lawyers who were very competitive, but at the end of the day we would go out for happy hour together. We appeared before Gail almost every day and it became known very quickly that she was the 'North Star'—she was the moral compass for the legal community even as a relatively new judge. The reason I bring up this time period is because she is the same person she is today as she was thirty years ago, and I'm sure was before that . . . and of course will continue to be."

Judge Andler also became known for the respectful manner in which she treated litigants. "I handled cases in front of Judge Andler for years," said Mark P. Robinson, Jr., of Robinson Calcagnie, Inc. "In my opinion, she was one of the most competent and effective judicial officers in the history of Orange County. She handled her cases effectively and was always gracious, considerate, and respectful to the parties."

"I remember Judge Andler once handled an unlawful detainer matter referred to us by the Public Law Center," said Senator

Thomas Umberg of Umberg Zipser LLP. “An associate tried the case and I was there to advise and support. Our client was a limited English speaker, but Judge Andler was always very patient, clearly explaining the process. Likewise, she was firm with our associate that, although she knew me, he was lead counsel and was going to be treated as counsel. She was fair, but firm, and after trial she asked if counsel wanted feedback. I was impressed she took the time to provide excellent constructive input to the young associate, along with her fairness, professionalism, and consideration of our client.”

Judge Andler also served as an important mentor to many young judges. “When I joined the Superior Court bench, I had no idea who Judge Andler was,” recalls Judge Elizabeth Macias. “She embraced me immediately and was so incredibly humble and unassuming. I had no idea that she was this amazing judicial officer with the most incredible reputation. She brought me along to the work she was doing in the community and was a mentor, showing other judges and me how to navigate being able to contribute outside of the courtroom. I was and am still in awe of her. She was an amazing jurist, but a really incredible human being. To see all that she’s accomplished then and now, while maintaining who she is and her sense of humility, that’s what really matters.”

Shifting to Neutral

After retiring from the bench in 2017, Judge Andler began a career as a private neutral at JAMS, serving as a mediator, arbitrator, and special master in complex cases. She has arbitrated, settled, and appeared as a special master in some of the most important commercial, business, and high-stakes civil cases in the country, earning a national reputation for handling cases with complicated circumstances and legal issues. For example, in 2023, Judge William H. Orrick of the United States District Court of the Northern District of California appointed Judge Andler as a special master in the *In Re Juul Labs, Inc., Marketing, Sales Practices, and Products Liability Litigation*, MDL 2913.

Former Magistrate Judge Jay C. Gandhi, a colleague of Judge Andler’s at JAMS, notes that “Judge Andler represents the ideal, triple threat as a neutral—a keen eye for assessing the strengths and weaknesses of each side’s case, creative and sophisticated in pursuing settlement strategies, and tenacious in achieving a resolution.”

Gerald Klein of Klein & Wilson, noted that Judge Andler is a highly sought-after neutral

because of her reputation for professionalism and courtesy with the parties: “When attorneys appear before Judge Andler, they know she will treat them professionally and with courtesy. She always reads the papers carefully to formulate a decision that is both fair and legally correct.”



“If they ever put judges on trading cards, she will be the Babe Ruth card everyone wants.”

Judge Andler has been named a Fellow of the prestigious Academy of Court Appointed Neutrals and a Fellow of the College of Commercial Arbitrators.

Helping the Legal Community

Throughout her career, Judge Andler has demonstrated a steadfast commitment to serving and supporting the Orange County legal community. She has served as a peer

court judge for Santa Margarita, Century, Tustin, and other high schools; she has served as a mock trial judge for the Constitutional Rights Foundation (CRF); she helped develop the *Crime & Consequences* writing competition for high school journalists; she hosted numerous elementary school students for the *Little Red Riding Hood* mock trial program; she recruited judges to volunteer in UCI’s Saturday Academy of Law program to expose ninth grade students to the practice of law, creating a pipeline to law school; she hosted various brown bag lunches for OCBA sections and often serves as a panelist for OCBA educational events; and she was one of the first judges to participate in the OCBA Mentor on Demand program.

Judge Andler has also served as the chair of the OCBA Masters Division, the Board of the Association of Business Trial Lawyers, the OCBA Leadership Development Committee, the CRF Judicial Advisory Board, and the Orange County Bar Association Homeless Task Force. She was also a Founding Fellow of the Orange County Bar Foundation. While at the Complex Court, she helped host the OCBA Construction Law, Labor & Employment Law, and Insurance Law Sections annually, arranging for the entire panel to meet informally with lawyers to discuss best practices and current issues.

As noted by OCBA Past President Dean Zipser, “We all know Judge Andler as a preeminent jurist and now an accomplished and much sought-after neutral. What many don’t see is all she does that’s under the radar. That’s because she is never out to get headlines or make a name for herself. To the contrary, Judge Andler puts her emphasis on finding opportunities for and elevating others. She identifies and helps lead others—from making connections to getting more involved with the profession to career advice. She is devoted both to enhancing others individually and the legal profession in general. When Judge Andler is asked to get involved, she is anything but passive. She is a tireless worker, digging in and giving it her all. We are all the beneficiaries.”

“Judge Andler is the person you want to be with at any gathering, large or small,” says Michele Johnson of Latham & Watkins LLP. “She is a born networker. She’ll introduce so many people to each other throughout a meeting, complete with personalized anecdotes, that everyone comes away with double the connections they had going in. And she brings the life to every party. At one ABTL retreat, she decided that what we needed more than anything was a flash mob.

She gathered a group and told us to tee up a great song, blare it over the loudspeaker, and one by one stand up and start dancing like no one was watching. At an ABTL business meeting, we let her down by not executing on her brilliant plan, but that's the kind of energy she delivers, and it brings everyone together in such meaningful ways."

Regan Phillips, CEO of Court Appointed Special Advocates of Orange County (CASA), recalls, "Judge Andler was recognized in May at the annual CASA Celebration Gala as our 2024 Children's Champion, an award that we issue each year to someone who has stepped up to help create better outcomes for the youth in foster care that we serve. I won't forget the night I saw Judge Andler attending the first night of training for prospective new advocates—sitting judges are precluded from becoming CASAs, and this was (very) shortly after she retired from the bench. It struck me that after her many years of service—she never forgot about the kids in Dependency Court—she made one of her first personal orders of business to become a CASA volunteer. There is perhaps no one who understands and appreciates the value of our advocates better than a judge who has presided over these cases and there can be no better endorsement of our services than to have a judge choose to return to this difficult area of work. It was a tremendous compliment to see Judge Andler sitting in on our training and to know that she wanted to be an ally for the youth we serve in a new and important way. Ultimately, she changed course and joined our Board of Directors, where her support, compassion, experience, and insistence on achieving the best possible outcome for these kids has made her an unbelievable asset to CASA-OC and a true champion for the children we serve."

Presiding Judge Hernandez echoed that sentiment, "I'm not sure a lot of folks know about her work with the youth in our county. She served in our court taking care of the most vulnerable families and children. And her love and care for the kids is contagious."

Judge Elizabeth Macias noted, "When I chaired the Judicial Outreach Committee, I thought that it should have been named after [Judge Andler] because of all the work she did for it. She also embraced the work of DEI in the judiciary long before it became a hot topic in the community, and she was a real leader in that respect."

Past President of Project Youth OC, Kelly Galligan of Rutan & Tucker, LLP, remembers the impact Judge Andler's mentorship and leadership had on her as a young attorney.

"Judge Andler was the first judge I met as a new attorney. At our annual OCWLA holiday gala, where she swore in the officers and directors, she didn't just perform the formalities; she took the time to sit next to me at dinner. I was a first-year attorney, yet she treated me as though my career and aspirations mattered deeply to her. Since that night, she's gone out of her way to send me leadership opportunities, encourage me to take them, and mentor me along the way. She's a true champion for others, investing her time and energy into helping people succeed. And she has this incredible way of turning any room into a community. Whether she's leading a nonprofit, mentoring women, or hosting a roundtable, she makes everyone feel like they belong and have something to contribute."

Accolades and Praise


Judge Andler has received numerous honors and awards from the Orange County legal community, including being named Judge of the Year by the American Board of Trial Advocates (ABOTA), the Orange County Trial Lawyers Association, the Orange County Women's Lawyers Association, the Celtic Bar Association, and the OCBA Business Law Section. She has been named the Mock Trial Judge of the Year by the Constitutional Rights Foundation, the Judicial Honoree by CASA, and received the George Francis Civility Award from ABOTA. She was awarded CASA's highest honor, the Children's Champion award, for her lifelong work on children's legal issues and for helping eradicate child labor and forced labor in business supply chains while on the ABA Task Force on Human Trafficking.

"If they ever put judges on trading cards, she will be the Babe Ruth card everyone wants," said Gerald Klein.

Presiding Judge Hernandez believes "Gail's integrity, kindness, and compassion on and off the bench is what sets her apart from so many. And it goes without saying, she is brilliant. We would often say, and in fact Judge Yellin just made the comment yesterday, when we walk into a room with Gail, there is no doubt she is the smartest one in that room, but her humor and kindness never make you feel less. In fact, she will always find a way to lift others around her while being the friend, confidante, or problem-solver that all turn to. She has also been a long-time advocate for the branch, court, and each of us individually. The group of us I shared about earlier turned to her so many times, and now three of us are current judicial officers (myself, Yellin, and Zidbeck). Each of us would tell you Gail was the inspiration

and cheerleader on our journey. The fun fact is that Gail also presided over the marriages of Yellin and Zidbeck in the late 90s. Beyond her astonishing legal career, she is also the most warm-loving mama, wife, daughter, and friend you will know. She always finds time for work life, but her family and friends are the center of her world. Her beautiful family is blessed with her care and attention as she continues to care for her mom while watching her amazing daughter, the doctor, taking care of children . . . see a pattern?"

Kelly Galligan looks up to Judge Andler as a model for lawyers to follow. "Judge Andler is a total powerhouse. She's not just breaking glass ceilings. She pulls others up with her, showing them how to climb even higher. She's the ultimate mentor and connector! And her generosity is unmatched—whether it's her time, advice, or encouragement, Judge Andler is always there to cheer you on and make you feel like your goals matter to her just as much as they do to you. She's the perfect mix of brilliance and heart. She has a way of making everyone feel seen and valued, whether she's mentoring women in law, volunteering for nonprofits, or encouraging others to take on leadership roles they didn't think they were ready for."

Most OCBA members know how lucky we are to practice in such a strong, collegial, and vibrant legal community, shaped by over a century of amazing, dedicated, and caring leaders who've selflessly given of their time and energy to make our community a better place. Judge Gail Andler is one of those leaders who has had a meaningful and positive impact on the practice of law in Orange County. It is with great honor and privilege that we bestow Judge Andler with the esteemed Franklin G. West award. Congratulations, Your Honor! 

Daniel S. Robinson was the 2022 President of the Orange County Bar Association, and the 2024 Awards Chair. He is a partner at Robinson Calcagnie, Inc. where he represents plaintiffs in consumer and personal injury cases. He can be reached at drobinson@robinsonfirm.com.

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