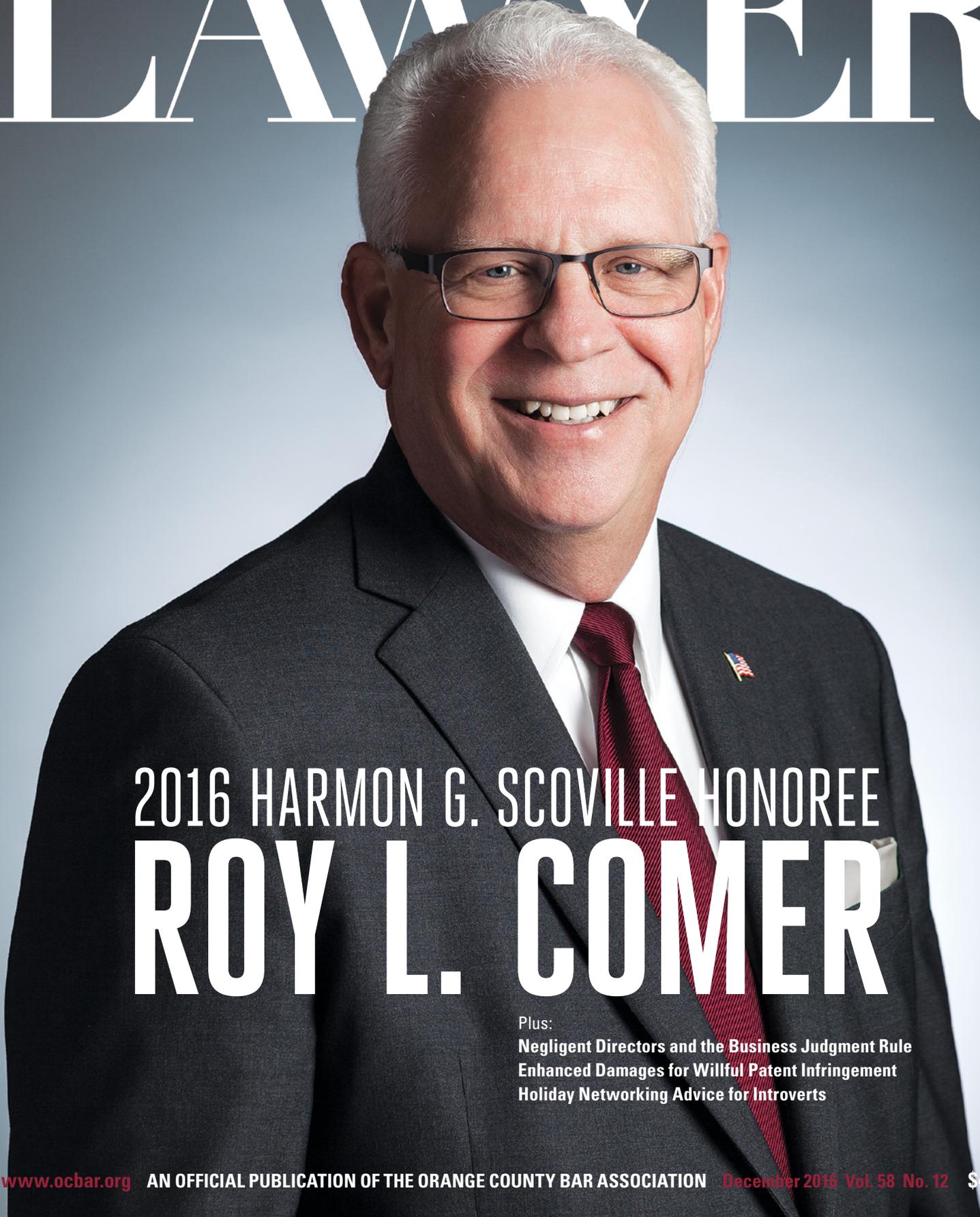


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HARMON G. SCOVILLE AWARD WINNER ROY L. COMER: A LIFE-LONG LEARNER PAYS IT FORWARD

by JOHN A. BERGEN

While most will agree that service to the bench, bar, and community is something all lawyers should strive for, this year's winner of the Harmon G. Scoville Award, Roy L. Comer, goes above and beyond those lofty goals. Roy generously devotes his time and talent whenever and wherever it is needed to his friends and colleagues, has spent his career dedicated to the education of less-experienced members of the Bar, and has delivered top-notch legal service to his clients. As Superior Court Judge Julian Bailey explained, "Roy Comer is an extraordinarily generous and giving man with a passion for the law and the clients he represents. I can think of no one better to receive the Scoville Award."

Established in 1990, the Harmon G. Scoville award recognizes a member of the Orange County legal community whose career exemplifies the highest standards of the legal profession, and who has significantly contributed to the Orange County Bar Association and championed our constitutional system of justice. Despite all of his accomplishments, Justice Scoville was widely known for his modesty and self-effacing nature. He was the last person to sing his own praises. The same can be said of this year's recipient, Roy Comer. As longtime colleague Donald J. Hamman put it: "Roy has served the legal community of Orange County with extraordinary grace, humility, energy, integrity, and stamina over a great many years, and I cannot think of another person who is more deserving of such a prestigious award."

After graduating from Marina High School in Huntington Beach, Roy enrolled at the University of California, Irvine where he majored in Social Ecology. Roy's interest in the law was

piqued when, to satisfy a graduation requirement for an "externship," he had the good fortune to be placed as a law clerk with one of the county's business litigation firms. Roy was immersed in the law at the practical, ground level, and it was here that he had his "Eureka" moment: he discovered that he enjoyed researching cases to reach conclusions, matching wits with other good minds, and then formulating the foundation of advocacy for clients of the firm. This confirmed what his parents always said about him (sometimes in exasperation), "You're gonna be a lawyer someday."

Upon graduation from UCI, Roy attended Western State University College of Law where

the full case version in the law library and briefing them for class.

Roy's law school classmate and long-time friend, Patrick Namanny, recalls Roy's methodology, which also formed a connection that he and Roy both had with Judge Scoville while law students. Pat observes:

I do find it somewhat ironic that Roy is being awarded the Harmon G. Scoville Award as the attorney whose career exemplifies the highest standards of the legal profession; not that he doesn't deserve the award, but rather, for what I recall having occurred in our Evidence class in law school. Judge Scoville was our Evidence instructor and one afternoon, [he] called on Roy in class to answer a question. Although Roy was able to correctly answer the question, Judge Scoville noticed that he did not have the assigned casebook with him in class and he mildly chastised Roy for not being fully prepared by coming to class without it. Even without the book, Roy was always able to fully respond to Judge Scoville's questions in the class. I've always thought that Judge Scoville was more impressed by Roy's ability to excel without the book than Roy's well-reasoned, thoughtful responses to his questions.

So life comes full circle with Roy, always the teacher throughout his career, receiving the award named for Judge Scoville, his long-ago Evidence teacher.

As a young lawyer, Roy honed his craft at several law firms as a litigator who represented both plaintiffs and defendants. After nearly forty years in practice, Roy is now a sole practitioner representing plaintiffs in major personal injury and wrongful death litigation, where he

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he received his *juris doctor* in 1978 and served as Executive Editor and Associate Editor of the Law Review. During first year semester break, Roy married his college sweetheart, Keri. Living on a very tight newlywed budget, Roy used knowledge from having worked as a law clerk to save money. That is, the cases assigned for class discussion from the casebooks were usually available in the law library. Roy was thus able to avoid the expense of buying casebooks by simply reading the cases assigned for class in



continues to represent the injured and infirm. Roy's civil litigation skills have given him the opportunity to broaden his work into many other types of litigation, including business, employment, elder abuse, probate, trademark, and real estate litigation. As retired Orange County Superior Court Judge Frank Firmat observed when Roy appeared in his court:

[Roy] came well-prepared but what I most remember about him was his relationship to his clients. Some lawyers treat their clients mainly as a file, a case, or issues or problems to be solved. Other lawyers mainly view their clients as a contractual fee-for-service relationship. Roy was different, however; it was obvious that Roy cared about his clients as people and cared about serving their informed best interests.

Roy's commitment to helping others understand their rights and responsibilities under the law began soon after his admission to the Bar when he volunteered for the OCBA Speaker's Bureau and spoke on the subject of law, liberty, and justice to many elementary and middle school students so they could appreciate that our country is a nation based on the rule of law. He served as president of the OCBA Barristers (now the Young Lawyers Division). He also chaired the Bridging the Gap Committee for several years and regularly spoke on two topics: legal ethics and the basics of starting your own practice. He was privileged to serve on the OCBA Board of Directors and as a delegate for the OCBA at the State Bar Convention during these early years.

Roy's enthusiasm for teaching flourished as a longtime coach for high school trial teams at his alma mater, Marina High School, for the Constitutional Rights Foundation. He is a scoring judge for the annual "Gladiator Mock Trial" team competition that pits college students from across the country in competition at his alma mater, UC Irvine.

But it is Roy's decades-long involvement with the multiple educational programs presented through the OCBA that clearly show Roy's extraordinary contributions, much of it behind the scenes, to continuing legal education in our community. For instance, Roy is currently Co-Chair of the OCBA College of Trial Advocacy Committee. Not content with the course materials used before his tenure, in 2009 he completely re-designed the course materials for COTA and continues as a regular speaker on Courtroom Communication Skills at this biennial program.

Roy is also currently the Co-Chair of the OCBA Education Committee that designs and presents CLE seminars to our entire legal community, including the recent four-part series on Trial Advocacy, where he served as Co-Program

Chair and wrote the articles that accompany the syllabus for each program.

In addition, he is also the current Chair of the Solo Practice and Small Firm Section of the OC Bar. He posts the popular (and occasionally snarky) "New Case Alerts" on the section list-serve regarding recent cases on torts, evidence, and civil procedure law that strike his fancy. He has spoken over the years at various Section meetings on topics relating to trial skills, client relations, marketing, diversity, depositions, discovery, professional responsibility and ethics, as well as serving as program chair on a variety of other CLE programs relating to law practice management, alternative dispute resolution, marketing, office technology, office leasing, and employment issues.

Through the years, Roy has been generous to share his skills and experience in all aspects of CLE presentations. As Board Member, Janet Martin, so aptly put it, "After creating my (PowerPoint) for a presentation (for my program for the Solo Practice and Small firm Section), complete with funny pictures, I asked Roy to take a look—he sent it back to me way better formatted, including even funnier pictures." Roy takes pride in working behind the scenes, coming alongside other speakers, and relieving them of some of the more mundane tasks of putting on a program. This allows the speaker to completely focus on their message designed to educate and support the program attendees in their never-ending search for a better way to be of service to their clients.

Roy is a regular and popular speaker, and program chair for many years, at the biannual OCBA Bridging the Gap program specifically geared toward "new admittee" attorneys who gain sage advice on "making your way through court." For many years, Roy has also chaired and spoken in several programs at the annual Last Dash program and recently completed a yet-to-be-released talk for the OCBA "Mentor on Demand" program on "To Be a Trial Lawyer." As observed by retired Superior Court Judge Nancy Weiben Stock:

Roy's enthusiasm for legal education knows no bounds. Whether it is 'Last Dash' or 'Welcome to the Practice of Law,' Roy is committed to all ends of the spectrum. His forte is trial skills, where he puts on a clinic on how to bring a real presence to the courtroom.

Judge Stock goes on to observe: "Roy's brand of self-deprecating humor is most refreshing. It serves to place everyone at ease and teaches younger lawyers that mentoring is a life-long pursuit. We can all learn to be better at our craft."

Roy acted for many years as a temporary judge for the Orange County Superior Court

for mandatory settlement conferences, and served on the arbitration panel for the court. He is also a member of the Mandatory Fee Arbitration panel for the OCBA.

Roy developed and presented a multi-part video program on deposition skills currently used by the Legal Aid Society of Orange County to train new lawyers. Roy brought those programs "into the cloud" as a popular presenter in his deposition series entitled "A Better Deposition," and lecturing on the topic of improving trial skills for the online video CLE provider attorneycredits.com.

A Master Benchler and Team Leader at Peter M. Elliott Inn of the American Inns of Court, Roy has presented programs on topics relating to trial skills, game theory as a tool for settlement, and professional ethics in negotiation.

Aware that a good teacher can inspire hope, ignite the imagination, and instill a life-long love of learning, Roy started his career as an adjunct professor of law at Trinity University College of Law in 2001. He currently teaches the course on Remedies, but he has taught Civil Procedure as well as Professional Responsibility and Legal Ethics.

He is an avid fan of the movies, especially "hero" movies and includes the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy, "Babe," "Inside Out," and "The Incredibles" as among his all-time favorites. (He often posts his well-liked personal reviews of recent movies on Facebook.) He thinks of himself as a somewhat-accomplished amateur chef; at least he's working at it. Another "hobby" of his, if you can call it that, is studying the mystery of the mind, including memory and techniques of effective interpersonal communication and persuasion.

Together with Keri, his alpha and omega bride for over forty years, Roy has two grown, married children and a beloved four-year-old grandson. Roy and Keri have been active at Voyagers Bible Church in Irvine for almost thirty years, where he served as an elder. He is also a member of the non-denominational group of Christian legal professionals, Daniel's Inn.



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