

# SAN DIEGO LAWYER®



SAN DIEGO COUNTY  
BAR ASSOCIATION

## SERVICE AWARDS 2020



*Outstanding Attorney*  
**Sharon  
Blanchet**



*Outstanding Jurist*  
**Hon. Gale  
Kaneshiro (Ret.)**



*Community Service*  
**Commissioner  
Pennie McLaughlin**



*Community Service*  
**Rob  
Shields**



*Service to Diversity*  
**Bhashini  
Weerasinghe**



*Service by a Public Attorney*  
**Rosalina  
Spencer Leon**



*Service to the Legal Community*  
**Valerie  
Garcia Hong**



*Outstanding Service by a New Lawyer*  
**Catherine  
Asuncion**



*Distinguished Organization*  
**Jewish  
Family  
Service**

### PLUS

The Criminal Justice System and  
Its Relationship to Race  
  
Keeping Your Genome to Yourself  
  
Volunteering as a Legal Observer





**Commissioner Pennie McLaughlin**  
Community Service Award

### **Why do you serve?**

There is a great need in many communities for help to reduce the struggle for people day to day. The possibilities of what can be achieved with a collective group of creative minds and commitment are endless. I believe it all begins with having an awareness of

the different obstacles people face and the continuous question of how we can solve the problems and bring some portion of struggle to an end.

**Who inspires you to serve?**

We have many great community leaders here in San Diego and a tremendous amount of energy on our Bench that provide the backdrop for inspiration. Judge Ipema and the other leaders of the National Association of Women Judges have greatly inspired me. My inspiration also comes from seeing something that needs fixing and believing in the possibilities of what we can do together.

**What advice would you give others to inspire them to serve?**

My main advice is that you do have time. No matter how busy you are or how many things you are juggling, you would be surprised at what your contribution can add to the collective effort. When you see real change, you will find a passion within you to share more, do more, and be more.

**Please list three noteworthy people (living or dead) you'd want to have dinner with and why.**

My mother, as she passed away when I was eight and I would love to have a conversation with her to learn more about who she was as a woman. I know that she served as the head of our town's political party when my father served on the town council. Neither had a higher education, but they truly had a calling to serve.

Barack Obama. I observed this President serve our country with unmatched grace. With his easy sense of humor and high intelligence, I would love to have a conversation with him on his experience and learn more in-depth about his ideas on how to bring more unity to our country.

*About*

Pennie K. McLaughlin,

San Diego Superior Court Commissioner

**Education:**

Fordham University

Boston University School of Law

**Years in practice:** Started practicing law in 1987 at the Los Angeles Public Defender's Office and was appointed as a Commissioner in 2004.

Thurgood Marshall. Justice Marshall's opinions, along with Justice Brennan's, helped shape my view of the judiciary and the importance of our rulings in the day to day lives of people. As a young law student, it was Justice Marshall's opinions that I remember best. Watching the recent movie on his life story puts him at the top of any list I could come up with for a dinner companion.

**What is one item on your bucket list?**

My immediate bucket list item is to hike the John Muir Trail that begins in Yosemite in 2021.

**Your favorite quote?**

"True peace is not just the absence of tension, but the presence of justice."

— Martin Luther King

**Favorite place on earth?**

My travel has taken me to many European Cities from Prague to Athens, but the place I feel most at home is in the small family-run cafes and wineries in the villages of Tuscany.

**Favorite place in San Diego?**

Del Mar beach at sunset with my two dogs.

**Cherished advice that you have received from a loved one, mentor or colleague?**

Take a breath first, I know you are passionate about this, but you need to breathe!

**If you could magically change one thing about the world, what would it be?**

There are many critical issues that need to be addressed, but I always come back to the urgent need to address the refugee crisis. I believe it is possible to raise our collective humanity through awareness to solve the crisis facing many homeless refugees and migrants worldwide. We are all people, and our basic needs are the same for a safe place to lay our heads, food, and water. Once we start here, we can solve this problem brought on by war and climate change by having all developed nations share in the solution.

**How can others make giving back part of their daily lives?**

The possibilities in our legal community are endless and make it easy for you to give back. Our current Bar President, Johanna Schiavoni has done a remarkable job of making all of us feel like a part of the legal community through this pandemic and during the current crisis in our communities. I encourage everyone to check out our Bar's website and to join in the Bar's efforts. The National Association of Women Judges also has a big presence in San Diego. Through this organization, I work with other judicial officials and attorneys on several programs that always need help from presenting re-entry workshops in the women's jail to hosting monthly book clubs with the inmates.

**In what ways does serving the wider community benefit the legal profession?**

The possibilities for change and for good are wide-ranging, and when attorneys and judges pitch in together, we make a difference. For example, when Judge Terrie Roberts and I hosted the first NAWJ inmate jail book club in 2015, the women's remarks brought tears to our eyes. They expressed such profound gratitude that we found them worthy enough to buy them books and then spend our personal time on a Thursday night with them. Every time I host one of the monthly sessions, I learn something. Importantly, other host judges have come to see these women as individuals with real-life stories, many gut-wrenching, not just names and case numbers on a page before them in court. Through these efforts, by serving our community, we are viewed through a better lens and people often come to realize the importance of all of the good that attorneys contribute along with the judiciary.

**The SDCBA Law Day theme this year is “Your Vote, Your Voice, Our Democracy” in celebration of the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment. What does this theme mean to you in your work and in your daily life?**

I believe that every day we should work to inspire people to take a stake in their communities, to stand up and be counted. One way to accomplish this is for each person to exercise his or her right to vote and help elect leaders into positions that will bring about the changes and improvements we seek to better the lives of everyone. This will not look the same or be the same for everyone, but we are better as individuals when we are better as a society. As judicial officers, we cannot take political stands, but we have the power to encourage the individuals that come before us to do their best and to care. If we show that we care, that is a good first step.

**As a recipient of a 2020 Service Award, who would you like to thank?**

As I mentioned, the NAWJ and Judge Tamila Ipema for giving me both the inspiration and the help to make our ideas into real programs; the re-entry staff and Captain at Las Colinas for working with us and doing the hard logistical work to make the projects a reality; the many judges and attorneys who pitch in every year, including Judge Roberts, Commissioner Keilani and attorneys Lauren Woon, Heather Rosing, and Jeri Malana. Finally, I would like to thank our Superior Court bench leadership for supporting our community efforts. As the saying goes, it takes a village, and the village in San Diego is widespread and incredible!