



CAALA President
Jeffrey Rudman
THE RUDMAN LAW FIRM

A giant among our great plaintiff firms

A TRIBUTE TO THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF BROWNE GREENE AND HIS PARTNERS AT GREENE, BROILLET AND WHEELER

I want to spotlight in this, my second-to-last column as president, a law firm whose attorneys have consistently contributed to CAALA through the years and have helped to shape CAALA into what it is today. This firm's dedication to giving back to the legal community has long been an inspiration to me as well as to so many others. The firm is Greene, Broillet and Wheeler.

A look at the list of CAALA Past Presidents and award recipients tells the story of their contribution. Since the practice was founded in 1970 by Browne Greene, 11 CAALA Presidents have come out of the firm. They include (in alphabetical order) Gerry Agnew, Joe Barrett, Bruce Broillet, Bruce Brusavich, Browne Greene, Randy McMurray, Gary Paul, Chris Spagnoli, Tom Stolpmann, Tony Stuart, and Geoff Wells. Additionally, seven CAALA Hall of Famers, eight CAALA Ted Horn Award Winners for selfless service to colleagues, and no fewer than 12 CAALA Trial Lawyer of the Year winners have practiced at or are current partners at the firm.

Our Trial Lawyer of the Year Award is named in the memory of one of the firm's early partners, Charlie O'Reilly, who was the first of only two attorneys to have won the award twice. The other two-time winner is Gary Paul, another legend of the plaintiffs' bar who was once a partner at the firm.

Recently, I had the pleasure of speaking with four of the firm's partners who have served as CAALA Presidents – Greene, Broillet, Spagnoli and Wells.

Browne reminisced about having become a plaintiff's lawyer after many years practicing in defense. He immediately got involved in what was then known as the Los Angeles Trial Lawyers Association (LATLA), where he made some of his very closest friends. He fondly remembers the monthly meetings where great lawyers connected with and helped each other. They provided robust and cutting-edge educational seminars in personal injury law. Browne later became LATLA's President and saw an opportunity and calling for the organization to dedicate itself to defeating the various tort reform efforts that threatened every lawyer with a contingency-fee practice.

In the late 1980s, certain propositions went to the voters which would have established no-fault insurance and capped contingency fees to 10%, decimating the practice of law as our members know it today. Browne took it upon himself, with others, to galvanize the plaintiff's bar, organizing teams of lawyers to fly all over the state to hit the ground, knock on doors, raise money and awareness, leading these ballot initiatives to fail, albeit by narrow margins.

Many a young lawyer does not realize that the very nature of our practices was saved by their efforts. In 1987, Browne, representing the interests of plaintiffs' lawyers and their clients, was a participant in the famous "Napkin Deal" where he, Senator Bill Lockyear and Assembly Speaker Willie Brown hammered out a massive agreement with insurance and tobacco lobbyists, and doctors, overhauling California's tort reform/civil liability laws, and avoiding a ballot initiative battle. (The agreement was written on the back of a napkin at Frank Fat's restaurant in Sacramento.)

Further insurance industry efforts to kill our practices came in the 1990s with propositions dubbed "the terrible 200s," again defeated through the efforts of trial-lawyer associations.

Bruce Broillet explained that Browne, who started the Political Action Committee (PAC) for the statewide lawyers association (then CTLA, now CAOC) and was its chairman for six years, "was the point of the spear and most of the spear itself...when Browne spoke, people marched." Browne's dedication was an inspiration to Bruce, who after serving on the LATLA board for nearly two decades, became its President. It was under his leadership, that LATLA changed its name to CAALA, a move designed to thwart the political attacks leveled against trial lawyers by the insurance industry attempting to demonize the plaintiffs' bar in furtherance of its tort reform efforts.

Bruce explained that Browne instilled a culture at their firm of being involved in attorney associations at the local, state and national levels, a culture that has permeated the firm from the very beginning.

He describes the firm's philosophy, that there is nothing more important than the clients and that part of representing clients is contributing to the protection of consumer rights through advocacy and involvement. As such, attorneys at the firm are expected to be engaged.

Chris Spagnoli remembers joining the firm as Browne was running for President of CTLA. Having a political background, she jumped in with both feet to help him secure the position, and in so doing quickly became a driving force in furthering the plaintiff bar's mission in protecting consumer rights. She followed in Browne and Bruce's footsteps and, inspired by CAALA's first female President, Deborah David, ran for CAALA's Executive Committee. She became CAALA's second female President, and later President of CAOC. Chris is also heavily involved in AAJ's efforts at the national level, raising money and serving as the Chair of its PAC. To this day, she has consistently dedicated inordinate amounts of time to actions that benefit all plaintiffs' lawyers and their clients.

Geoff Wells, the most recent CAALA President to come out of GB&W, was the President when I was elected as CAALA Secretary in 2014 and has always served as an inspiration to me, leading our organization in a valiant effort to take on the inequities of MICRA through a ballot initiative. He sat me down before I ran to become a CAALA Officer and gave me tips that I follow now in my year as President, including the importance of civility, leadership, listening, and inspiring and empowering future leaders of our association. He continues to lead by example, currently serving as the Fourth Vice President of CAOC.

Today, CAALA leadership out of GB&W continues with past associate Liz Hernandez elected as 2021 Secretary and Partner, Taylor Rayfield, CAALA's current Education Chair. Surely, we will see other great leaders come out of this firm.

Thank you, GB&W, for all you have done for our community and for inspiring generations of attorneys to fight the good fight in the name of the plaintiffs' bar.

