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Changing Times
ASCDC's Incoming President
Linda Miller Savitt

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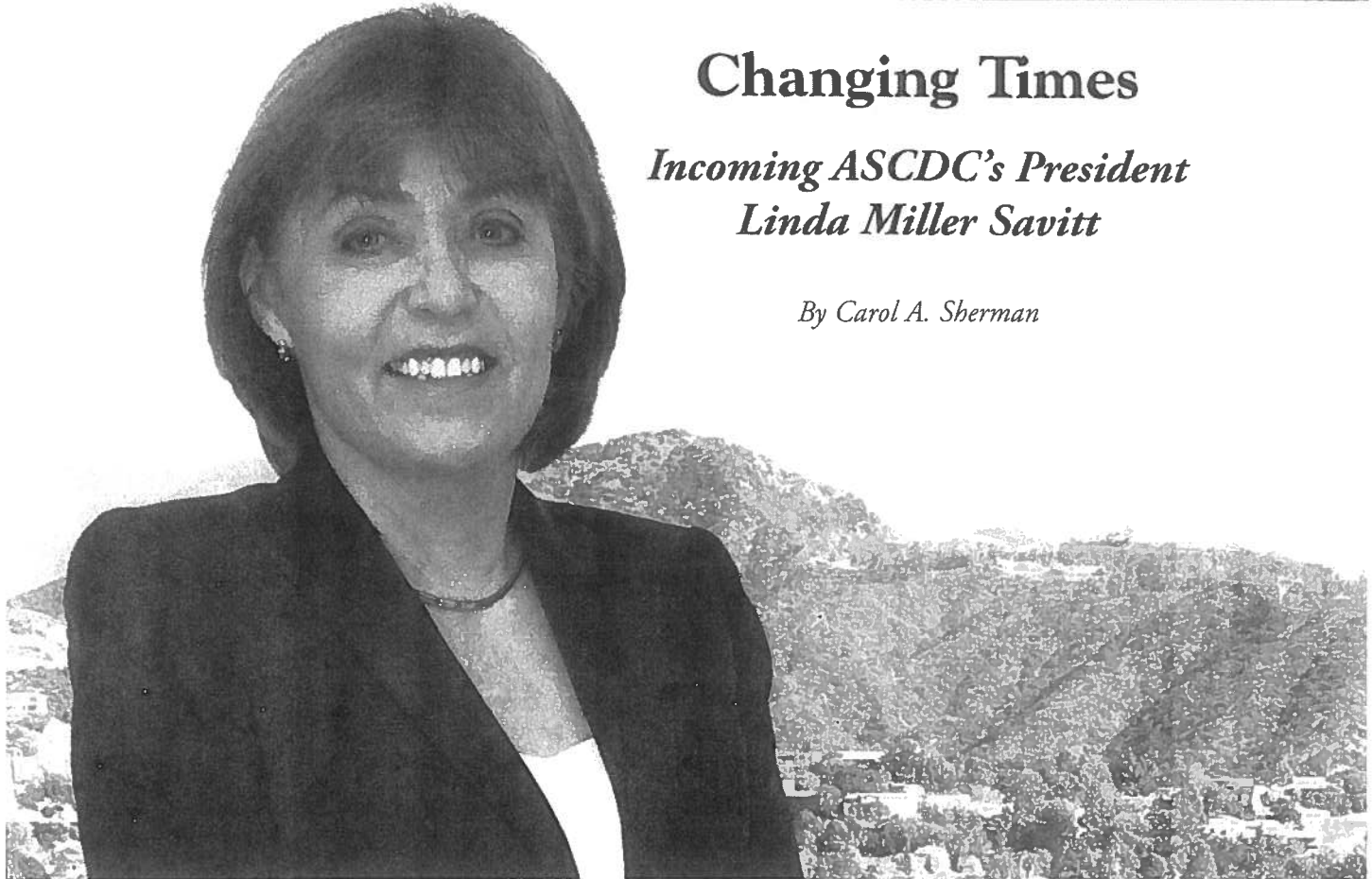
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Changing Times

Incoming ASCDC's President Linda Miller Savitt

By Carol A. Sherman

Association of Southern California Defense Counsel (ASCDC) incoming president, Linda Miller Savitt, faces more than the usual challenges of balancing a busy law practice with leading one of the nation's largest organizations of civil defense lawyers. Savitt will be the first president in 34 years without the support and guidance from long-time ASCDC Executive Director Carolyn Webb who retires in 2010.

"We are so fortunate to have had Carolyn's leadership for so many years. Being a member of the Board of Directors since 1998, I can tell you that she spoiled us. She made everything we do for our members seem so easy, yet first-class."

Savitt assures members that the transition will be smooth and seamless as ASCDC's day-to-day administrative duties shift to California Advocates Management Services (CAMS), the management company for the Association of Defense Counsel of Northern California and Nevada.

"This new management will make us even more cohesive with our colleagues to the north. By leveraging CAMS' experienced management team, led by Executive Director Jennifer Blevins, both Associations will benefit from greater efficiencies and streamlined processes."

Savitt doesn't envision the two Associations becoming one. "California is simply too large for one organization to effectively serve the needs of all members."

A successful labor and employment trial lawyer with Ballard Rosenberg Golpher and Savitt, Savitt will have logged 60 days in trial in 2010, but is excited to lead Southern California's civil defense lawyers during challenging times. "The single biggest challenge facing every civil trial lawyer remains getting our cases to trial. Every budget fix the Legislature has come up with has been temporary when it comes to keeping the civil courts open. Through the efforts of California Defense Counsel (CDC) and our legislative advocate, Mike Belote, we will continue to support and assist the civil courts."

A champion of CDC and lobbyist Belote, she adds, "CDC is the most underrated lobbying organization out there. CDC works so hard to get the defense position out there on behalf of our constituency, and is stronger and more effective than ever. Our membership needs to understand all that CDC does and its value to the organization. Without CDC, we would have no voice in Sacramento."

Changing Times (continued)

While California struggles to solve its budget crisis, Savitt is optimistic that the economy is improving, a positive sign for all lawyers. "Defense firms in particular, have been struggling in the last few years. Insurance companies have been keeping cases in-house. There has been a push to keep rates low. I'm optimistic that business is starting to turn around. As the economy shifts, more plaintiffs' cases are being filed, and this translates into more business for defense firms."

With an approving economy, Savitt will look for new ideas to revitalize ADCDC's membership and attract lawyers from all business sectors, including public sector lawyers as well as corporate counsel. "ASCDC represents the greater business community which includes large companies and small businesses. All companies, regardless of what they do, need quality attorneys. Our membership consists of some of the best trial lawyers in California. Typically, we don't charge the rates that the firms that I call "gray pinstripe firms" charge. We're efficient and we know our way around the courtroom."

She recognizes that young lawyers are the future of our Association.

"My membership in ASCDC has been so fulfilling. I've made so many great friends that cross firm lines. If I need advice about a subject matter unfamiliar to me, I can pick up the phone and call a colleague from another firm. I want the younger lawyers to tell me what they would like from their Association. For example, we're considering offering a seminar about the new law passed on one-day jury trials. I want the firms to be aware of this law because it gives young lawyers an opportunity to gain valuable trial experience on smaller, less complex cases."

At the same time, she encourages every member, regardless of experience and practice area, to become more actively involved with the Association. She cited the work of ASCDC's proactive Amicus Committee. "We've had a number of opinions published, while taking positions that have been acknowledged by the Court of Appeals."

She also notes the popular Brown Bag lunches at the courthouses. "At this stage in my career, I know all of the judges but it took a long time. Brown Bags give young lawyers exposure to the judges in order to get an inside read on what they want to see in their courtrooms. Everyone loves them, most especially the judges."

In other initiatives, the Board of Directors will revisit the Association's membership rate structure to make it more affordable for smaller firms. "One reason the Association isn't growing is because lawyers have left the big firms to start small firms. The last thing they think of is affiliating with the defense bar. In reality, they need us more than they realize because they don't have a big firm to bounce off ideas, and seek advice, counsel and a chance to network."

"Recently, I was telling a few of our members how truly exciting it is to be on the Board and that we need to extend that excitement to our recruitment efforts. It's such a wonderful organization with such great people."


With all ASCDC has to offer, Savitt believes membership is an easy sell. In addition to the Amicus committee and Brown Bag lunches, ASCDC judges' nights are among its most popular events. In Orange County, the judges' reception coincides with a construction defect committee seminar.

"This is a great time to talk with the judges. They'll recognize your face the next time you go into court."

Like other long-time members, one of the highlights of the year is the Annual Seminar. In 2011, ASCDC will celebrate its 50th Annual Seminar at the Biltmore Hotel in Los Angeles. "When I started attending the Annual Seminars, I would run into lawyers who I knew or I had co-defended cases. It is such a great setting to meet and network with the other lawyers. Because my firm, like so many other firms, is specialized, the Annual Seminar offers a variety of topics where I can get exposure to other areas of law that may indirectly impact what I do."

Savitt also took the opportunity to tout *Verdict* magazine, the Association's quarterly publication. "I love getting *Verdict*. I immediately jump to the Green Sheets section to see the cases I haven't picked up on in the last 4-6 months. For young lawyers in particular, *Verdict* is a great opportunity to write an article that may generate business and help promote them." She points to a story that ran in the magazine about a case she had won. "A year and a half after the article ran, I ended up getting a huge case because another lawyer had saved the article."

In other news, Savitt announces that ASCDC's popular Hall of Fame night will return in 2011. Looking ahead, ASCDC will alternate years with the Consumers' Attorneys who also hold a similar event once every two years.

When asked if there was one driving goal for next year, she laughs. "I could quote Wally Yoka who said when taking over the presidency, 'I just don't want to mess it up.' " 

LA Story

By Carol A. Sherman

Linda Miller Savitt has been practicing law for 30 years, but law wasn't her first career—or her second. Out of college, she taught third and fourth-fifth grades in the Los Angeles Unified School District. After a year, she knew teaching was not for her. From there, she went to work as a budget analyst for the City of Los Angeles in its administrative office. Two years later, she began



attending Loyola Law School at night while still working full-time for the City. She completed the program in four years.

"Night school was the best training for becoming a lawyer because being a lawyer, you don't go

home at 5 p.m. Working for the City, I learned excellent analytical skills. Part of being a lawyer is being able to analyze your case."

When she passed the bar, Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley wrote her a personal letter of congratulations which she still fondly recalls. "That letter was very special to me. While with the budget office, I worked closely with his staff and the Mayor knew me."

She admits wanting to pursue law because she found it intellectually stimulating. "I'm very analytical and law is analytical. I'm also gregarious which helps if you're a trial lawyer. It's all about talking to people and I like that."

After passing the bar, she bounced around several firms, including working in a practice that specialized in oil and gas litigation and land-use cases. Then, she moved to a firm that did insurance defense work, legal malpractice and accounting malpractice. "I really liked that a lot but the firm split up."

In 1984, she joined Rushfeldt, Shelley & Drake, a medical malpractice defense firm. "It was both fascinating and fun. Shortly after joining, our hospital clients started getting sued, involving employment cases. I had handled one or two employment cases before so I was assigned to the cases. Before I knew it, I was trying them in court and winning." It didn't take long before Savitt began attracting clients from fields other than health care. "I started doing labor and employment law 100 percent of the time." Savitt was with the firm for 16 years and a partner for 13 of those years. On July 1, 2000, she joined her current firm, Ballard Rosenberg Golper & Savitt, in its Glendale office.

A Los Angeles native, Savitt grew up in Baldwin Hills, attended St. Mary's Academy and graduated from UCLA with a degree in political science and a double minor in art history and Italian. Over the

years, she has continued to work on mastering Italian during trips to her mother's native Italy.

Savitt's father, who passed away this year, immigrated from Sweden in 1924, having arrived on Ellis Island on his fourth birthday. He worked as a wholesale florist, and eventually served for 50 years as a member of the Board of Directors for the Southern California Floral Exchange. "My Italian mother was born in Canada and came to the United States in 1939 at age 19. She met my father at a Bank of America dance during World War II." Her parents were married for 65 years. Savitt credits her mother for instilling in her daughter a strong business sense. "My mother sold real estate at a time when no one's mother worked. She is the reason that I'm as strong and independent as I am today."

When she is able to take time from her busy practice, she enjoys traveling with her husband, a retired Deputy District Attorney for the County of Los Angeles. Having recently returned from a two-week trip to Paris, their travels have also included bicycling through France, Hungary, Spain, Portugal and Italy. Other memorable travel destinations include Scandinavia and England.

Savitt and her husband met through friends. "It's a weird story. We were like the four characters on the popular *Seinfeld* television show. There were three guys and me. For two years, we did everything together just as friends. We went to the movies, dinner and even spent New Year's Eve together. The next day, we all went to the Rose Parade." But the foursome dissolved when Savitt and one of the four friends started dating.

The Savitts have been together for 25 years and married for 12 years. "He's the focus of my life. We think alike and we have so much fun together. I'm convinced that we were meant to find each other."

Biking is a big part of their lives. Sunday mornings they bike from their Westwood home to Marina del Rey or up along the Pacific Palisades. Saturday mornings they work out by taking spin classes. "I'm not a racer, I'm a steady rider. I always finish. I like the freedom of being outdoors."

Having grown up in a tight-knit family, Savitt remains close with her sister who lives about a half mile away. "My sister has two children and is a stay-at-home mom. We're very close." Three years younger than Savitt, they have dinner as a family every Sunday night, alternating the cooking duties. She admits to enjoying cooking, especially chopping vegetables. "It's a great way to relieve the tension from a busy day."

Although Savitt has no plans to retire anytime soon, when she does, she'll travel more and continue studying Italian.

Immediately following the 50th Annual Seminar in March, they are planning to join the ABOTA trip to Thailand and Cambodia, and then continue on their own to Shanghai and Hong Kong.