

# EXTRA

Trials, transactions  
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to the practice of law.

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## FEATURE

### THE SCENE

# Honorbound

The Century City Bar Association lauded top attorneys in the entertainment, bankruptcy, real estate, litigation and in-house counsel fields of law. **By Eron Ben-Yehuda**

**W**hat do Friends of Clinton, a Japanese gold record and spiritual healing have in common?

They all came up during tributes to four lawyers at a dinner hosted in March by the Century City Bar Association.

Nearly 300 well-wishers plus The Scene filled a banquet hall March 29 at the Century Plaza Hotel to honor the organization's choices this year for the top attorneys in the fields of entertainment, real estate, litigation and in-house counsel.

The invitation said "Black Tie Preferred" but, mercifully, most in attendance, including the group's officers, passed on wearing a tux on a Tuesday night.

The Scene feels gussied up enough wearing clean underwear but went the extra mile and wore a business suit and tie.

The few who did dress more elegantly included a showbiz couple, naturally: Hollywood producers Harry Thomason and his wife, Linda Bloodworth-Thomason.

They have a soft spot for their attorney, Michael J. Plonsker of Santa Monica's Alschuler Grossman Stein & Kahan, who garnered the award of 2005's top entertainment lawyer.

But the duo is better known as buddies of President Clinton.

During her introduction of Plonsker, Bloodworth-Thomason hinted at the myriad controversies surrounding the Clinton administration. She commended Plonsker's astute counsel during those tumultuous times.

"Through every slur and slander in 'Something-gate,' we were buffered by his supreme unflappability and his



Photos by Hugh Williams

**From left: Brian S. Kabateck, president of Century City Bar Association; Kenneth N. Klee, Tuchin, Bogdanoff & Stern; Alschuler Grossman Stein & Kahan partner Michael J. Plonsker; Pixar Animation general counsel Lois J. Scall; Daniel G. Jordan of Case, Knowlson, Jordan & Wright; and Bruce A. Broillet of Greene, Broillet, Panish & Wheeler**

extraordinary guidance," Bloodworth-Thomason told the audience.

Harry Bloodworth recalled that, in 1999, Newsweek "wrote that I was the guy who advised the president to wag his finger at the American people and say, 'I did not have sex with that woman, Ms. Lewinsky.'

"Now, knowing this was a blatant lie, Michael called Newsweek and demanded an apology."

He got one, Bloodworth said.

By this time in the evening's festivities, The Scene had gulped down the tasty appetizer of mixed green salad with sliced seared Ahi tuna.

So the Scene's stomach fluttered slightly when Plonsker appeared on stage and the first words out of his mouth were, "My son found a ladybug in his salad so please, everybody, be careful with the main course."

Plonsker joked that, even "growing up as a little kid in Chicago," he yearned to win recognition from the Century City bar organization.

Turning serious, he added that he doesn't do his job to receive accolades.

"Frankly, I just want to work hard, run faster and jump higher than all my opponents while I get the right result for my clients," Plonsker said.

The crowd clapped in appreciation as the next honoree, Lois K. Scali, accepted her award as general counsel of the year.

Scali's headed the legal department at Pixar Animation Studios in San Rafael since 2003, after 17 years at the Century City office of Irell & Manella.

She handled the applause with aplomb. But then, The Scene gleaned from her bio, she's probably used to adulation.

Scali signed a recording contract with Columbia Records at 12 and toured worldwide with her sister for 15 years as the vocal duo the Sherry Sisters.

In 1964, their song "Sailor Boy" reached No. 1 in Japan, where they earned a gold record.

Peter J. Dekom of Beverly Hills' Weissmann, Wolff, Bergman, Coleman, Grodin & Evall introduced her.

"She's one of the kindest, most effective communicators I've ever met," Dekom said. "Lois has got it all. It's scary."

In her acceptance speech, Scali congratulated the other winners.

"My husband, Frank, cautioned me tonight not to be too humble," Scali said. "He reminded me of that famous quote from Golda Meir, 'Don't be too humble. You're not important enough.'"

These days, it seems The Scene can't throw a rock at an attorney awards dinner without hitting Bruce A. Broillet, which is not a wise move considering his super lawyer skills.

Broillet of Santa Monica's Greene Broillet, Panish & Wheeler might be tired of getting honors, having picked up another award, this one naming him 2005's best litigator.

A few weeks earlier, he received the Lifetime Legal Achievement Award from the Foundation for Taxpayer and Consumer Rights.

His friend Los Angeles County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky told the attendees about the \$3.3 billion settlement Broillet helped secure in 1998 against tobacco companies

on behalf of Los Angeles County to compensate for the cost of treating sick smokers.

"And he took on that cause, that risk [of contingency-fee litigation], with the same passion that he takes on everything else," Yaroslavsky said. "When I think of Bruce Broillet, I think of this diminutive individual [at 5 feet, 2 inches tall] who takes on giant causes and usually prevails."

After adjusting the microphone to suit his height, Broillet mentioned the honor and nobility of practicing law. He also thanked the clients who have placed their trust in him over the years, especially a little girl for whom he won a \$2.2 million verdict in 1986 after she suffered severe burns from a defective water heater.

"She still sends me a Christmas card every year," he said.

Kenneth N. Klee took home a plaque recognizing him as the bankruptcy lawyer of the year.

Klee is a co-founder of Century City's Klee, Tuchin, Bogdanoff & Stern and a UCLA law professor, teaching business bankruptcy and renegotiating business contracts.

But Klee is interested in more than legal arguments and spread sheets.

"His curiosity and bent for research led Ken to the study of alternative healing," his friend Marc S. Cohen of Los Angeles' Kaye Scholer told the crowd.

Klee is familiar with healing through crystals, pulsers and "radiance technique," Cohen said.

The Internet site WebHealth refers to the radiance technique as "a uniquely powerful energy science, as effective today as it was eleven thousand years ago."

That makes The Scene wonder what award banquets were like during cave-man times and whether bugs in the salad made much of a difference.

Klee poked fun at his unconventional area of interest.

As he accepted the plaque for his legal accomplishments, he said, "Thanks so much, Marc. Blessings to you."

Klee counts as his mentors some of the nation's giants in the bankruptcy field, including Vern Countryman and Lawrence P. King, who have died in recent years.

"I'm indebted to them, and their spirits live on," Klee said. "I won't bring any of them into the room, but their spirits do live on."

The evening concluded with an unsettling reminder of the price some pay for practicing law.

Peter Merlone, a managing partner of M&H Realty Partners, spoke about his friend and legal adviser Daniel G. Jordan, chosen as 2005's top real estate lawyer.

Jordan, a senior partner with Case, Knowlson, Jordan & Wright in Century City, "burned out" on the law in the early 1990s, Merlone said.

This dark side of the law usually doesn't come up at ceremonies recognizing professional excellence. But in more ways than one, attorneys and their clients seem to share the trials and tribulations of cases.

Merlone noted that nobody talked about that aspect of the legal profession during the evening's ceremony.

"But I suspect it's something that afflicts a number of people in this room," Merlone said, while the audience remained quiet.

Jordan took some time off before returning to the practice.

For the past 12 years, among his other clients, Jordan has advised Merlone's business, which specializes in real estate acquisition and redevelopment.

"He has just done a spectacular job," Merlone said.

Jordan walked up on stage, took the plaque and said, "It is an extreme honor, and I will more than gladly accept it."

Although The Scene didn't receive any honors, the fact that the party ended before 9 p.m. was reward enough.