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DEAN J. ZIPSER

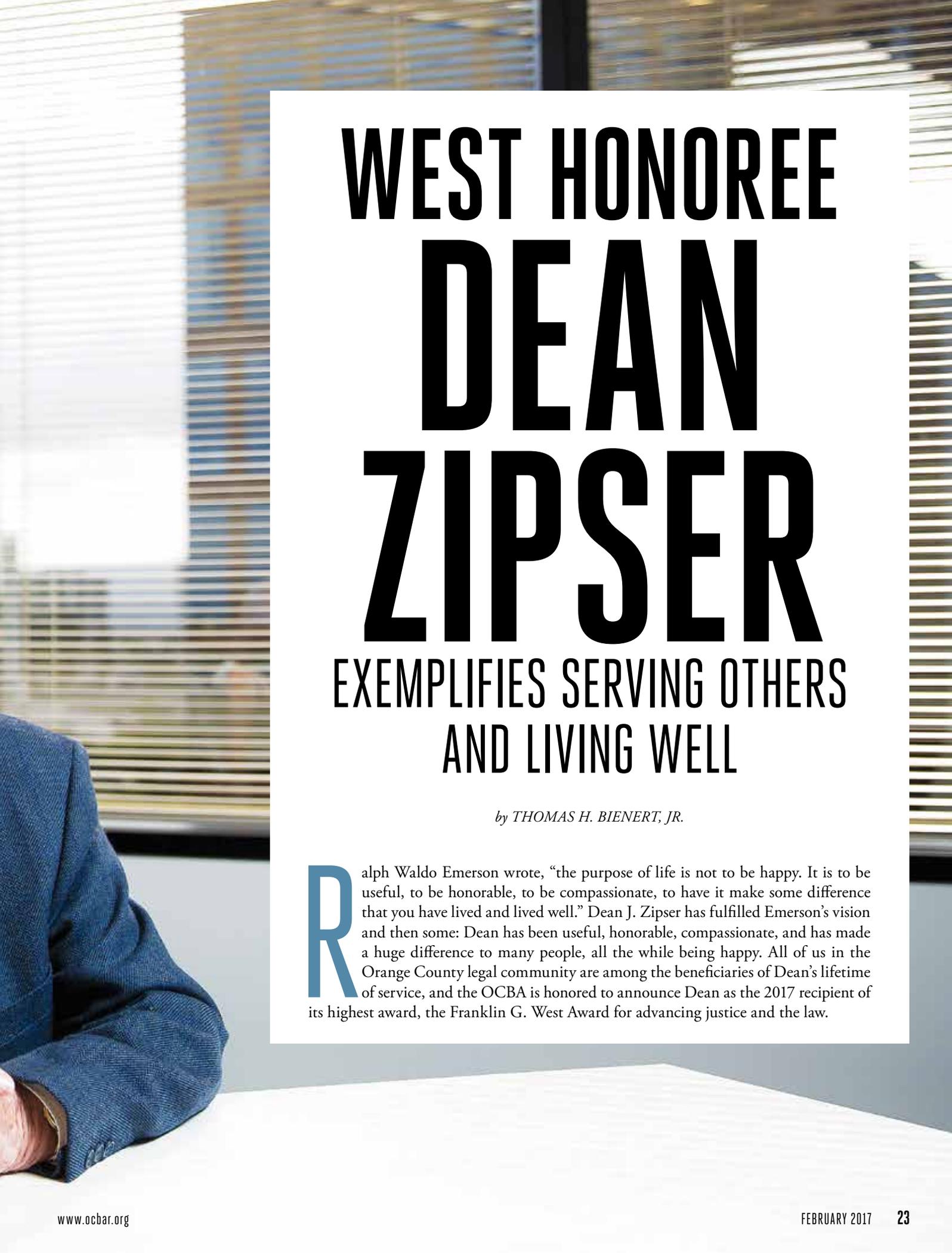
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WEST HONOREE DEAN ZIPSER

EXEMPLIFIES SERVING OTHERS AND LIVING WELL

by THOMAS H. BIENERT, JR.

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, “the purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well.” Dean J. Zipser has fulfilled Emerson’s vision and then some: Dean has been useful, honorable, compassionate, and has made a huge difference to many people, all the while being happy. All of us in the Orange County legal community are among the beneficiaries of Dean’s lifetime of service, and the OCBA is honored to announce Dean as the 2017 recipient of its highest award, the Franklin G. West Award for advancing justice and the law.

Calling Dean useful is a dramatic understatement. He has been serving the OCBA and its members for over thirty years, ever since moving to Orange County in 1985. His list of service positions reads like a full list of the organizations, committees, and boards in the county. He is a Past President of the OCBA, where he has also filled every officer position, is a former Chair and Board Member of the Masters Division, a co-chair of both the Mentoring Committee (which he started when he was OCBA President) and the Leadership Development Committee, and is a current and former member of numerous committees and task forces. He's also a Past President and Board Member of the Orange County Bar Association Charitable Fund; a Past President, officer, and Board Member of the Association of Business Trial Lawyers, Orange County Chapter; a Founding Member and Board Member of the Federal Bar Association, Orange County Chapter; the current Vice President and a Board Member of the Constitutional Rights Foundation of Orange County; a Board Member of the Orange County Bar Foundation; and served on the Pro Bono Panel of the U.S. Central District of California and as a Lawyer Representative of the Ninth Circuit Judicial Conference.

Dean's reach goes well beyond Orange County. He is Co-Vice Chair of a blue-ribbon group on the California State Bar Rules Revision Commission. Working under the Presiding Justice of Division 3 of the Second District Court of Appeal and Chair Lee Edmon, and along with former State Bar President and Co-Vice Chair Jeffrey Bleich, Dean and several other of the state's best lawyers are undertaking the important and tedious job of re-examining and recommending amendments to the California Rules of Professional Responsibility. The Commission's final recommendations will be presented to the California Supreme Court for consideration and adoption as the requirements of all attorneys in the state.

Along with being incredibly useful to our legal community, anyone who knows Dean will tell you he is unfalteringly honorable and compassionate. Associate Justice Richard Fybel has known Dean for years and, when asked about him, speaks

not just of his great ability and tireless work ethic, but mentions above all else what a "terrific person" Dean is. "He has always led by example in the bar to be inclusive of all. What stands out in my mind is that he is always trying to help people. I think the world of Dean," says Justice Fybel. Mei Tsang counts herself among many mentored by Dean, calling him "one modest fellow. There is no air about him. When he talks to anyone, he is just there for them. It is an incredible rare trait to have this amazing leader with humility who cares about you." Former OCBA President Lei Lei Wang Ekvall sums it up best: "Very few people have Dean's level of honor, integrity, professionalism, and civility."

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Carole Reagan, who has worked with Dean for twenty-four years from MoFo to Umberg/Zipser LLP, explains one of many reasons she has built her career alongside Dean's: "Dean truly cares about not just the careers, but the lives of those he works with. He is the ultimate team player. Throughout my career, and the careers of many others I can think of, Dean has been supportive, and indeed a champion, of flexible work arrangements for working moms. I can say with absolute certainty that Dean is the reason I have been able to maintain a legal career and some semblance of family balance." And when speaking about Carole, Dean humbly notes that while he began mentoring her, now he learns as much from her, too.

We need not look long for Dean's model and inspiration to be everything to all people. "My father, Stanley, has been my inspiration," says Dean. "My dad did everything. He was a trial lawyer running a small law firm where he did it all, he

was the handyman around the house, and he was everywhere that he needed to be with our large, busy family. Dad would say 'I can't keep up with it all,' but he always did," says Dean. Then, he chuckles at the realization that he now finds himself saying that same thing. And, of course, Dean always does keep up with everything, to the amazement of many. "I don't even think the word 'no' is in his vocabulary," says Lei Lei Wang Ekvall. "I don't think the man sleeps. I sometimes see him at three or four bar events a week but meanwhile, he is also managing his firm, which was just acknowledged as one of the top twenty boutique law firms of Southern California by the *Daily Journal*," she continues. Dean credits both his father and his mother, who ran a busy travel agency, with his work ethic. "Both of my parents worked really hard." Like father and mother, like son.

Dean grew up in West Los Angeles with his older brother and younger sister and brother. Growing up in L.A. made him a die-hard Dodgers fan. "It was a very special event when my dad took us to a Dodgers game. We had a rule to never leave the game early, and after the game, my brother and I would go up and down the aisle getting score books; with the books and the mitts we'd brought, we'd wait outside the stadium after games and try to get autographs," recalls Dean. Despite thirty-plus years in Orange County and his otherwise clear devotion to the OC, Dean maintains his strong allegiance to the Dodgers (while also adopting the Angels who, as he notes, play in a different league, preventing any real conflicts of interest).

His West Los Angeles upbringing also made him a lifelong Bruin fan, and come college time, UCLA was the only college to which Dean applied. After doing predictably well at UCLA, Dean focused on law school. "I wanted to be like my dad," he recalls. Dean graduated Stanford Law School in 1980, and his desired career path was no surprise: "I wanted to work with my dad. But he said 'no,' telling me, 'You went to a great law school, now go to a great law firm.'"

As usual, Dean followed his father's advice, deciding to start practicing at McKenna, Conner & Cuneo in Los Angeles. With several clients based in Orange County, Dean moved to the OC

in 1985 and joined the McKenna office here. He never looked back, later leaving with others to start the Morrison & Foerster office in Orange County and, more recently, opening his own firm, Umberg/Zipser LLP, with Tom Umberg, Carole Reagan, and Adina Stowell. Since moving here in 1985, Dean has been serving our county nonstop.

The seeds of getting involved began at UCLA, where Dean was the student lobbyist who addressed UCLA issues with local government. His penchant to get involved really took off once he joined Morrison & Foerster. “MoFo was very supportive of community service. I just kept doing it,” Dean says. “I started with the OCBA Resolutions Committee and ‘Lawyers Unite’ for the United Way, and then one thing led to another. I never had a plan,” he recounts, “but someone always put thoughts in my head for something worthwhile to do.”

Dean thanks several great role models whose words and actions inspired him to get involved in the OCBA and beyond, including former OCBA President Donald Gray, Justice Richard Fybel, Judge Andrew Guilford, and former OCBA President Danni Murphy. Spurred by their influences, Dean has given immeasurably to our legal community.

Even though Dean is rightly receiving a “lifetime achievement award,” he is far from finished. Indeed, one might say he’s just getting started. “There is still a lot left I want to do,” says Dean in an understatement. He continues to be active on the OCBA Leadership Development and Mentoring committees, to name a couple. And this July, he takes over as President of the Constitutional Rights Foundation, Orange County, while also serving as Secretary of the Federal Bar Association, Orange County Chapter, where he will become President in 2020. And that is not all. “I will be available to assist wherever there is a need.”

Mentoring will continue to be a priority. “When I first began at McKenna I gravitated to working with certain partners because they were so willing to help me develop as an attorney. I gained so much from them, and I knew that I wanted to give back to others as they did for me,” Dean explained. He has made good on that sentiment. Adina Stow-

ell has worked with Dean for sixteen years, first at MoFo and now at Umberg/Zipser LLP. “I am fairly certain that my success as a lawyer stems from Dean’s patient teaching, mentorship, encouragement, and friendship,” she says. Orange County Public Defender Larisa Dinsmoor has been a trial attorney for over ten years and echoes these sentiments: “Dean has guided me, mentored me, and advised me on how to become a better leader and contributor to the OCBA. Because of him, and his support and encouragement, I’ve pushed myself to levels I never thought were imaginable.” Robyn Frick, an eleven-year lawyer and partner at Newmeyer & Dillion LLP, states: “I could not have possibly had a better mentor. We go to lunch several times a year to catch up, not only for mentoring purposes, but because we have become friends. Dean gives me solid and well-reasoned advice, and is always looking out for my best interests based on my personality and personal goals.” Dean Zipser has made a huge difference to many individuals in our legal community.

Dean clearly enjoys taking a personal interest in attorneys and watching them develop both professionally and personally. “The need to help less experienced attorneys doesn’t go out of business,” he explains. “There is always a need to mentor our newest attorneys and doing so is nearest and dearest to my heart. We need to develop our next leaders.” With our many talented young lawyers, and continued mentorship by the likes of Dean, our legal community will no doubt be in good shape for many years.

Emerson would be proud. By his standards, Dean Zipser certainly has “lived and lived well.” But Dean has one-upped Emerson—spend any amount of time with Dean and you’ll readily see that he *is* happy. Dean credits most of that to his family and their unwavering support. After a happy, close-knit upbringing, Dean was fortunate enough to meet Estee, his wife of thirty-four years. “I saw Estee on a Saturday at a Bar Mitzvah, and again the next day at a party. By that Sunday night, I knew this was the person I was going to marry,” Dean says with a smile. “Estee has had more rubber chicken dinners, dealt with more late

nights, and has shouldered more responsibility while I was unavailable than anyone should have. And through it all, she has never complained.” As more and more requests for Dean’s talent and help pile up, Estee predictably tells him, “You will worry more if you don’t do it than if you do, so go ahead and do it.”

Ask people who know Dean well, like Justice Fybel, and they talk of Dean and Estee together: “My wife and I have been lucky enough to travel with Dean and his wife, and to get to know them well. They are wonderful people together who make things joyous. We just love being around Dean and his wife.” Estee and Dean have two sons, and Dean’s eyes light up when he talks about them. Bradley studied theater at Northwestern and is now a stage manager working at Southern California theaters such as South Coast Repertory, and currently is working on a play in Pasadena starring Al Pacino. Younger son Kevin wants to be a lawyer and is currently at UCI and applying to law schools. “I see in Kevin how I was regarding my dad,” Dean says with pride. Perhaps history will repeat itself.

Comparing all things Dean to Emerson makes me wonder: do happy people go on to do amazing things for others? Or do those who do amazing things for others derive happiness because they have done such amazing things? We need not ponder these for too long because, in Dean, we have both. Lucky us.



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