

A Night of Honor, Inspiration, and Community: 2025 Celebrate with the Stars

Over 250 legal professionals, community members, families, and friends attended the twelfth annual “Celebrate with the Stars” awards dinner on April 9 at the Aqua Turf Club in Plantsville to honor individuals who have made an impact on the Connecticut Legal Community.

The event began with a welcome from the CBA’s new executive director, Lina Lee, who introduced herself to the attendees and congratulated this year’s awardees. “Tonight is a very special celebration. We’re not just celebrating titles or positions; we’re celebrating individuals who have made a day-to-day commitment to upholding excellence and high standards,” stated Lee. “They are those who pave the way and make sure the standards of our profession are at the highest and the path is well-paved for the next generation.” Following her welcome, CBA President James T. (Tim) Shearin took to the stage to begin the night’s presentation. President Shearin gave a special thanks to Governor Lamont for providing a proclamation in honor of Celebrate with the Stars as well as Attorney General William Tong, who sent citations thanking each of this year’s awardees for their valuable contributions to the state’s legal community.

CBA President James T. (Tim) Shearin, President-Elect Emily A. Gianquinto, and Vice President J. Paul Vance jointly presented the first recognition of the evening for members of the bar admitted in 1975, who were honored for their 50 years of practice with half-century pins.

The night’s awards presentation began with **The Hon-**

orable Anthony V. DeMayo Pro Bono Award. The winners of this award, as selected by the Pro Bono Committee, exhibit commitment to pro bono service and serve as role models for the profession. This year’s winners included **Paul T. Kelly** and **Jeffrey L. Meyers**, both of whom have provided significant legal services to those in need without expectation of payment.

Young Lawyers Section (YLS) Chair Vianca T. Malick presented the **Young Lawyers Section Vanguard Award** to **Alison J. Toumekian**. Attorney Toumekian was recognized for her significant contributions to the YLS through seven years of service on the YLS executive committee as well as for

her role as the representative for District Two (Connecticut and Rhode Island) in the American Bar Association’s Young Lawyers Division.

Rosendo Garza, Jr. was presented with the **Citizen of the Law Award** for his significant contribution to public service not involving professional legal skills, but providing inspiration and contributing to the needy, the good of society, the environment, or our way of life. Outside of his legal career, Attorney Garza is a lieutenant in the United States Marine Corps Reserve, serving as an infantry officer. Through multiple combat deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan he has shown inspiring lead-



The 2025 Celebrate with the Stars Awards Recipients (From L to R Rear) Jennifer L. Herbst, Rosendo Garza, Jr., Jeffrey L. Meyers, John Dankosky, Paul T. Kelly, and Denis R. Caron (Front) Alison J. Toumekian, Livia DeFilippis Barndollar, Hon. Nina F. Elgo, and Sally Zanger



Attorneys Observing the 50th Anniversary of Their Admission to Practice in Connecticut

ership, resilience, and an unwavering commitment to service. “I’m a first generation American, the son of Mexican immigrants who came to this country to rebuild their lives,” noted Attorney Garza. “Because of them I carry a deep sense of gratitude and responsibility and that’s what led me toward a life of service.”

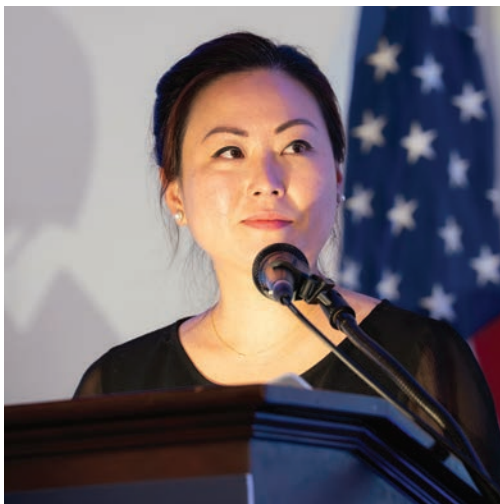
Sally Zanger was presented with the **Charles J. Parker Legal Services Award** for her deep and abiding interest in and dedication to the delivery of legal services throughout her career to the disadvantaged in Connecticut. She is a senior staff attorney at the Connecticut Legal Rights Project where she provides high quality legal services to low-income Connecticut residents with psychiatric disabilities, primarily on matters related to their treatment and civil rights. For over 49 years she has advocated for low-income clients living with mental health conditions.

The **Tapping Reeve Legal Educator Award** was presented to **Jennifer L. Herbst** for her contributions to the legal education of her colleagues as a Professor of Law & Medical Sciences of Quinnipiac University’s School of Law and Frank H. Netter MD School of Medicine. She currently serves as a volunteer community member on the Adult and Pediatric Ethics Committees for Yale-New Haven Hospital and is a seminar leader in clinical ethics for the Sherwin B. Nu-

land Summer Institute in Bioethics at Yale.

Radio journalist and moderator, **John Dankosky**, received the **Distinguished Public Service Award** for his significant contributions to society and his distinguished achievements in his profession. He has worked as a journalist, radio host, and moderator of live events in Connecticut since 1994. He currently serves as director

of news and audio for the popular public radio program Science Friday and previously served as news director at Connecticut Public Radio for more than 20 years. “The state of our country right now is such that those who report the news and those who uphold the law are under attack daily. We need more than ever to be courageous in our defense of the truth and courageous in our defense of those with less power,”



New CBA Executive Director, Lina Lee



John Dankosky



Rosendo Garza, Jr.



Livia DeFilippis Barndollar

proclaimed Dankosky. “Together we can use our work and our voices to inform, to lift up, to defend, and to fight the good fight.”

The **John Eldred Shield Distinguished Professional Service Award** was presented to **Denis R. Caron** for his outstanding service through the CBA for the benefit of the legal community and the community at large. Throughout his fifty-year legal career, Attorney Caron has provided countless hours to educating members of the Connecticut Bar on the intricacies of foreclosures and real property law, and is the author of the widely renowned *Connecticut Foreclosures: An Attorney’s Manual of Practice and Procedure*. Attorney Caron thanked the CBA Special Committee on Standards of Title, which he chaired from 2004-2016, noting, “The work that they do is sometimes relegated to some dusty volume on the shelf, but when it comes time to resolve some title matter that’s where you go. It’s a group that works hard and does a tremendous service for the Bar.”

The **Edward F. Hennessey Professionalism Award** was presented to **Livia De-Filippis Barndollar** for her dedication to the highest ideals and standards as a legal professional. For over 35 years she has helped individuals and families in difficult situations navigate the often-tumultuous world of family law, consistently maintaining her kindness, compassion, patience, and reasonableness. Over the years, she rose through the ranks due to her dedication and commitment to her clients and



CBA President James T. (Tim) Shearin, Executive Director Lina Lee, President-Elect Emily A. Gianquinto, Secretary David M. Moore, and Vice President J. Paul Vance

colleagues and she has proven herself as a leader in the community and mentor to those around her. In her remarks she read from the CBA’s Lawyers’ Principles of Professionalism, noting their focus on civility, honesty, competency, responsibility, mentoring, and honor. “Meeting these commitments is a special challenge now,” stated Attorney Barndollar. “Let’s derive the strength to do so from and with each other. In doing so we hopefully can bring public good and preserve the rule of law.”

The final award of the evening, the **Henry J. Naruk Judiciary Award** was presented to **The Honorable Nina F. Elgo** for her substantial contributions as a judge of the Connecticut Appellate Court. She is the first Asian Pacific American judge appointed to

both the Connecticut Superior Court and the Connecticut Appellate Court. During her tenure in the judiciary, Judge Elgo has served on various committees designed to improve the court system. Since 2012 she has served as a member of the Connecticut Bar Examining Committee and additionally serves on the Uniform Bar Exam Committee of the National Conference of Bar Examiners.

The night ended with brief remarks from President Shearin on the importance of the rule of law in the United States. He noted how Abraham Lincoln, as a young attorney in his Lyceum Address, had warned that the fundamental blessings of American liberty and justice faced greater danger from influences within our country than from threats outside of it. “For Lincoln, that [danger] was disregard for the rule of law,” stated Shearin. “For him, political religion was reverence of the laws. That is our political religion. That is what we must espouse each and every day and that is what we must start preaching to every person we meet because right now the rule of law is under attack.” President Shearin further cautioned that, “The rule of law is important because it ensures an orderly and just society, it’s the only way this democracy works”

Congratulations to this year’s Celebrate with the Stars awardees and thank you to everyone who attended this year’s memorable event.



CBA President-Elect Emily A. Gianquinto, Vice President J. Paul Vance, The Honorable Nina F. Elgo, and President James T. (Tim) Shearin

View all the photos from the event at ctbar.org/2025AwardsPhotos. ■