

JAMES P. HILL RECEIVES BUSINESS LAW SECTION'S 2022 LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Written by Paul J. Pascuzzi*



The Business Law Section is pleased to announce that James P. Hill (“Jim”) has been selected to receive the Business Law Section’s 2022 Lifetime Achievement Award. This prestigious award is given annually to a California lawyer “who over an extended period has made significant contributions to the Business Law Section or to business law generally in the State of California and who has achieved high status in the legal community.” The Lifetime Achievement Award will be presented to Jim at the California Lawyers Association Annual Meeting in San Diego. The Business Law Section (“BLS”) presents the award annually at its Annual Meeting event, which this year will be a luncheon on September 16, 2022.

Jim joins an impressive list of California business attorneys and legal scholars who have received this award over the years. If you are looking for career inspiration, scroll over to the Business Law Section’s website to review the articles on the prior award recipients. Jim’s addition to the list is well deserved, given his illustrious career and especially his contributions to the Business Law Section, the California Lawyers Association, and the legal community at large. Jim took on the enormous responsibility of serving as the California Lawyers Association’s inaugural Chair of the Board of Representatives, representing nearly 100,000 California lawyers. Like all our Lifetime Achievement Award winners, Jim has a life journey both interesting and remarkable. However, his key role at a crucial time in the life of the BLS and other Sections is what stands out and serves as the platform for Jim’s selection as the recipient for the Lifetime Achievement Award.

Jim comes from family lineage in law and the military. His father, Roland Putman “Putt” Hill, was a Navy pilot, settling the family in the Navy town, Corpus Christi, Texas. This was after Putt’s tour flying amphibious Navy aircraft during the Korean War, first based in San Francisco and then San Diego, California. Putt, a dashing young Navy lieutenant, and

Jim's mother, Lucy, eloped before Lucy finished college to start their transient life together while Putt was in the Navy. This explains why Jim was born in Pensacola, Florida; his older sister, Claire, was born in Honolulu; his older brother, John, also a Navy pilot and then a captain for Delta Airlines, was born in Guam; and his younger sister, Alice, was born in Corpus Christi. The family took up residence there on the Texas Gulf Coast, where Lucy took on the role of a homemaker raising four kids. While doing so, Lucy obtained her English degree and teaching credentials commuting to Texas A&I (now Texas A&M) in Kingsville, Texas, which led to her teaching English at Jim's high school. Jim cites his mother's influence for instilling in him a love of the English language and writing, which motivated him through high school, college, law school, and beyond.

Jim's proclivity for the law also may have come from his mother's side of the family. Jim's great-grandfather, James B. Lewright, of San Antonio, was a prominent Texas trial lawyer, as was Jim's grandfather, Walter M. Lewright, who was a founding partner in one of the largest law firms in South Texas at the time. You will have to ask Jim to tell you the story about his grandfather being asked to leave UT Law School before graduation for gambling and "keeping women" when you see him (which, as the tale is told, led to Walter "reading the law" under the watchful eye of his father before embarking on his own trial lawyer career). Turns out Jim inherited a bit of that Texas rebel spirit.

Jim met his wife Gale at Richard King High School in Corpus Christi in the late 60s. Jim's leadership instincts started when he ran (under the banner of "Unified Students") for and was elected to serve as the student council president in his senior year. While in high school and notwithstanding his father's distinguished military service, Jim led anti-war marches and protests against the Vietnam war. His passion for the peace movement led other students in the very military town of Corpus Christi who were not so inclined to object, leading the administration there to bring Jim up on impeachment charges. After a "trial" before the full student body, Jim survived an impeachment vote and was not kicked off the student council. Notwithstanding what Jim recalls as a traumatic test to his beliefs, Jim's passivist commitment continued forward later that year as he registered as a "conscientious objector" (I-O) at the local draft board.

Jim attended undergraduate studies at the University of Texas, Austin, pursuing a Journalism degree. After about two years of college, Jim's number (18) came up in the draft lottery of the day. He applied for and was approved for alternative service. Alternative service placed Jim in a very low-level "Central Services" job at the University

of Colorado Medical Center, where he was assigned to such tasks as preparing operating room packs, washing bed pans, and other menial tasks in the basement of the teaching hospital. Rather than leave his high school sweetheart in Texas, Jim married Gale (in the party room of the local Chinese restaurant, Chung Mei, because Jim's Episcopal church would not allow Jim's piano teacher, Red Camp, to play the organ at the Good Shepherd). Gale, now married, traveled with Jim to Denver while he performed his alternative service. Jim and Gale were basically on their own at that point, doing their best to get by, since Jim's father was not pleased with his anti-war passions or his decision to leave college at age 19. When Jim's alternative service work concluded about a year later, Jim and Gale returned to the University of Texas, Austin as students, prepared to work and attend school to get their degrees.

While pursuing his undergraduate journalism degree, Jim worked for the college radio station KUT-FM, including as a public affairs reporter covering city council and board of supervisors' activities (Ann Richards was a Travis County Supervisor at the time—starting her own flamboyant and memorable Texas political career). Jim also worked for the college newspaper, The Daily Texan, while obtaining his degree. Jim recalls covering the 1974 Huntsville Carrasco prison siege, which turned into an eleven-day prison lockdown and was one of the longest hostage-taking sieges in United States history at that time, ending with a fatal shootout between the Texas Rangers and the hostage takers. Jim camped out for over a week on the front lawn of the prison, reporting on the event, and won an award for his writing.

Jim's journalism degree took him to a job in Colorado after graduation, with a daily newspaper, the Colorado Spring Sun. While Jim recalls the job fondly in the fun category, satiating his "news junkie" addiction on the front lines, he also recalls working 12-hour days while Gale was working half the time for twice the pay waiting tables at a local steak restaurant. With the pay disparity as one motivating factor, Jim applied to law schools in Denver and Texas, having taken the LSAT prior to moving to Colorado. Jim was accepted at the University of Texas School of Law in Austin, which at the time offered virtually free tuition to Texas residents (which Jim and Gale were able to maintain), leading to the obvious choice for the impecunious couple to return to their roots in Texas. Jim recalls rekindling his relationship with his father around this time as well, which had to be part of the reason to return to Texas.

Jim graduated with honors from UT Law (including Order of the Coif) in 1978, with no clear idea of what type of law he wanted to practice. Jim reports especially enjoying several law school courses with Professor David Epstein,

in commercial and bankruptcy law. Taking Jim under his wing during law school, Professor Epstein, together with Dean Page Keeton, encouraged Jim to apply for clerkships with federal district court and court of appeals judges. Prior to graduating, Jim applied for clerkships with court of appeals judges in the Ninth and Tenth Circuits. One judge, Judge Herbert Choy, served in Honolulu. Jim and Gale saved for a trip to visit Judge Choy, and while there, Judge Choy encouraged Jim to meet with Judge Walter Ely, who happened to be visiting Honolulu to sit on a panel that week with Judge Choy. Judge Ely was originally from Texas (and a UT Law graduate himself), and selected one student from the law school every year as one of his clerks. Judge Ely, a diehard Guadalcanal veteran Marine and founder of the Marine Memorial Club in San Francisco, and conscientious objector Jim hit it off in an interview on the beach in Waikiki, leading Dean Keeton to pick Jim for the Judge Ely clerkship at the Ninth Circuit. Jim's clerkship started immediately after Jim finished taking (and passing) the Texas state bar exam.

After clerking with Judge Ely for over a year and taking and passing the California bar, Jim moved to San Diego to start work as an associate at the antitrust and securities litigation firm, Sullivan, Jones & Archer. Jim's first assignments included working on federal appeals cases, but it was not long before bankruptcy work started blossoming and attracting Jim's attention. Having begun practicing bankruptcy and receivership law, Jim next went to work for renowned San Diego bankruptcy lawyer (and later State Bar President) Colin Wied. After a short time there, Jim started his own firm with his law school classmate from Texas, Jamie Baskin, who also had relocated to California.

From 1982 to 1990, Jim enjoyed doing bankruptcy and receivership work at his own firm in San Diego, known as Hill & Baskin. Jim's great work developed long-standing clients such as bankruptcy trustees Marty Goldberg, Ralph Boldt, Richard Kipperman, Harold "Hal" Taxel, and retired Navy Seal Captain William "Biff" Leonard. In 1989, Jim's law partner, Jamie, decided to return to Texas. Having established their lives in San Diego and having grown his firm to about a dozen lawyers, Jim and Gale decided to stay put. In August 1990, Jim merged his firm with that of his former colleagues at Sullivan Jones & Archer, creating a new firm that is now the Sullivan Hill Rez & Engel law firm.

Jim has had many bankruptcy cases with interesting twists and turns. Among them is Grand Airways, an airline operating out of Las Vegas, where Jim represented Biff Leonard in his first case as a chapter 7 trustee. The case ended up as a liquidation case where, after bankruptcy court approval, the debtor's chapter 11 attorney was

paid his fee in the form of the debtor's storage room of inventory of tiny liquor bottles served on the company's airplanes. Another case, also for Biff Leonard as trustee, involved a bankruptcy estate's interest in approximately two-thirds of the island of Ambergris Caye in Belize that the Belize government had taken, but not paid for, through eminent domain. After more than two years of commuting back and forth from Las Vegas to Belize, Jim and Trustee/Capt. Leonard (then still in the Navy reserves) eventually succeeded in obtaining a multimillion-dollar recovery in what was the first time the Belize government was reported to have paid dollars out for an eminent domain taking. Sullivan Hill still maintains a small office in Las Vegas doing trustee, receivership, and other bankruptcy work today.

Jim's bar service in the legal community began when he was encouraged by his prior law school teacher, Professor Epstein to get involved with the American Bar Association business bankruptcy subcommittee. That rewarding experience led to Jim getting involved in the San Diego chapter of the Federal Bar Association. Jim served as chair of the San Diego County Bar Commercial Law Section before it became the local bar's Bankruptcy Section. Jim was recruited to the then State Bar Business Law Section Insolvency Law Committee ("ILC") by Jay Bingham, another insolvency lawyer, after they battled one another in a contentious Chapter 11 bankruptcy case (Carbite Golf). Jim recalls his time on the ILC as the most rewarding and professionally enjoyable experience of any of his bar service. Jim speaks fondly of the infectious experience of being immersed in bankruptcy case law and legislation. Jim quickly ascended to become Chair of the ILC (with Co-Chair Tom Phinney) in 2012-2013. Jim never hesitates to recommend service on the ILC to his insolvency colleagues, including his firm partners and insolvency law practitioners, Gary Rudolph and Kathleen Cashman-Kramer, who followed Jim's footsteps on to the ILC.

Jim went on to serve as a member of the BLS Executive Committee, which sets policy and manages the 15 substantive standing committees of the BLS. Jim chaired active subcommittees of the BLS Executive Committee that had major responsibility for aspects of the BLS operations. He was selected to become Chair of the BLS Executive Committee from 2016-2017. He brought his energy, vigor, good judgment, and leadership to a BLS that would have benefited mightily from Jim's leadership under normal circumstances.

However, the years of his service as BLS Executive Committee Chair were packed with everything but normal circumstances. To the contrary, the BLS was entering one of the most tumultuous periods in its history. The BLS, and

later the other Sections of the State Bar and then a brand-new organization, the California Lawyers Association, were fortunate during those critical years to have Jim's vision, commitment, and skills.

It was during the time that Jim served as Chair of the BLS that forces started to gather that on one hand threatened the viability of the Sections and on the other caused a movement to mushroom to take the Sections out of the State Bar entirely. First came efforts towards "deunification;" that is, to take out of the State Bar all voluntary, non-regulatory functions. That notion evolved into a more limited legislatively-facilitated separation of only the Sections. Many Bar leaders strenuously fought the efforts to even seriously consider such a major restructure. Fear of the unknown was the primary motivator. Jim did not succumb to such a fear and was one of the Bar leaders who early on committed to seriously evaluating the prospect of separation and at an early date became an advocate for this historic development.

Jim was in the middle of it all, first as the delegate from the BLS to the Council of Sections, then as the delegate from the BLS to the newly created Board of Representatives of the newly created California Lawyers Association ("CLA"). Then, as a result of an election of his peers from other Sections on the CLA Board, he served as the first chair of CLA, serving for two terms. (The CLA Bylaws prevent any other Chair from succeeding themselves, meaning Jim's two terms will be unique in that regard.)

No question, this was a challenging period for all involved. There were powerful political winds buffeting every aspect of the transformation. The Chief Justice of California, the Judiciary Committees of the California Assembly and the Senate, the State Bar staff and Board leadership, and the 15 individual Sections, each represented powerful interests, strong views, and the capability of being disruptive of, if not killing, any such transformation. And as to the individual Sections themselves, each had its own culture, identity, and substantial differences in the way they functioned and thought about whether leaving the State Bar was in their, and their members', best interests.

Pulling all of this together, reconciling competing interests, projecting an attitude that was positive and welcoming to divergent views required an exceptional leader. That was Jim.

As a result of his journalism training, Jim added a critical component to every Committee and Section, and to the Board itself, and that was through his timely, unbiased reporting and analysis as disparate views were investigated and hammered out. Jim did this with a device he labeled

"Jim's rough notes." Jim would generate these email "rough notes" memos while meetings were in progress—remarkably, many times while he was simultaneously chairing meetings. Within minutes of the conclusion of a meeting, "Jim's rough notes" were available to any of the CLA leaders who wished to have a deeper understanding of the major issues that were actively being resolved. Because these notes were timely and came to be known for what they were, an unbiased insight into rapidly evolving consequential issues, this unofficial, but enormously important, volunteer contribution arguably was as instrumental as any of the CLA formal procedures to bringing divergent positions together, communicating important views, bonding, and generating a commonality of perspectives about the CLA issues of the day and those of its future.

While this unassigned, unofficial, uncompensated, and possibly even insufficiently appreciated, contribution was huge, Jim also served in a number of formal leadership positions in the CLA in its formative period. In every position in which he served, he was an active, contributing, always present, and always informed, leader. Jim participated on the all-important Budget and Finance Committee, the Long-Range Planning Committee, and a special blue-ribbon committee that was charged with investigating and reporting on an entirely new model for CLA membership, dues, and other revenue sources, among others. These assignments were only the beginning for Jim, as he totally immersed himself for several years in the work of creating the new CLA. He devoted substantial efforts, for instance, to reimagining the functions of what was then the California Young Lawyers Association and how it would relate to the CLA and to the sections of the CLA.

And, it should be mentioned, all of these leadership responsibilities and achievements were undertaken in a period when the CLA was functioning with only a skeletal staff, operating for many months out of a small space that the State Bar provided through a sublease arrangement at its headquarters after formal separation. It was almost a year after the creation of the CLA, on January 1, 2018, that a new Executive Director, Ona Dosunmu, was in place and began an active hiring program to provide staffing for the CLA leaders. Before that, Jim and his fellow CLA officers became virtual chief cooks, bottle washers, and paper pushers as they performed staff functions, as well as formulated policy, for the future of the CLA. For those of us involved in the BLS and other Sections during those tumultuous times, all we can say to Jim (and his able and loyal assistant, Linda Gubba-Reiner) is, "Wow" and a very big "Thank You."

Jim's success and leadership skills can be attributed at least partially to the important people in his life, including his mother, Lucy, Professor Epstein, Dean Keeton, and Judge Ely, all mentioned above. Jim also singles out as his BLS and CLA leaders and influencers Roland Brandel and Robert Harris, who continue to play key roles as advisors to the BLS Executive Committee and as members of various CLA committees. However, we would be remiss were we not to mention Jim's wife and partner in life, Gale, to whom he has been married 50 years this past January. Jim describes Gale as his lifelong supporter, as he has been hers. Gale earned her accounting degree while she and Jim worked their way through undergraduate school and while Jim was in law school and in his year of clerkship for Judge Ely. Gale became a CPA and worked for Price Waterhouse in its San Diego office, after taking on many other jobs as they both worked to get themselves from high school, through undergraduate studies, through law school, and starting their own family. For the past 20 years, Gale has worked at The Bishop's School in La Jolla, currently serving as the Senior Director of Advancement, Leadership, and Annual Gifts. They have three wonderful children. Katherine (aka "Kat") is a Russian literature scholar, formerly serving as a professor at Princeton in New Jersey, and then at Stanford in Palo Alto, and who recently joined Deloitte in its San Francisco office as a Writing Lead in the Pursuit Center of Excellence, and (best of all) who gifted Jim and Gale with their only grandchild so far, Margaret Gale ("Margie"). Their son, Travis, lives and works in Texas, and, like Jim, attended the UT Austin School of Communications, earning there his Master of Journalism. Travis is an editor/publisher for the Texas Electrical Coop magazine and digital platforms, with a circulation (reportedly the largest in the state of Texas) of approximately 1.6 million. Their youngest, daughter Julia, works for Rick Engineering in San Diego as a city and regional planner, having obtained her degree from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo's College of Architecture and Environmental Design. Even more impressive, Julia is Jim's first mate on his boat berthed at the San Diego Yacht Club, the "EXBERT."

As a founding member of his firm, Jim is a member of its Executive Committee and chair of the Insolvency and Commercial Bankruptcy practice group at Sullivan Hill. Jim is annually recognized in Best Lawyers® in the fields of Bankruptcy and Creditor-Debtor Rights/Insolvency and Reorganization Law, as well as Commercial Litigation, and has been named the "Lawyer of the Year" in San Diego in the fields of Bankruptcy and Creditor-Debtor Rights/Insolvency and Reorganization Law. Jim has been named a Top-Rated Lawyer by Martindale-Hubbell and American Lawyer Media in Commercial Bankruptcy and Creditor-Debtor Rights and in Corporate Restructuring

and Bankruptcy, and he enjoys an AV® Preeminent™ Peer Review Rating by Martindale-Hubbell. Jim frequently participates as a moderator, panelist, and lecturer at bankruptcy and commercial law seminars and symposiums. Jim has also been recognized as a Super Lawyer in the field of Bankruptcy and Creditor/Debtor Rights and was named a Top San Diego Lawyer by San Diego Magazine. He was selected as one of The Daily Transcript's "50 Influential Leaders" in the San Diego business community. He has also has twice been named Mediator of the Year by the Bankruptcy Court for the Southern District of California. Last, but not least, Jim is an instrument-rated private pilot, having served as an officer and president of the San Diego Flight Corp (dba San Diego Flying Club), San Diego's longest operating member-owned not-for-profit flying club.

Jim is most proud of his involvement in, and contributions to, the launching of the California Lawyers Association. Jim continues to this day working hard to ensure the Sections are vibrant and relevant to California lawyers. Jim's and others' vision of the CLA as "THE Bar Association for All California Lawyers" has become a reality, with much continued work to be done. But we all can thank Jim for his role in getting the CLA out of its incubation and into its growth and adolescent years. Jim's substantial experience and expertise, kindness, and modesty, and his ability to lead through difficult times, all make him well-qualified and deserving of this year's Business Law Section Lifetime Achievement Award. Congratulations Jim, and on behalf of the Business Law Section, we thank you for all you have done for the business and legal community in the State of California!

**Paul Pascuzzi (Felderstein Fitzgerald Willoughby Pascuzzi & Rios LLP in Sacramento) served as chair of the Business Law Section in 2009-2010 and currently serves as an advisor to the Executive Committee and chair of the Lifetime Achievement Award Selection Committee.*



BUSINESS
LAW

45
YEARS

CALIFORNIA
LAWYERS
ASSOCIATION

Congratulations

TO OUR VERY OWN

JAMES P. HILL

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**RECIPIENT OF THE BLS LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD
PRESENTED BY THE BUSINESS LAW SECTION OF THE CALIFORNIA LAWYERS ASSOCIATION**

**HIS CAREER AND SERVICE TO THE LEGAL COMMUNITY DEMONSTRATE HIS
ALLEGIANCE TO THE ADVANCEMENT OF OUR PROFESSION.**

CONGRATULATIONS, JIM, ON YOUR INCREDIBLE SUCCESS!

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