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Robin Davidson

TOP 100 - Taking the moment and making it matter

ABSTRACT:

Collecting votes for this year's Top 100, the staff of Daily Journal EXTRA found that no issue captured the community more than gay marriage. As a result, the names of Therese Stewart, Kate Kendell, Jon Davidson and Dennis Herrera entered this year's list.

Each year brings with it a new case or practice area in which lawyers are making their impact felt. Years past have seen the rise (and last year's fall) of the Gray Davis administration; technology, which made the Silicon Valley king before falling flat; an increased awareness on public interest work after 9/11; and litigation relating to corporate fraud, the Catholic church and energy.

Of course, some members of our list are perennials, their faces and accomplishments on the pages of our Top 100 issue as familiar as an old friend's. In this year's Top 100, our seventh annual, those fighting for equality - in marriage, at California's schools (Williams), over the Internet and in the work force (Wal-Mart) - grabbed your attention along with anyone who has the attention of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

We collected 1,500 votes from the legal community this year. We've broken out the top 10 vote-getters, who appear alphabetically and with slightly longer profiles, at the front of our list. They're followed by the 90 who round out the Top 100, with an influence that extends from San Diego to Sacramento, from the courts to the boardrooms, from youths who cannot afford lawyers to the wealthiest companies and individuals in the state.

With a new frontier joined in the battle for civil rights, it's probably no surprise that this year the legal community voted for our most diverse list ever: 22 women and 21 individuals who are ethnic minorities or openly gay or lesbian are included.

The flock of media drawn to the San Francisco clerk's office on those rainy days soon departed for the next big story even as the newlyweds and their lawyers settled in for the long, often-agonizing years of courtroom battles. Other members of our list, including the state's attorney general and the chief justice, have taken roles in the continuing saga, playing their respective parts on the road to justice.

Creating a moment in history is a special accomplishment. Picking up where that moment ends and carrying a cause to the finish is extraordinary.

Michael J. Bidart, partner, Shernoff Bidart & Darras, Claremont.

Long the nemesis of health maintenance organizations who have denied medical care to individuals, this bad-faith insurance litigator has switched his sights to the big picture. This winter, he helped convince an arbitrator that Blue Cross of California broke its contract with HMO subscribers when it changed their coverage in midterm. Now he's busy calculating damages for the 87,000 member class.

"If I was ever in a real problem, the only person I would hire is Mike Bidart."