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Judicial Council Announces 2006 Winners of Distinguished Service Awards

San Francisco—The Judicial Council of California has announced the recipients of its 2006 Distinguished Service Awards. Now in their 13th year, the awards are the highest honors given by the council to those who demonstrate extraordinary leadership and make significant contributions to the administration of justice in California.

Chief Justice Ronald M. George and Administrative Director of the Courts William C. Vickrey will present the awards at the Judicial Council's Fall Leadership Conference in November.

Jurist of the Year Award

This award honors members of the judiciary for their extraordinary dedication to the highest principles of the administration of justice statewide.

Justice Richard D. Aldrich, of the Court of Appeal, Second Appellate District, Division Three, has worked to improve the access of self-represented litigants and disabled persons to the courts, and has been instrumental in establishing complex litigation courts in California.

He has chaired several Judicial Council committees and task forces that have required collaboration among groups with many divergent goals and objectives. His leadership has enabled these groups to develop recommendations that have benefited both the judicial branch and the community at large.

Among Justice Aldrich's numerous achievements, one of the most notable is his leadership of the Judicial Council's Complex Litigation Task Force, from 1996 to 1999, which was responsible for establishing complex litigation courts in six major counties in California. The program was successful in helping California litigants with a more efficient and less

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costly method of resolving complex legal disputes. The committee published the *Deskbook on the Management of Complex Civil Cases*, which has become the benchmark against which other similar programs are evaluated by other state court systems across the nation.

As chair since 2004 of the Court Security Working Group, which brought together representatives of diverse organizations, Justice Aldrich helped establish statewide uniform funding standards for court security.

From 1992 to 1994, Justice Aldrich chaired the Judicial Council's Select Committee on Trial Court Coordination, the body that paved the way for unification of California trial courts. Justice Aldrich also was instrumental in establishing uniform delay reduction standards as chair of the Blue Ribbon Panel of Experts on the Fair and Efficient Administration of Civil Cases in 2003.

Justice Aldrich played a key role in the Judicial Council's adoption of rule 989.3 of the California Rules of Court, which sets forth procedures for requests for accommodations by persons with disabilities. It was the first rule of its kind the country adopted after the passage of the Americans With Disabilities Act in 1996. Justice Aldrich is responsible for the adoption of a similar policy by the State Bar of California.

In addition, Justice Aldrich helped inaugurate the Second District Appellate Settlement Conference and Mediation Program in 1995. The program has recruited experienced appellate practitioners to act as mediators and settlement conference officers. As a result of this program, approximately 30 percent of the pending appeals have been resolved, saving the time and expense of briefing and preparation of the appellate record.

Justice Aldrich began his judicial career in the Superior Court of Ventura County in 1991 and was appointed to the Court of Appeal in 1994. For the past 14 years, Justice Aldrich has been on the faculty of the B. E. Witkin Judicial College, where he teaches civil settlement techniques. He served on the Judicial Council from 1998 to 2002.

Judicial Administration Award

This award honors individuals in judicial administration for significant contributions to and leadership in their profession statewide.

Tressa Sloan Kentner, Executive Officer of the Superior Court of San Bernardino County, has been dedicated to enhancing public understanding of the courts and providing improved court services to Californians. A member of the Judicial Council from 2002 to 2005, she currently serves on the council's Court Executives Advisory Committee, Governing Committee of the Center for Judicial Education and Research, Enhanced Civil Assessments

Working Group, Trial Court Facilities Modification Working Group, Trial Court Budget Working Group, and Domestic Violence Practice and Procedure Task Force. Additionally, she has devoted a significant amount of time in support of continuing branch education and professional development for court staff.

She is a former member of the Judicial Council's Legal Services Trust Fund Commission and the Judicial Council's Access and Fairness Advisory Committee, Rules and Projects Committee, Court Technology Advisory Committee, Litigation Management Committee, and Court Profiles Advisory Committee.

Through her proactive leadership, the Superior Court of San Bernardino County has been able to sustain a high level of efficiency and service to the public. Ms. Kentner has made important contributions to court administration in the areas of court operations, facilities, automation, administrative services, and fiscal operations.

Ms. Kentner was instrumental in the unification of the Clerk of the Court's Office, and reengineered all case processing, including an automated system to improve procedural fairness and access to justice countywide. She also introduced innovative job classification and promotion systems that emphasize training and job skills.

Ms. Kentner also worked to ensure the upgrade of all courthouses in San Bernardino County, including the addition of seven courtrooms. Furthermore, her accomplishments include implementing unified management of civil, family law, criminal and traffic cases with Internet access. In the area of fiscal operations, she introduced court purchasing, planning, and other procedures to ensure oversight and accountability, and a budget management system to maintain court operations during fiscal crisis.

Ms. Kentner has been Executive Officer for the San Bernardino court since 1994. Previously, she was the Executive Officer for the Superior Court of Sonoma County and general manager of the Family Support Division at the Santa Clara County District Attorney's Office.

Patricia M. Yerian is Director of the Information Services Division of the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC). Throughout her 19-year career at the AOC, Ms. Yerian has demonstrated vision, teamwork, dedication, and professionalism. Working closely with the Judicial Council and AOC leadership, she has helped set the direction for judicial branch information technology. She currently serves as staff to the Judicial Council's Court Technology Advisory Committee.

Achievements include establishing the California Courts Technology Center, which provides full-service technology support to the courts. Ms. Yerian has been instrumental in development and support of new systems, including the SAP Court Accounting and Reporting System, the SAP Courts Human Resources Information System; the California

Case Management System; a Facilities Management system, and the Appellate Courts Case Management System.

Under her direction, the judicial branch is also developing statewide data exchange standards and a new Integration Services Backbone, which will assist courts in the exchange of data with statewide justice partners.

Ms. Yerian is leading the branch in developing a branchwide systems architecture and new court technologies, in order to create a common experience for the public in the California court—to enable citizens to receive the same high level of quality and service from any location.

Ms. Yerian also assumes a leadership role in professional organizations dedicated to advancement of court information technology. She is a member of the California State IT Council that advises the State Chief Information Officer on information technology in the executive branch.

Bernard E. Witkin Award

This award honors individuals other than members of the judiciary for their outstanding contributions to the courts of California.

John Hancock, the president of California Channel, a public affairs television network, has been instrumental in statewide television broadcasts of the official proceedings of the judicial branch of government. He has helped educate and inform the public about the courts and has helped make California a national leader in public outreach programs.

During the past several years, California Channel has broadcast selected oral arguments of the California Supreme Court and public hearings on access and fairness sponsored by the Judicial Council of California. In addition to broadcasting the Supreme Court's annual public outreach sessions to schools, Mr. Hancock has taken the initiative in televising important cases involving same-sex marriage, the parenting rights of same-sex couples, the constitutionality of the California Coastal Commission, criminal sentencing laws, and sexual harassment in the workplace.

California Channel's broadcasts of court sessions have demystified the legal process and have brought the courtroom to the people of California. Many Californians are able to see the state's high court at work, hearing arguments on some of the most important legal issues of the day. The public is also able to hear court and bar leaders testify on the impact of budget shortages and other challenges on access to justice in California.

In the first six months of 2006 alone, California Channel broadcast three Supreme Court calendar sessions and one Court of Appeal argument.

In addition to his duties as president of California Channel, Mr. Hancock has actively worked with Women Escaping A Violent Environment, a provider of comprehensive services to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. He serves on the California State University Regional and Continuing Education Advisory Board, the Sacramento Library Foundation Board of Directors, and the advisory board of the Government Technology Conference on Justice and Public Safety.

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The Judicial Council is the policymaking body of the California courts, the largest court system in the nation. Under the leadership of the Chief Justice and in accordance with the California Constitution, the council is responsible for ensuring the consistent, independent, impartial, and accessible administration of justice. The Administrative Office of the Courts carries out the official actions of the council and ensures leadership and excellence in court administration.