

Washington State Bar Association

1325 Fourth Avenue, Suite 600
Seattle, WA 98101-2539



Contact: Jennifer Olegario, WSBA Communications Manager
206-727-8212; jennifero@wsba.org

Six Outstanding Lawyers Receive Washington State Bar Association Local Hero Awards

Yakima County Bar honors the commitment and service of local legal professionals

Yakima, Washington [May 16, 2019] — The Washington State Bar Association (WSBA) has awarded six Yakima-area lawyers the Local Hero Award for their outstanding service in Yakima County.

The Local Hero Award is given to those who have made noteworthy contributions to their communities. **WSBA President Bill Pickett will present the awards at a luncheon on Thursday, May 16, at the Hilton Garden Inn in Yakima, Washington.** The WSBA members were nominated by the Yakima County Bar Association and local WSBA members.

The Local Hero Award winners were selected in recognition of their leadership and positive impacts on their community. Yakima County Bar President Cynthia Martinez commended the Local Heroes for their collective service and, through their good work, providing an example of the positive impact legal professionals can have on their local community.

Teresita Del Carmen Varela is a committed volunteer at the Yakima Women's Christian Association where she provides help to victims of domestic violence at the association's legal clinic. Additionally, being bilingual allows Del Carmen Varela to help fill the large unmet need for legal services among non-English-speaking community members.

Jeanie R. Tolcacher has served as president of Yakima County Volunteer Attorney Services (VAS) since 2016, spearheading recruitment of the VAS executive director and, through her guidance, ensuring the organization was able to continue providing civil legal assistance to indigent clients in the Yakima community amid administrative challenges.

Yakima Superior Court **Judge Ruth Reukauf** has been on the bench for nearly 25 years. Before her judicial role, Judge Reukauf was a deputy prosecuting attorney in the criminal divisions for both King and Yakima counties, as well as assistant dean for the Washington State Judicial College. Judge Reukauf helped bring to Yakima the Color of Justice Program, which had been highly successful in Pierce County. The program follows a national model of promoting legal careers for women by giving young girls from marginalized groups a full day to meet and job shadow Yakima County female judges and attorneys of diverse backgrounds.

Blaine Tamaki, in addition to being Washington's 2012 Trial Lawyer of the Year, is a member of the University of Washington Board of Regents and leads one of the area's best known and respected plaintiff's tort firms. With more than three decades of experience practicing law, Tamaki is a committed advocate on the Washington State Association of Justice and sits in leadership positions on a number of committees and event organizations.

David Thorner heads the Yakima County Bench Bar Association and remains one of the more distinguished judicial officers in Yakima County. He has a long record of service and volunteer work with the WSBA and his community, recently mediating issues between the superior court and county clerk.

Richard Johnson, who founded the family law firm Johnson & Johnson, has made a career of helping injured Yakima residents. He served as lead counsel in nearly 200 cases that reached a jury verdict in state and federal court, the Washington State Court of Appeals, and Washington Supreme Court. Johnson is a member of the WSBA and Washington State Association for Justice Court Rules & Procedures Committees. He was named the 2015 Outstanding Plaintiff's Trial Lawyer by the Washington Defense Trial Lawyers Association. Johnson was a commissioned officer in the U.S. Army Military Police Corps and now devotes time to coaching youth sports and serving as a member of the Yakima Southwest Rotary Club.

“It gives me great pleasure to acknowledge the service and commitment that so many of my admirable colleagues bring to our cherished community of Yakima,” WSBA President Pickett said. “These folks demonstrate the ethics, dignity, and ardent devotion demonstrated every day by the members of our association. They make our community and our profession better, and for that they have my most heartfelt appreciation.”

About the Washington State Bar Association

The WSBA operates under the delegated authority of the Washington Supreme Court to license the state’s nearly 40,000 lawyers and other legal professionals. In furtherance of its obligation to protect and serve the public, the WSBA both regulates lawyers and other legal professionals and serves its members as a professional association — all without public funding. The WSBA’s mission is to serve the public and the members of the Bar, to ensure the integrity of the legal profession, and to champion justice. For more information, visit www.wsba.org.

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