

# Sacramento

January/February 2015

# LAWYER

SACRAMENTO  
COUNTY BAR  
ASSOCIATION  
MAGAZINE

2015 SCBA President  
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# SacLEGAL Honors Influential Members of the LGBT Community at Its Second Annual Founders' Award Reception and the Unity Bar Dinner

by Natalie S. Bustamante and Jo Michael



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Sparked by the United States Supreme Court decisions in *Hollingsworth v. Perry* (2013) 133 S.Ct. 2652 and *United States v. Windsor* (2013) 133 S.Ct. 2675, 2014 saw unprecedented progress toward marriage equality across the country, with more than 30 states legalizing marriage for same-sex couples. In October, SacLEGAL recognized two women who have contributed significantly to both the Sacramento legal community and the continuing quest for LGBT equal rights.

At the Second Annual Founders' Award Reception, SacLEGAL honored United States Magistrate Judge **Allison Claire**, who served as Co-Chair with the founders of SacLEGAL, **Eileen Gillis** and **Larry Levine**. Judge Claire was introduced by friend and fellow past board member, **Kathleen E. Finnerty** of *Finnerty Law Offices, Inc.* Finnerty's creative form of introduction was a heartfelt and witty poem about Judge Claire that the audience and honoree all enjoyed.

As an appointee to the United States District Court for the Eastern District, Magistrate Judge Claire is the first member of the nation's federal judiciary to be in a state-sanctioned same-sex marriage. She and her wife married during the brief window in 2008 after the California Supreme Court validated marriages for same-sex couples and before Proposition 8 outlawed them. In accepting the Founders' Award, Judge Claire gave truly inspiring remarks about her penchant for activism before going into law, and how this segued into a career as a federal public defender. She also shared her experience challenging the denial of federal benefits for



**SacLEGAL co-founder Eileen Gillis and Speaker Kathleen E. Finnerty**



**SacLEGAL Co-Chair Jo Michael, Teri McKown, Magistrate Judge Allison Claire, and SacLEGAL Co-Chair Natalie Bustamante**



**Judge Thadd Blizzard, SacLEGAL board member Steve Muni, Judge David Brown, and SacLEGAL board member Allison Cross**



**SacLEGAL Treasurer Pamela Jones, Uptown Studios Representative Tania Torres, and Unity Bar Master of Ceremonies Windie O. Scott**

her wife and witnessing first-hand the profound effect the *Windsor* decision had on federal employees. This occasion was the first time Judge Claire had ever spoken publicly about these experiences, and the rapt attention of the diverse audience of attorneys, law students, and members of the judiciary was palpable. Judge Claire concluded her remarks with a call to action, encouraging everyone to do their part to ensure equality for all members of the LGBT community.

The following week, at the annual dinner hosted by the Unity Bar Association of Sacramento, SacLEGAL honored **Tina Reynolds**, who was introduced by SacLEGAL Treasurer **Pamela**

**Jones**. Reynolds is the owner of local marketing firm Uptown Studios and co-founder of Equality Action NOW, a grassroots organization formed in 2008 in response to California's same-sex marriage ban. Hailed as a tireless activist, Reynolds continues to fulfill her passion for social change by working with non-profit organizations to fulfill their goals. Uptown Studios representative **Tania Torres** accepted the Unity Bar award on behalf of Reynolds. The Unity Bar scholarship recipient for this year is Pacific McGeorge School of Law student **Joshua Bohannon**, who is President of the McGeorge Lambda Law Students Association, among other academic and co-curricular achievements. ⚖️