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Summer 2019



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# President's Message



Sonya Fischer

## Spotlight on Public Justice

By Sonya Fischer  
*OTLA Guardian*

On Tuesday, August 27, 2002, the lives of Arthur Bryant, his wife, Nancy Johnson, and their seven-year-old son, Wally, changed forever. The family was driving south on Highway 97, headed through La Pine, Oregon. They had only traveled a short distance that morning from Sunriver, where Bryant, the executive director for Trial Lawyers for Public Justice, had been the keynote speaker at the OTLA Summer Convention. The family got an early start that day because they wanted to get home to Oakland in time to get Wally to bed and ready for his first day of second grade. Bryant and Johnson were looking forward to a long, leisurely, end-of-summer drive in Johnson's 1993 Toyota Corolla station wagon. Suddenly, a Chevy Silverado four-wheel-drive pick-up truck, headed the opposite direction, swerved into their car at a high rate of speed and blew the smaller vehicle apart.

Everyone in the car was injured, Johnson was seriously injured and Wally broke his leg. Bryant bore the brunt of the crash and suffered the most serious injuries. He lay near death at St. Charles Medical Center in Bend as friends and family were notified. He was diagnosed with a traumatic brain injury, two collapsed lungs, broken bones in his arms and legs and a crushed right hand and

foot. OTLA members organized a blood drive and came to the family's assistance every way they possibly could including providing round-the-clock visitors, housing, food and playmates for Wally.

### An appropriate name

That winter, the OTLA board made what to many seemed an obvious choice. They renamed the OTLA Public Justice Award the Arthur H. Bryant Public Justice Award, in honor of the man who nearly lost his life and his family attending the convention at Sunriver. There were many ties between OTLA and TLPJ (the organization now known simply Public Justice). First and foremost, both are organizations seeking justice and advocating for the public interest. Jeff Foote was president of OTLA in 1990-91 and an officer on the TLPJ board when he conceived of the annual award for OTLA, patterned after a similar award given by TLPJ. The OTLA Board voted the award would be given "to recognize an individual or group who, throughout the previous year, strived to create a more just society through creative litigation and innovative work with the broader public interest community."

It would be presented each year at the summer convention. From 2003 on, the newer honor has been appropriately known as the Arthur H. Bryant Public Justice Award.

### It matters

I'm sharing this story because I wasn't aware of all the details myself. I'm sure many other members may not know the whole story of the origins and the naming of this prestigious award. Every year at the convention, the ceremony honoring the year's recipient(s) of the Arthur H. Bryant Public Justice Award is a highlight for me. Each award involves an inspiring story. Usually it involves fighting against societal norms to move the moral arc of the universe just a little closer to justice. (See list of recipients below.) All the recipients and their clients have amazing stories — a few are memorable to me.

At the 2004 convention, attendees heard how OTLA member Steve Beriman and political activist Steve Novick worked on state ballot titles protecting survivors' right to access to juries. In 2011, OTLA member Lake Perriguay and his client, student teacher Seth Stambaugh, were both honored for fighting for Stambaugh's rights. Stambaugh was



Arthur Bryant, Nancy Johnson and their son, Wally, in 2001.



*The OTLA Public Justice Award was named for Arthur Bryant after he nearly lost his life driving home from the 2002 OTLA Summer Convention.*

banned from the Beaverton School District after admitted to a grade school student that he, Stambaugh, couldn't ever marry because he was gay. Last year, we heard how the legal team of OTLA members Beth Creighton, Michael Rose and David Park worked for six years to help Adalberto Flores-Haro and his family receive justice after Flores-Haro was shot and seriously injured due to the unwarranted action of tactical police officers. This year the spotlight will be on sexual

harassment at the Oregon State Capitol. We will learn how four amazing OTLA members — Dana Sullivan, Whitney Stark, Ashley Vaughn and Charese Rhony — stood with their clients to say sexual harassment at the Legislature is not okay.

### To public justice

As trial lawyers, we seize opportunities to bring justice to our clients' lives and, to the public at large. As your president, I am honored to serve with so many committed lawyers who care.

We live in a time when social media rule the public dialogue. But as lawyers, we wrestle with the reality of difficult issues and we know that it is not so simple. As lawyers, we promote and protect public justice every day. So take a moment and thank yourself for being part of the good fight, the peoples fight. Each of us, every day, always.

When you are at the convention and present for the honoring of this year's winners of the Arthur H. Bryant Public Justice Award, listen carefully and look around you. Next year, it could be any

one of us honored for the work we do every day for public justice – to change the lives of those around us.

*Note: For more on Arthur Bryant's near death experience, I encourage you to pick up a copy of "The Rubber Orchestra: A Memoir in Two Voices." It's a compelling account of what happened written by Nancy Johnson, Bryant's wife and is the source for some of the details I've related above. Johnson, an accomplished journalist, was completing the memoir in 2012, when she died from ovarian cancer. Bryant recently announced his retirement from his role as Public Justice Chairman.*

*Sonya Fischer is OTLA President. She practices family law and is the owner of Fischer Family Law PC. She also is a member of the Clackamas County Board of Commissioners. Fischer contributes to the OTLA Guardians of Civil Justice at the Sustaining Member level. Her firm is at 385 1st St., Ste. 221, Lake Oswego, OR 97034. You can contact her at 503-635-3548 or sonya@fischer-familylaw.com.*

## Arthur H. Bryant Public Justice Award

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|--|--|--|
| 1991 Arthur Johnson<br>Elden Rosenthal                                   | 2001 Ad Hoc Committee<br>of Newport, Oregon                  | 2012 Arthur Schmidt  |
| 1992 Daniel O'Leary  | 2002 Tiffani Alvera<br>and her team of advocates             | 2013 Richard Lane  |
| 1993 Jeffrey Foote<br>Sen. Richard Springer                              | Larry Wobbrock,<br>Richard Lane<br>and Chuck Tauman          | 2014 David Sugerman<br>Amy Johnson<br>Tim Quenelle<br>Rep. Tobias Read<br>Rep. Jennifer Williamson |
| 1994 Greg Kafoury<br>Campaign For Equal Justice                          | 2003 Charles Merten<br>Oregon Advocacy Center                | 2015 Hala Gores  |
| 1995 Sharon Stevens<br>Save Our Rights! Coalition                        | 2004 Steve Berman<br>Steve Novick                            | 2016 Tom D'Amore<br>Rob Dolton<br>Neil Jackson<br>DeeDee McElhaney                                 |
| 1996 Spencer Neal<br>Basic Rights Oregon                                 | 2005 Alan Graf and the<br>NW Constitutional<br>Rights Center | 2017 Judy Snyder   |
| 1997 David Paul<br>PCUN  | 2006 Jim McCandlish  | 2018 Beth Creighton<br>Michael Rose<br>David Park  |
| 1998 Martha Walters  | 2007 Phil Goldsmith  | 2019 Dana Sullivan<br>Whitney Stark<br>Ashley Vaughn<br>Charese Rhony                              |
| 1999 Carl Kiss<br>Jim Coon<br>Bill Gaylord<br>Chuck Tauman<br>Ray Thomas | 2008 Mark Griffin  |  |
| 2000 Trust Juries<br>Not Politicians Coalition                           | 2010 Tom Steenson  |  |
|  | 2011 Lake Perriguet and<br>client Seth Stambaugh             |  |