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ASIAN AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION  
*of the Greater Bay Area*

## January 2014 Newsletter

### President's Column

By David Sohn



Dear Friends,

Since my last column, we have had a number of exciting events come to pass which I am proud to report back on.

In early October 2013, our Community Services Committee organized a group of 40 volunteers to help package food at the San Francisco Food Bank.

That same month, we co-hosted a joint happy hour with our sister bar association, APABA-SV, in Redwood City. We also hosted AABA Idol and Billiards Night, two events that continue to be successful year after year.

In late October 2013, we organized a first-of-its-kind leadership and business development retreat for APA partners and in-house attorneys with Ascend, one of the premier national professional organizations for APA executives. This full-day retreat exposed participants to the specific behaviors, competencies, and experiences required to succeed at the executive level. Prominently discussed were the stereotypes and prejudices faced by APAs in the legal profession, and how to overcome them.

In November 2013, we held our first annual Speed Networking Event. This event was led by Board member, Marina Sarmiento Feehan, a professional branding coach, who shared invaluable tips on how to network the right way.

In December 2013, we kicked off our Judicial Mentorship Program. The purpose of this Program is to help members interested in a possible career on the bench get connected with AABA's deep roster of judicial

mentors. For many APAs, the judicial application process is a mystery. Through this Program, we hope to not only de-mystify this process, but to build a strong pipeline of qualified judicial candidates in the coming years.

This month, our Solo and Small Firm Committee concluded its prolific schedule of events with a one-of-a-kind program entitled "Buying or Selling a Law Practice." Our Solo and Small Firm Committee has done an amazing job staying ahead of the curve to meet the needs of our solo and small firm members.

Additionally, our In-House Committee organized its Fifth Annual General Counsel Roundtable, featuring a panel of distinguished APA women. The panelists shared their perspectives on rising through the executive management ranks at their respective companies.

This coming week, our Civil Rights and Public Law Committees will be hosting a dynamic panel discussion on the unique circumstances facing non-citizens in the criminal justice system. We have lined up several extraordinary speakers, including San Francisco District Attorney George Gascon.

In a couple months, on March 14, 2014, we will be having our 37th Annual Installation Dinner at the San Francisco Marriott Marquis. If you are interested in sponsorship opportunities, please feel free to contact anyone on our Board. You do not want to miss this Dinner! If there is only one Dinner to attend, this is it!

With a new term almost upon us, all voter-eligible members should have received ballots for the election of new AABA Officers and Directors. Please make sure to take the time to vote for next term's leadership. Your vote is critical to ensuring that AABA continues to serve you and your professional needs as your bar association.

Finally, this is my last President's Column. I would like to say a big thank you to all of my fellow Officers and Board members for working hard to uphold AABA's mission this past term. It's been an honor working with all of you. Let's keep on truckin' and finish strong!

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### **Profile on Vince Chhabria**

By: Vincent Tong, AABA Newsletter Committee Member

"A rigorous and independent thinker who can analyze complex information, facts and law, and cut through to critical issues very concisely." – Burk E. "Buck" Delventhal, Government Team Chief Attorney, San Francisco

## City Attorney's Office

"An incredible attorney who hit the ground running on day one. He is an intellectual and an amazing lawyer; it is incredible how his mind tirelessly works." – Therese "Terry" Stewart, Chief Deputy City Attorney, San Francisco City Attorney's Office

Who is Vince Girdhari Chhabria?



Mr. Chhabria is a Deputy City Attorney for Government Litigation and Co-Chief of Appellate Litigation at the San Francisco City Attorney's Office. Since 2005, Mr. Chhabria has played a critical role in numerous high-profile cases, including San Francisco's challenge to California's ban on same-sex marriage, the successful defense of a city law requiring local employers to help pay for health insurance for their workers, the ban of tobacco sales in pharmacies, as well as the prosecution of a wage and hour case against a local car wash that illegally subjected their employees to unpaid waiting time in violation of employment laws. In 2008, Mr. Chhabria was named one of California's top 20 lawyers under 40 by the Daily Journal. In the following year, Mr. Chhabria received one of the California Lawyers of the Year award from The Recorder.

Mr. Chhabria's road to the Judge's chair began with his father's emigration from Delhi, India to attend college in Kentucky, and subsequently attaining his master's degree in accounting from Golden Gate University. In pursuit of the American Dream, the San Francisco native graduated from U.C. Santa Cruz with a degree in political science. After a three-year stint on Capitol Hill, Mr. Chhabria took his intellectual curiosity and fervor for justice to U.C. Berkeley School of Law, where he graduated with honors and was named to the Order of the Coif. Thereafter, Mr. Chhabria clerked for U.S. District Court Judge, The Honorable Charles Breyer and the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals Judge, The Honorable James Browning, before serving as a clerk for U.S. Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer for the 2001-2002 term. Immediately prior to joining the city attorney's office, Mr. Chhabria gained invaluable litigation experience and legal prowess while defending white-collar cases as an associate at the law firm of Covington & Burling, LLP.

Despite his achievements, however, the recent buzz surrounding Mr. Chhabria is his nomination by President Obama in July 2013 for a judgeship on the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California. Despite clearing the Senate Judiciary Committee in November 2013, Senate Republicans refused to allow a full floor vote on his nomination on December 20, 2013. As such, Mr. Chhabria will need to be renominated by

President Obama in 2014. If he is renominated and confirmed, Mr. Chhabria would become the first South Asian Article III judge in California.



### **About the Author**

Vincent Tong is an employment and business attorney based in Oakland, California. When not serving individuals and their businesses, Vincent volunteers with several non-profit legal services organizations. Vincent is also an avid rock climber and aspires to be a world traveler. You can find him online at [www.tong-law.com](http://www.tong-law.com).

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### **2013 AABA Annual Holiday Party @ O3 BISTRO AND LOUNGE**

By: David Yoshida and Ben Uy, Social Committee Co-Chairs

On December 5, 2013, AABA concluded another fun year of successful social gatherings and networking events with the merriest one of all – the Annual Holiday Party at the Asian fusion restaurant, O3 Bistro and Lounge. The chilly weather did not deter almost 200 judges, attorneys, law students, and legal services professionals from coming out and enjoying the jolly festivities. Attendees enjoyed the free-flowing holiday spirits, endless gourmet appetizers, a fun photo booth, great music courtesy of talented DJs, and heartwarming performances by our AABA Idol Karaoke Competition winners – Joshua Chang, Dyanne Cho, Kelsey Yoro, and Yunah Rha. The hosted bar and piquant hors d’oeuvres helped to create a warm ambiance that kept big smiles on our members’ faces throughout the evening.

Thank you all for your ongoing support and for making this year’s Holiday Party another great success. We hope that everyone enjoys a safe and happy holiday season. Keep your eyes open for the Social Committee’s next event sometime in early 2014. We wish you all the merriest of holidays and look forward to seeing you all very soon.

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## **A Glimpse of the Road to Partnership**

By: Suzette Torres

I recently became a partner at my firm. Out of the 5 partners in this firm, I'm the only female, minority partner. People often ask me questions about being a partner and whether it's worth it.

### **What is it like being a woman partner?**

The best way for me to describe my job is that being a partner is somewhat similar to having another husband. Back in the days when I was single, I only needed to worry about myself. I was independent and did not have to report to anyone. Once I had a boyfriend, my thought process changed. My schedule now involved someone else. So if I wanted to go to dinner, I'd check to see if my boyfriend was available. He'd ask for my input on picking a restaurant or choosing a movie, and I liked that he valued my opinion. He made me care about our future together. I would joke with him about when he was going to ask me to marry him. After several years of pestering, we finally got married. Throughout our marriage, we've had some "heated disputes", which included issues such as finances, family, friends, sports, life, politics, etc. But to this day, we remain together because we love each other, are invested in each other, and our family is worth fighting for.

When I was an associate, I only needed to worry about my own billable hours, getting a raise, and when would I get my bonus. As the cliché goes, I was independent but worked well with groups. When I became a senior associate, the partners in the firm valued my input more and trusted me with taking over cases with very minimal supervision. One day, I finally I threw down the gauntlet and let my boss know that I wanted partnership in the firm. After several years, I finally became a partner. As a partner, you don't necessarily worry about your own billable hours. You think about everyone's billable hours. You want to make sure the firm collects enough receivables to make overhead, cover costs, and make payroll. You think about the pros and cons about taking risks, how to bring in new clients, and whether there is enough work to keep everyone busy.

It comes to no surprise that during this partnership, my partners and I have had some disputes about finances, office management, etc. We may not always agree, but we value each other's input and are able to resolve our differences. I am invested in this firm, and I want to see this firm continue to grow and prosper.

### **Getting on the Road to Partnership**

The road to partnership was not easy. When I was younger, I would tell people that I wanted to become an attorney and the response I received was, "Really? I can't see you as an attorney. You're too nice." I thought, what the hell does that mean? I learned very quickly that some people make certain assumptions or judgments on what an attorney should look/act like.

For many years, I've been mistaken as the court reporter. In fact, I was mistaken as a court reporter by another court reporter (in his defense, he thought his office double-booked reporters for a deposition). It was only when I started talking that people realized that I am an attorney. It begs the question: If other people don't see me as an attorney, how will the partners ever see me as an equal? I didn't know how to get the partners' attention and I didn't know who to ask about it. I assumed that my partners would automatically see my successes and would acknowledge me accordingly. I thought it was bad form to brag or gloat about my achievements, but that is a grave misconception. I realized that it's okay to celebrate my accomplishments and highlight my contributions to the firm. It was okay to want other people to acknowledge it. The lesson I learned was that I had to do more than just dress for the job that I want. I had actually proactively marketed myself to the partners and showed them that I have earned the respect of my peers, my staff, the judge, and the jury.

One of my strongest assets is that I am a people person. I noticed that clients have an easier time talking to me (maybe because I look like the court reporter) and I'm a great listener. To them, I was more than just an attorney. I was their trusted advisor. This skill is what helps my firm retain clients and get repeat business. It also helps me to be a better rainmaker and a better advocate. After all these years, I finally learned that if I want to rise to the top, I can't sit on the sidelines. I have to stand in the spotlight, take risks, and be confident to let the firm know that I am irreplaceable.

On a personal note, one major setback was being diagnosed with breast cancer shortly after I started my legal career. At that time, partnership was furthest from my mind. When I finished all of my cancer treatments, I thought I was out of running for partnership. Again, it was a great misconception. My cancer history will always be a part of me, but it will never define who I am as a person or as an attorney. Looking back, I wish I had tapped into our resources in AABA and FBANC (Filipino Bar Association of Northern California) sooner and sought the advice and guidance from our partner members. Had I done so, I don't think I would have waited so long to seek partnership, and I would have been better prepared on this journey.

This is just a glimpse of my road to partnership. Everyone's journey is different. No matter what road you choose, always be proactive and don't ever be afraid to celebrate your success out loud.



### **About the Author**

Suzette Torres is a partner at Bardellini, Straw, Cavin & Bupp, LLP ([www.bscb.com](http://www.bscb.com)) in San Ramon. BSCB represents individual and corporate clients throughout Northern California in real estate, business, litigation and transactions. Suzette is an active member of AABA and FBANC (Filipino Bar Association of Northern California) and East Bay CREW (Commercial Real Estate Women). She currently serves as a Board Member on the Contra Costa County Bar Association Women's Section. In her spare time, she mentors law students at Golden Gate University Law School and serves as a volunteer judge/evaluator for Golden Gate University Law School's Trial Advocacy class and Bernie L. Segal's Criminal Mock Trial Competition.

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### **Joint East Bay Happy Hour With Alameda County Bar Association**

By: Emily Tam, Social Committee Co-Chair

On November 6, 2013, AABA's Social Committee and the Alameda County Bar Association Barristers Executive Committee held a joint Happy Hour at Bar Dogwood in Uptown Oakland. Approximately 50 attorneys, judges and law students enjoyed Happy Hour drinks and complimentary appetizers throughout the night. It was a great opportunity for AABA attorneys in the East Bay to mingle with attorneys from the Alameda County Bar Association. It was also a great opportunity for law students to network with attorneys from both organizations. We look forward to hosting another successful East Bay Happy Hour Event next year!

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## Ohana: AABA Mentorship Means Family

By Lisa P. Mak

This year, the AABA Mentorship Committee revamped its mentorship program and created “families” comprised of senior attorneys, junior attorneys, and law students to help AABA members connect and build relationships amongst each other. The program began with a “meet and greet” for families in August 2013, followed by family brunch events and smaller gatherings initiated by family members.

“We are trying our best to bring the mentors and mentees together as ‘families’ participating in various fun activities in order to foster a genuine relationship amongst the members of the family,” explained Josh Chang, Co-Chair of the AABA Mentorship Committee. “The idea is that everyone in the family can contribute something to the family as well, not just the designated mentors. The ultimate goal is to have them continue this relationship for the rest of their careers or lives.”

For this article, three AABA mentees from different backgrounds graciously shared their perspectives on the mentorship program. Thank you to all the participating mentors and mentees who have made this program successful so far!



Sylvia Nguyen

2L, Golden Gate University

### **What are your career goals?**

After graduating, I plan on working as a criminal defense attorney. As a side project, I want to create an organization that helps young adults who have been incarcerated get respectable full-time jobs. Later on, I'd like to become a judge and/or a law school professor.

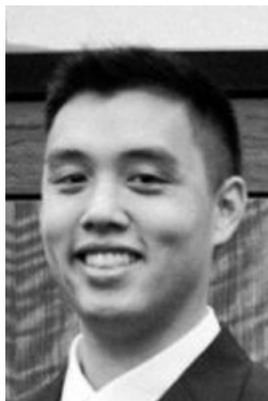
### **Why is mentorship important to you, and how has the AABA mentorship program helped you so far?**

I believe students need guidance as they step into the world of law. Books can only teach so much. The rest of what we know can only be taught through experience and, aside from having those personal experiences ourselves, it's best to be taught by someone who has [those experiences.] The program has given me the opportunity to learn from attorneys with similar backgrounds as myself. Despite the difference in legal interests, I found that all our journeys to reach our individual goals are actually very similar. Learning how much my

mentors have overcome, and seeing how happy they are, have encouraged me to always keep a positive attitude despite the struggles that come with being an attorney.

**Since your involvement with AABA, what's the most interesting thing you've learned?**

I've learned not to be afraid to get out there and MEET people. So much of our field involves networking and socializing, but sometimes I'd feel almost counterproductive as though I should be studying instead! I've met incredible people over the past few months and I'm certain no grade could ever be more valuable than the relationships I've built with the students and attorneys of the AABA mentorship program.



Hendson Lin

UC Hastings Graduate, New Attorney

**What are your career goals?**

My long-term career goal and dream job is to become the general counsel at a start-up and be a part of its legal team from incorporation through IPO.

**Why is mentorship important to you, and how has the AABA mentorship program helped you so far?**

Mentorship has always been near and dear to me. From the time I joined Phi Alpha Delta as an undergrad, to joining APALSA and AABA in law school, I have been amazingly fortunate in meeting people I look up to and respect who have taken a genuine interest in my personal success. It is extremely important to me to pay forward the wisdom and help I have received from others. The AABA mentorship has helped me gain perspective on the bigger picture of my legal career by allowing me to gain advice from experienced attorneys who have been through the obstacles I face as a new attorney and come out the other side.

**Since your involvement with AABA, what's the most interesting thing you've learned?**

I've learned never to underestimate the spikey-haired, 25-year-old-looking Asian male next to you, because although he looks young, he could actually be the AABA President and my mentor, David Sohn!



Yue Liu  
2L, UC Hastings

**What are your career goals?**

I'm still contemplating my career options. Ideally, I'd like to go back to China and practice as a public interest/criminal defense lawyer. However, the police regularly pressures such lawyers by visiting and interrogating them about their activities and their clients. I might choose to stay in the US or go elsewhere to do similar things – fighting bullies.

**Why is mentorship important to you, and how has the AABA mentorship program helped you so far?**

Mentorship is important because I don't know anyone in California, and AABA is the closest thing to a family. I've been the beneficiary of kind advice in every respect. Plus, AABA provides free food! AABA has made me feel safer and also encouraged me to challenge myself.

**Since your involvement with AABA, what's the most interesting thing you've learned?**

The most interesting thing I've learned is that we cannot be modest in America and must go out of our way to promote ourselves.

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**AABA Members Show Generous Support of Relief Efforts for Victims of Typhoon Haiyan**

By Dyanna Quizon

When devastating events happen globally, AABA will often partner with other bar associations to help provide relief and support to those who have been impacted. Recently, AABA was proud to be a platinum sponsor of a lively happy hour/relief drive/fundraiser spearheaded by the Filipino Bar Association of Northern California (FBANC). Funds and donations collected at the event were sent to non-profit organizations – National Alliance for Filipino Concerns (“NAFCON”) and West Bay Pilipino Multi-Service Center – to distribute to those in need in the most devastated regions of the Philippines affected by Typhoon Haiyan. The event occurred at Drake Bar and Lounge in San Francisco on Tuesday, November 19, 2013.

AABA members were well-represented in the crowd and made generous, individual contributions. FBANC expressed its appreciation for the overwhelming community response from bar associations like AABA to its call for assistance.

“We accomplished this swift and significant result solely because of generosity of the legal and political community of the Bay Area who not only donated and volunteered, but also reached out to their co-workers and employers for contributions,” FBANC President Abigail Rivamonte Mesa said in a statement.

Over three hundred guests raised money by tipping such illustrious guest bartenders as State Senator Leland Yee, San Francisco Supervisor John Avalos, and San Francisco Public Defender Jeff Adachi and separately contributing donations. Drake Bar and Lounge also donated 20 percent of the evening’s receipts to the relief effort.

Including the funds raised at the event, FBANC raised over \$20,000 for victims of Typhoon Haiyan with the help of local Bay Area lawyers’ groups, law firms, law schools and individuals. For AABA members who would like to make online financial donations, they can find a published list of approved aid organizations at FBANC’s website – [www.fbanc.org](http://www.fbanc.org).

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