

OACTA AWARDS PROGRAM

Not all awards will be distributed annually. Members are welcome to provide nominations to the OACTA Awards Committee who will make recommendations to the OACTA Board of Trustees. OACTA Awards will be presented at the OACTA Annual Meeting held in November.

Excellence in Advocacy Award

The Excellence in Advocacy Award honors a lawyer whose career has been distinguished by his or her commitment to effective client advocacy both in and outside the courtroom, professionalism, civility, and community involvement, as well as intelligence, creativity, personality, sensitivity, good judgment, and the education and training of newer attorneys.

Award Criteria: The candidate should be recognized as a highly skilled advocate, effective in resolving clients' legal disputes whether in negotiation, mediation, arbitration, trial or on appeal. A candidate for this award must have practiced law for at least 25 years (or in the case of present or past member of the judiciary, at least 15 years) and should also be a model of professionalism and civility, as well as a leader in his or her community and/or the profession. The candidate need not be still living, a member of OACTA, or currently practicing law.

PAST RECIPIENTS:

2025 - John M. Hands, Esq.
2024 - Neil F. Freund, Esq.
2023 – Jeffrey W. Hutson, Esq.
2022 – Cormac DeLaney, Esq.
2021 – Nicholas E. Subashi, Esq.
2019 – James L. McCrystal, Jr., Esq.
2018 - Frederick Hunker, JD, CPCU
2017 - Lawrence A. Sutter, Esq. (posthumously)
2016 – David W. Peck, Esq.
2015 – Carolyn A. Taggart, Esq.
2014 – James R. Gallagher, Esq.
2013 – Irene Keyse Walker, Esq.
2012 – W. Roger Fry, Esq.
2011 – Rick E. Marsh, Esq.
2010 – David C. Greer, Esq.
2009 - Ronald A. Rispo, Esq.

Respected Adversary Award

The Respected Adversary Award honors an attorney who, while often standing on the opposite side of the courtroom, demonstrates professionalism, integrity, and skillful advocacy, elevating the practice of law and enriching the adversarial process. This award recognizes a member of the plaintiff's bar who is not only a formidable opponent but also a valued peer—someone whose commitment to justice, civility, and ethical conduct fosters mutual respect and strengthens the legal community.

Award Criteria: The candidate should be a practicing attorney who devotes a substantial portion of his or her practice to the representation of clients on a contingency fee basis. He or she should demonstrate the highest standards of legal excellence and collegiality, and

through skillful representation of his or her clients, challenge OACTA members to become better advocates, and in doing so, contribute meaningfully to the pursuit of fair outcomes and the rule of law.

PAST RECIPIENTS:

2025 - Daniel R. Mordarski, Esq.
2024 - D. Arthur Rabourn, Esq.
2023 – Craig P. Scott, Esq.
2022 – K. James Sullivan, Esq.
2021 – Robert J. Wagoner, Esq.
2019 – Robert P. Rutter, Esq.
2018 - Eleana Drakatos, Esq.
2017 - James (Jay) M. Kelley III, Esq.
2016 – Steven P. Collier, Esq.
2015 – Mark Kitrick, Esq.
2014 – John D. Holschuh, Jr., Esq.
2013 - Eric Kennedy, Esq.
2012 – Patrick W. Allen, Esq.
2011 – John M. Gonzales, Esq.
2010 – Nicholas E. Bunch, Esq.
2009 - Paul O. Scott, Esq.
2005 – Frank A. Ray, Esq. (Professionalism in Civil Law Award recipient)

Outstanding Advocacy Award

The Outstanding Advocacy Award recognizes exceptional advocacy in a particular and important matter accomplished in the most recent twelve to twenty-four months. The matter need not be highly publicized but should be one impacting more than just the interests of the candidate's client(s).

Award Criteria: The candidate must be a current member of OACTA and have recently and successfully advocated on behalf of his or her client(s) in a matter of concern both to the client and to either OACTA, the legal profession, or society at large, whether in a civil trial or appeal or in the public realm.

PAST RECIPIENTS:

2023 – David C. Comstock, Jr., Esq.
2020 – Richard M. Garner, Esq.
2019 – Benjamin C. Sassé, Esq.
2017 – Timothy J. Fitzgerald, Esq. & Michael M. Neltner, Esq.
2014 – David S. Lockemeyer, Esq.
2013 – Richard M. Garner, Esq.

Outstanding Young Lawyer Award

The Outstanding Young Lawyer Award recognizes outstanding achievement, leadership, and contribution to the legal profession and community by a newer/younger lawyer. Considerations include achievement, leadership, proficiency, service to the profession, and service to the community.

Award Criteria: The candidate must be a licensed attorney, a current member of OACTA, and have been practicing law for ten or fewer years or under the age of 40.

PAST RECIPIENTS:

2025 - Hannah M. Heinmiller, Esq.
2024 - Elisabeth C. Arko, Esq.
2023 – Phillip M. Sarnowski, Esq.
2022 – Thomas N. Spyker, Esq.
2021 – Adelia A. Mohan, Esq.
2020 – Christopher F. Mars, Esq.
2019 – Zachary B. Pyers, Esq.
2018 - David J. Oberly, Esq.
2017 - Melanie Irvin, Esq.
2016 – Lori E. Thomson, Esq.
2015 – Natalie M. Wais, Esq.
2012 – Lauren K. Epperley, Esq.
2011 – Jill K. Mercer, Esq.
2010 – Jonathon L. Beck, Esq.
2004 – Crystal Richie, Esq.

Public Service Award

The Public Service Award honors public officials and journalists for significant contributions to advancing civil justice. This award recognizes a public servant or member of the media whose advocacy and accomplishments align with OACTA's mission to promote fairness, excellence, and integrity in the civil justice system.

Award Criteria: The candidate may be a current or former public official, journalist, or member of the media, but need not be or have ever been a member of OACTA.

PAST RECIPIENTS:

2023 – Chief Justice Sharon L. Kennedy
2021 – Director Judith French
2017 - Judge Michael P. Donnelly
2015 – Judge Lisa Sadler
2014 – Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor
2013 - Evelyn Lundberg Stratton
2005 - Hon. Michael H. Watson
2005 – Justice Judith A. Lanzinger
2005 – Hon. Patrick J. Tiberi
2004 – Representative Bill Seitz
2004 – Senator Steve Austria

Distinguished Contributions to the Community Award

The Distinguished Contributions to the Community Award recognizes an attorney who has made a positive impact on the civic, artistic, athletic, scholastic or philosophical/religious aspect of his or her community. The award may recognize such efforts over a period of time or a single act of significance.

Award Criteria: The candidate must be an attorney, with preference given to a current member of OACTA and have demonstrated service to his or her community beyond that demonstrated in the practice of law.

PAST RECIPIENTS:

2025 - Scott R. Mote, Esq.
2024 – Kurt D. Anderson, Esq.
2022 – Hilary S. Taylor, Esq. (posthumously)
2016 – Mark F. McCarthy, Esq.
2014 – Tabitha Justice, Esq.
2013 – Carolyn A. Taggart
2012 – Thomas M. Glassman, Esq.
2011 – Stephanie D. Adams, Esq.
2009 - Carter E. Strang, Esq.

Lifetime Achievement Award

The Lifetime Achievement Award honors a current or former long-standing OACTA member for their contributions to the association and the profession, over a lifetime. The recipient of this award will have devoted a substantial portion of his or her career to the defense of civil claims in Ohio and consistently exhibited ideals such as integrity, leadership, skill, and a long commitment to the values and mission of OACTA.

Award Criteria: The candidate must be a present or former member of OACTA who has exhibited commitment to the mission of OACTA and the highest values of the profession over the course of his or her career.

PAST RECIPIENTS:

2025 - Carolyn A. Taggart, Esq.
2024 - Thomas P. Erven, Esq.
2023 – W. Charles Curley, Esq.*
2022 – Mark F. McCarthy, Esq.
2021 – James L. Mann, Esq.*
2020 - Stephen V. Freeze, Esq.
2019 – Gretchen Koehler Mote, Esq.*
2018 - Steven T. Sloan, Esq.
2017 - Terrance M. Miller, Esq.*
2016 – James S. Oliphant, Esq.
2015 – Neil F. Freund, Esq.
2015 – Peter J. Hersha, Esq.*
2014 – Charles E. West, Esq.
2014 – Timothy D. Johnson, Esq.*
2013 – Ralph F. Dublikar, Esq.
2013 - Stephen V. Freeze, Esq.*
2012 – William M. Cussen, Esq.*
2011 – John B. Robertson, Esq.
2011 – Thomas E. Boyle, Esq.*
2010 – James L. O’Connell, Esq.*
2009 – Henry A. Hentemann, Esq.*
2001 – Robert A. Manning, Esq.
1998 - Eugene F. Tierney, Esq.

**These individuals received the Distinguished Contributions to the Profession Award. This award was combined with the Lifetime Achievement Award in 2025.*

The following award recipients will be determined by the OACTA officers:

Frank Seth Hurd Member of the Year Award

This award will recognize a member whose commitment to OACTA is truly distinguished.

PAST RECIPIENTS:

2025 - Natalie M. E. Wais, Esq.
2024 - Benjamin C. Sassé, Esq.
2023 – Brigid E. Heid, Esq.
2022 – Adelia A. Mohan, Esq.
2021 – Joseph T. Mordino, Esq.
2020 – Jamey T. Pregon, Esq.
2019 – Gary L. Grubler, Esq.
2018 - David W. Orlandini, Esq.
2017 - Anne Marie Sferra, Esq.
2016 – Gregory E. O'Brien, Esq.
2015 – Michael M. Neltner, Esq.
2014 – Hilary S. Taylor, Esq.
2013 – James N. Kline, Esq.
2012 – Jamey T. Pregon, Esq.
2011 – James L. McCrystal, Jr., Esq.
2010 – Lynnette Dinkler, Esq.
2009 – Terrence Kenneally, Esq.
2002 – John G. Farnan, Esq.
2001 – Scott A. Gilliam, Esq.
2000 – Mark F. McCarthy, Esq.
1999 – James R. Gallagher, Esq.
1997 – James L. McCrystal, Jr., Esq.

OACTA Committee Chair of the Year Award

This award will recognize a member who has contributed greatly to OACTA in their role as a Committee Chair. The OACTA officers will select this recipient.

PAST RECIPIENTS:

2025 - Karen E. Ross, Esq.
2024 – David W. Peck, Esq.
2023 – Michael M. Neltner, Esq.
2022 – Gretchen Koehler Mote, Esq. and Nicole A. Mitchell, Esq.
2021 – Michelle L. Burden, Esq.
2020 - Brigid E. Heid, Esq.
2019 – Christopher F. Mars, Esq.
2018 - Charles R. Wendland
2017 - Michael M. Neltner, Esq.
2016 – T. Andrew Vollmar, Esq.
2015 – Lynn V. Luther, Esq.
2014 – Benjamin C. Sassé, Esq. / Jennifer K. Nordstrom, Esq.
2013 – John J. Garvey, III, Esq.
2012 – Natalie M. E. Wais, Esq.
2011 – David W. Peck, Esq.
2010 – Jamey T. Pregon, Esq.

2009 – Kurt A. Anderson, Esq.

2008 – Brian D. Kerns, Esq.