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The Second Annual TWITA Awards

This year's honorees join a long line—well, a short line, really; more like a hyphen—of previous TWITA award winners whose service to the profession has been extraordinary.

By **Marc Garfinkle** | May 31, 2018

Thank you for your patience, dear readers. We didn't forget to announce this year's TWITA awards last month. We were waiting for the Atlantic City conventions to wrap up before revealing our honorees. You'll understand why shortly. We at the TWITAs are delighted to have such special honorees this year.



For the uninformed (or if you are my age and forget everything) the coveted TWITA (“That’s What I’m Talking About”) Awards have been awarded each year continuously since 2017, to individuals and organizations whose outstanding work benefits the bar and/or the practice of law. Some past recipients have been hard-working and selfless—making contributions that inspire or empower us, and reminding us what’s best about being a lawyer. Others may have just said nice things about me, contributed handsomely to my foundation, or otherwise caught my fancy. This year's honorees join a long line—well, a short line, really; more like a hyphen—of previous TWITA award winners whose service to the profession has been extraordinary.

Oh, one detail. Fact checking. We don't do it. It's a waste of time. No one seems to care about the truth anymore, statistics can lie, and fact-checkers are always denounced as partisan. We will have none of that at the TWITAs.

There are two categories of TWITA award winners: organizational and individual. We will reveal the organizational winner(s) first. Then, somewhere below, we reveal our surprise individual winner, whose name until then shall remain Ken Vercammen of Edison. Thank you for your patience. [Note: We eschew the presentation of actual trophies because in addition to being costly dust-collectors, they contain a substance considered dangerous by the State of California. Winners seeking proof of the award should take a selfie posing with a copy of this newspaper.]

After searching for almost a year, assisted by the antiquated methodology, inadequate information and arbitrary standards that define us, I personally selected a most deserving *pair* of organizational honorees. Together, we call them, "The Annual Conferences at Atlantic City." They need no introduction; their sponsors spend boatloads on advertising. They are the annual Boardwalk Seminar of the New Jersey Association for Justice ("the Boardwalk Seminar") and the Annual Convention of the New Jersey State Bar Association ("the Bar Convention"). These are the two 800-pound gorillas that invade that city each spring, drawing thousands upon thousands of litigators and legislators, mediators and arbitrators, plaintiffs and defendants and every other species of lawyer to convene. Despite the fact that neither honoree is a "conference"—one is a "seminar," and one is a "convention"—we will call them "conferences," so as to offend neither, thus avoiding nasty tweets.

Although they seem to compete annually for attendees, sponsors, venues, sunny days and press coverage, both events really pull in the same direction, and they have far more in common than sponsoring mere seminars at the shore. For example, many lawyers, such as I, belong to both groups, because we find them both helpful to our practices. Both groups educate and inform us. They lobby in our interest. They file amicus briefs on our behalf. They have seemingly inexhaustible supplies of top experts ready to share ideas with us. And perhaps their crowning achievements: they both know how to mix partying and professionalism in perfect measure at the shore each year. Although you probably should join these organizations, the conferences are open to member and non-member attorneys, alike.

For that reason, attorneys swarm to Atlantic City in May for continuing education, camaraderie, networking, serendipity, and professional reinvigoration. If you are getting tired of the daily grind and disenchanted with the practice, a few days in AC can give you new ideas and insights, fresh contacts and better practices going forward. Your career can be upgraded almost overnight if you take full advantage of the offerings. Most lawyers choose to attend one or the other of these events each year; some alternate the years; some attend both.

Just who are these lucky honorees? The New Jersey State Bar Association is a voluntary membership organization whose (abbreviated) stated mission is:

To serve, protect, foster and promote the personal and professional interests of its members. To promote access to the justice system, fairness in its administration, and the independence and integrity of the judicial branch. To foster professionalism and pride in the profession. To provide educational opportunities to New Jersey attorneys. To enhance the quality of legal services and the practice of law. To provide education to the New Jersey public to enhance awareness of the legal profession and legal system.

To those ends, their Annual Convention included 400 speakers, 100 seminars and 100 sponsors, all dedicated to helping lawyers and improving lawyering. The NJSBA has lofty goals, but they do a terrific job of accomplishing their mission.

The New Jersey Association for Justice (NJAJ) (formerly ATLA-NJ, the Association of Trial Lawyers of America) is the other 800-pound gorilla. It is a glowing example of lawyers helping lawyers. Their membership is a Who's Who of excellent trial lawyers who want to "give back" to the profession. The NJAJ has a great list-serve, characterized by top attorneys giving valuable advice freely and frequently. The best trial lawyers in New Jersey belong to the Association for Justice, and you will find them at the Boardwalk Seminar, teaching and learning. Thanks to them, the Boardwalk Seminar offers litigators a smorgasbord of topics from basic information to sophisticated analyses, from yesterday's decisions to tomorrow's techniques.

Attending one (or both) of these Atlantic City extravaganzas is rejuvenating. You won't hear people talking about how they can't wait to leave the practice or retire, or how they wish they had studied medicine. To the contrary, the lawyers there still enjoy lawyering, are proud to be lawyers, delighted to be in AC. The air is full of war stories,

anecdotes, professional insights and cooperation. All of the experts are top experts, but for once, they are easily approached. At AC, attorneys are never adversaries; we are all colleagues. Camaraderie is born here and relationships are spawned and nourished.

Because they give so much for so little in return, and because they are so good at what they do, we are proud to award this year's organizational TWITA Award to The Conferences at Atlantic City.

Now, for our individual honoree, Kenneth Vercammen, a Middlesex County solo with a true general practice, who is entirely unaware of how great his contribution to NJ lawyering has been. If you're not sure whether you've ever met Ken, then you haven't. He is a hyper-energized ball of fire who speaks with such speed and intensity that he would have left you wondering how long anyone could sustain that pace. People who know him well say that Kenny's been like that his whole life. In fact, as a distance runner at the University of Scranton, where he set a record for the half-mile, the judges were unable to record his speed—so they recorded his muzzle velocity at the starting line.

If you don't know Ken, but you know his name, that's probably because your research once caused you to look up a statute online, and it led you to Kenny's website. It happens all the time. Ken Vercammen is the undisputed master of SEO (search engine optimization) for lawyers, in part because of his *NJLaws.com* web address, but mostly because he is immersed in the law. He teaches, he lectures, he writes. He will share his SEO expertise with colleagues who ask, but that information alone will not place them ahead of him on Google.

While his marketing ingenuity has made him a legend, his creativity and selflessness have made him a TWITA hero. He hosts a party at the shore each July, charging as admission canned and packaged food offerings which he then donates to the needy. He gives out cards to his clients with instructions on what to do or say if they are arrested. He organizes and participates in foot races to benefit worthy causes. You would be hard-pressed to find a successful marketing strategy that Ken has not pioneered or refined.

Ken is inhumanly productive. He lectures extensively on the county, state and national levels. His articles and books have been published by the ABA, the New Jersey Law Journal, the New Jersey Lawyer and other legal publications. He is editor-in-chief of the New Jersey Municipal Court Law Review, a past chair of the NJSBA Municipal Court

Section, a former municipal public defender and prosecutor, past president of the Middlesex Municipal Prosecutor's Association, newsletter editor for the ABA, and adjunct professor at Middlesex County College (criminal law and procedure, business law). By my count, in the past five years Ken has authored of at least 280,000 scholarly articles on legal topics, offered 13,648 hours of CLE lectures, devised 742 new (and ethical) ways to promote a law practice, and still has time to worry about helping his colleagues to improve their practices.

Now, That's What I'm Talking About.

Marc Garfinkle practices in Morristown, focusing exclusively on legal ethics, attorney discipline, bar admission and judicial misconduct. He is also an adjunct professor at Seton Hall University School of Law.