





By Rachel Spalding

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL:

President Heather Glick-Atalla on SFVBA's Future and a New Look at Leadership

Photos by Ron Murray

A Strong Will to Serve

SFVBA President Heather Glick-Atalla on Building Community Trust, Being A Noted Trust Expert, and Taking the Organization to the Next Level

THERE'S A PAINTING THAT you see when you enter Heather Glick-Atalla's comfortable East Valley home, right across from the living room fireplace and next to her picture windows. It sticks out because, in a home that's nicely turned out in a traditional style, the picture hangs sharply askew, leaning to the left.

Surrounded by other framed artwork and family pictures all mounted correctly — that is, dead straight — on the wall, a visitor's mind runs wild.

Is the picture meant to convey something in particular? Is it a sign that Glick-Atalla and her family see themselves as nonconformists, marching to the beat of a different drummer?

"Oh, that?" notes the attorney, a Southern California "Super Lawyer" from 2020 through the present. "We just hung it wrong, by accident, and then kind of figured it was charming. You've got to go with the flow in life."

Glick-Atalla's flexible outlook, as reflected by her interior decorating approach, appears to be one of the main reasons for her success. As the principal attorney at Glick Atalla, APLC, headquartered in Sherman Oaks, she is a Certified Specialist in Estate Planning, Trust, and Probate Law, with a focus on Estate Planning and Nonprofit Law.

As of last fall, she is also the 94th president of the San Fernando Valley Bar Association. Glick-Atalla's ascendancy also signifies a new chapter for the



“

I actually thrive in an environment where I'm doing more than one thing at once.”

organization, one that will usher in an era of younger — and, more than ever before, female — leaders.

With the SFVBA turning 100 (!) in 2026, the organization is looking to broaden its membership base, with an

emphasis on bringing in more attorneys in the early stages of their careers while also making sure that longtime members still feel engaged.

Now that the world has finally rounded the corner on Covid-19, the SFVBA is building up a robust calendar of events through 2024 and into 2025 to allow the community to meet and mingle in real life — maybe even in dressy-casual pants, not just on Zoom in old sweatsuits.

Planning and strategizing is one of Glick-Atalla's strengths, making her the right leader for right now according to immediate past president Matthew Breddan. "Heather has a laser focus on



Rachel Spalding has experience working in both traditional print media and digital communications for *The Hollywood Reporter*, the *Los Angeles Times*, Bustle Digital Group, and Warner Bros. Her byline has appeared in publications including *InStyle* and *Parents*. Rachel is a graduate of the University of Southern California, and recently completed her master's in Nonfiction at the University of California, Riverside.

her goals for herself and the organization,” he notes. “In addition, her leadership skills are respected and admired by those who work with her on the Executive Committee, as well as members of the Bar.”

Hearing that people are saying, and have said, great things about her throughout her career, Glick-Atalla isn't one to offer you false protestations of modesty. “I worked really, really hard [to become an expert in my specialty],” she says. “Especially those first couple years. There's just been something that really sparked a fire in me to do the best I could do and perform.”

An outsider can easily discern another reason why Glick-Atalla has flourished: Her ability to multitask is possibly an “Avenger”-level superpower. On the day she's been asked to pose for the *Valley Lawyer* cover, she's already cleaned the house, had her hair professionally done, served breakfast, and supervised a couple Lego-building sessions for her sons by 9 a.m. Later that day, she adds, she'll take the boys to soccer, and then get back to her laptop.

“I actually thrive in an environment where I'm doing more than one thing at once, starting in law school,” explains Glick-Atalla, joking that she could also have “some undiagnosed psychological thing where I need to constantly be doing something.”

The SFVBA's new honcho, a native of Encino, may be an empowered type of person who owns the position she's come into. However, she's also humble about the fact that she might not have reached anywhere near her current success if it weren't for a few unique factors.

One was that her father, Marshall Glick, is a leading Valley trust attorney who, after graduating from UCLA, spent decades building up his practice and participating in the local legal and nonprofit communities.

His was the example she looked up to when, taking a gap year after graduating from the University of Southern California, she decided to take the LSAT and apply to law school. Unfortunately, this period

of time in Glick-Atalla's young life, which should have been carefree, also corresponded with her mother Donna Glick's last days in a long battle with breast cancer.

Even to the present, Glick-Atalla finds comfort in the fact that she had just gotten into several law schools and had a set direction for her adult life before her mother passed away. It was a tough decision, given that her father and sister were so fresh from the loss of a wife and mother, but Glick-Atalla knew she had to forge her own path and attend the law school that was calling out to her.

With the blessing of her family, she accepted a seat at the University of San Diego, leaving Los Angeles for the first time. This ended up being a key decision in shaping her future: The SFVBA's head is now married to one of her USD classmates, immigration attorney Nabil Atalla. Her classmates from USD are still her core group; Nabil and the ladies were all in attendance at Glick-Atalla's installation as SFVBA President at Burbank's Castaway restaurant and event space on Oct. 12, 2023.

At the gala, Glick-Atalla glittered in a navy-blue gown and gold heels as she





All Juggle, No Struggle: Glick-Atalla and family – Nabil, Nathan, and Brandon – at work and play at their East Valley home.



outlined her goals for the future, and her gratitude that the Board of Trustees had placed such confidence in her. At a nearby table, two young men were listening very closely — her bowtie-clad sons Nathan and Brandon.

Like any mom, Glick-Atalla wants to model for her offspring the importance of working hard and sticking to your goals and dreams.

“I wondered whether or not we should bring them because they’re six and eight, and you know, that’s not convenient at those events, they’re little kids!” she says with a laugh. “And I’m so glad that we did. We put the pictures from the gala up in our house, and they’re always going to remember that day, and seeing me up on that stage.”

The evening offered her another milestone: Attaining a role as a leader after a long involvement with the SFVBA, helping out wherever she was needed until she felt ready to take the helm.

“I was excited [that night]; I’m glad that showed. It was a long time coming,” she notes. “I’ve been on the board for eight years! And the funny thing about my speech was that my dad asked me if I wanted him to [try a first draft]. I appreciated the offer, but it was important to me that my speech reflect my vision in my own words.”

Before anyone asks why Glick-Atalla’s dad would be so up in her business, offering his skills as her speechwriter, it’s important to note that, for anyone who doesn’t already know,

Marshall Glick is now of counsel to Glick-Atalla’s law firm, which he founded in 1985. After earning her J.D. from USD in 2009, she arrived back in L. A. to find the right legal fit. After a couple chats with her dad, that perfect position ended up being ...in his firm.

But don’t assume that her non-celebrity “Nepo Baby” status made things easy. Glick-Atalla felt intense pressure — mostly self-imposed — to master all that was being thrown at her in what had previously been a sole practitioner’s firm. From day one, she recalls, her father threw her into the deep end, putting her on “every call and every case” so she could learn quickly.

Looking back, Glick-Atalla knows that if she had started at a large firm, she would have been allowed to do much less: “My dad was very generous. I drafted every document and had hands-on mentorship. You don’t get that kind of training everywhere.”



The result, over time, was that the firm's clients began to rely on Glick-Atalla just as much — and the father-daughter duo evolved. Glick-Atalla brought the practice into modern times with technology, and her dad has been able, bit by bit, to step away.

Now, Glick-Atalla's days include a satisfying combination of all aspects of estate planning, including probate and trust administration, and helping clients form nonprofit organizations. In 2017, she was certified as a Specialist in Estate Planning, Trust and Probate Law by the State Bar of California's Board of Legal Specialization.

Glick-Atalla is also proud that she has kept her father's core clients, even with him mostly in retirement; nowadays, she gets referred to plan the estates of some of the kids and grandkids of her father's original posse. She quips that it probably doesn't hurt that the firm retains its original, decades-old phone number.

One of her father's best qualities was to teach someone, and then let them shine instead of retaining the spotlight for himself. That's why Glick-Atalla feels so strongly that one of the most important agendas of her tenure will be to give a leg up to those coming after her.

"I'm very blessed," she notes, adding that "it's a position of privilege" to have seasoned attorneys watching

www.sfvba.org


over you, making sure you are taking the right professional steps. On her wish list is increasing mentorship opportunities for law-school grads who are of color and/or female. Regardless of demographics, though, Glick-Atalla adds that today's junior lawyers all could improve their in-person social chops.

"A lot of today's young people were in law school online. They'll need to do what I did, which is to go to events, walk up to people and shake hands. It's a skill they'll need with clients."

That's where the groups like the SFVBA come in, she concludes.

"We need trade associations more than ever, because people need to connect. That was a loss during the pandemic. This organization is where I met my greatest friends. My installation speech wrote itself in that my vision for the Bar Association is that it should be like a hub for lawyers to come and network. Like, you have to be part of the Valley Bar Association if you're an attorney practicing in the San Fernando Valley. That this is your community; your home; your 'people'."

Expanding an almost century-old institution's membership, mission, and even mindset is ambitious — and the new president is hopeful.

"It's one year, and you give it your all," concludes Glick-Atalla. 

A Sample of Heather Glick-Atalla's Installation Speech

October 12, 2023

“MY GOAL AS PRESIDENT will be to have the Bar Association once again become a hub for lawyers and their colleagues. I want the Bar to be a close community where our members can share ideas, gain information, network with each other, and build lasting friendships...2022 was the Bar's first full year of in-person programs and outreach since the pandemic began, and what a success it was!

Our immediate Past President and my dear friend Matthew Breddan did an incredible job leading us through a period of transition. 'Thank you' is not enough to recognize the efforts of my fellow Executive Committee members last year, including Matt, Amanda Moghaddam, and Taylor Williams-Moniz, and I look forward to continue working with you all, and our new treasurer, Kyle Ellis, this coming year.

We need to continue serving our Members and the community in ways that better communicate and encourage people to participate in our diverse programs, and we need to broaden our Association's long list of accomplishments. I pledge to you that throughout my presidency and to the best of my ability, I will promote professionalism; civility among attorneys; professional courtesy; respect for our judicial system and for the judges who make it work; the high ideals of our legal profession, and expansion of legal services for those in our community who are in the greatest need.

So many of you have dedicated yourselves over many years toward furthering the Bar's professional services and traditions of excellence. The continued development of our Bar Association and our success depends primarily upon our Members [and] I encourage any of you who have questions or are willing to become more involved in Bar activities to contact me. I look forward to seeing you all throughout the year at our many events." 