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FEATURED ARTICLES

Centennial Voices: The 1980's

SCBA President's Column: A Century of Service—
And the Responsibility of the Next Hundred Years

YLD President's Column: Passing the Gavel (and
the Group Chat)





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CENTENNIAL VOICES:

The 1980s: A Decade That Shaped the Modern SCBA

As the Sarasota County Bar Association celebrates its Centennial, the presidents of the 1980s reflect on a decade of growth, innovation, and one leadership decision that would influence the Association for generations to come.

From expanding member programming and strengthening legal aid to hiring the SCBA's first Executive Director, these leaders helped lay the foundation for the organization members know today.



John Patterson

President, 1982–1983

"The SCBA was invaluable in helping my late wife, Nora, and me build lifelong friendships, become part of the Sarasota legal community, and begin a lifetime of service to the profession."

John Patterson remembers an Association that was as much about relationships as it was about the practice of law.

Looking for ways to increase attendance at Bar meetings, Patterson invited renowned Florida folk musician Gamble Rogers to perform before he became widely known. The program proved to be a tremendous success and remains one of his favorite SCBA memories.

Beyond memorable programs, Patterson is especially proud of helping bridge divisions among the area's legal aid organizations. Those collaborative efforts eventually led to the creation of the Sarasota-Manatee Lawyer Referral Service, expanding attorney participation in legal aid, earning state-wide recognition, and laying the groundwork for what is now Legal Aid of Manasota.

Reflecting on the Association today, Patterson believes the SCBA's willingness to evolve has been one of its greatest strengths.

"Remaining relevant requires continual effort, and the SCBA has consistently risen to that challenge."

His advice to today's attorneys is simple: get involved. The friendships, leadership opportunities, and professional connections formed through the Bar can shape an entire career.



Nevin A. Weiner

President, 1988–1989

"By far and away the most significant accomplishment during my presidency was hiring Jan Jung as the SCBA's Executive Director.

Her organizational acumen, relationship insight, and personal charm elevated the reputation of our Association throughout the legal and civic community."

Few presidents can point to a single decision that transformed an organization. Nevin Weiner can.

Although he fondly remembers serving as reporter, editor, and publisher of *The Docket*—an experience that introduced him to many respected attorneys who became mentors and lifelong friends—he believes the defining accomplishment of his presidency was selecting Jan Jung to become the Association's Executive Director.

That decision ushered in an era of professional management that strengthened the SCBA's reputation not only within the legal community, but throughout Sarasota's civic, educational, and nonprofit organizations.

Looking back nearly four decades later, Weiner is proud to see the Association continuing to thrive.

"Happy Anniversary, SCBA!"

A Legacy That Continues

The reflections of the 1980s presidents reveal a decade defined by growth, collaboration, and visionary leadership. Whether expanding legal aid services, creating innovative member programs, strengthening relationships with the judiciary, or making the pivotal decision to hire the Association's first Executive Director, their leadership helped shape the modern Sarasota County Bar Association.

As the SCBA celebrates its Centennial Year, it is fitting that so many of these memories point to one lasting legacy: **Jan Jung's** nearly three decades of leadership, which strengthened the Association, elevated its reputation throughout the community, and helped position the SCBA for the century that followed.



Gerald B. Keane

President, 1989–1990

"Serving as President of the SCBA remains one of the greatest honors of my legal career."

Gerald Keane also credits the hiring of Jan Jung as one of the defining moments of his presidency, serving on the committee that selected the Association's first Executive Director.

Together, Keane and Jung also established two annual Bench-Bar programs that encouraged open dialogue between judges and attorneys about improving the administration of justice. Those conversations strengthened relationships throughout the legal community and eventually evolved into traditions that continued for decades, including Keane's longtime leadership of Family Law's The Judges Speak program.

When Keane attended his first SCBA luncheon in 1973, he was the Association's 189th active member. Watching the organization grow from those early years into the vibrant professional association it is today remains one of his greatest sources of pride.



1980's



2026

A Century of Service—And the Responsibility of the Next Hundred Years



SCBA PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

By: Sara Castro, Esq.
Castro Potts Law Firm, PLLC

As this final issue of *The Docket* for the 2025–2026 Bar year goes to print, my term as President of the Sarasota County Bar Association comes to a close. Serving as President during our Centennial year has been one of the greatest honors of my professional career.

One hundred years is an extraordinary milestone. For a century, attorneys in our community have come together—not because they had to, but because they believed our profession is stronger when we support one another, learn from one another, and work together to serve the public. This year has been a celebration of that legacy, but it has also been a reminder that each generation has the responsibility to build upon it.

When I began this year, I hoped we could honor our history while positioning the SCBA for the future. Looking back, I am proud of what we accomplished together.

We celebrated our Centennial throughout the year with outstanding programming, meaningful social events, and opportunities to bring together members of every stage of practice—from law students and young lawyers to seasoned practitioners and members of the judiciary. We strengthened our committee structure, expand-

ed member engagement, continued planning for the future of the organization, and hosted one of the most successful Bench Bar Conferences in recent memory. None of that happened because of one person. It happened because so many members stepped forward and generously gave their time.

I would like to recognize and thank our outgoing Section Chairs for the time, expertise, and leadership they dedicated throughout the year. Our Sections provide some of the most valuable opportunities for members to learn, collaborate, and build professional relationships, and that success is a direct reflection of the volunteers who lead them. My sincere appreciation goes to **Tara Gess (ADR), Adria Jensen (Business Law), Chris Nigro (Civil Trial), Kate Fall (Elder Law), Lisa Gallagher (Estate Planning), Richard Perlman (Family Law), Maury Azerad (Real Property), and Cynthia Riddell (Solo/Small Firm)**. Thank you for your commitment to providing outstanding programming and serving our members.

This year, we launched our newly centralized Programs Committee, which will build upon the strong foundation our Sections established by coordinating high-quality educational programming across the Association. I am grateful to the members of this committee for embracing this new model and helping shape the future of SCBA programming. My sincere thanks to **Chair Chris Nigro, Chair-Elect Jill Bowen, Jessica Close, Richard Perlman, Lisa Gallagher, Maury Azerad, Marisa Agganis, Raven Peters, Tamara Spires, and Alexis Schad**. Their creativity, countless hours of planning, and commitment to serving our members made this year's programming a tremendous success.

I also want to thank our Governance Committee—**Tamara Spires, Cori Coser, Bill Motherway, Callie Cowan, Tammie Sandoval, Alan Perez, and Stacy Dillard-Spahn**—for their thoughtful work

strengthening the Association's foundation and helping ensure we remain well-positioned for the next century.

Our Finance Committee, led by **Jay Castle and including Erin Itts, Mark Vuono, Madeline Mojica, Tyler Stall, Rian Davis, and Tamara Spires**, devoted significant time to ensuring the Association remains fiscally strong and able to continue serving our members for years to come.

Our Membership Committee has been working hard behind the scenes this year to ensure the longevity of our organization at a time when membership organizations face unique challenges. My sincere thanks to **Chair Tammie Sandoval, Michele Stephan-Arsenault, Alexis Downyok, Barbara Bush, Tara Gess, Neil Lyons, John Getty, Andrew Van Ness, and Caroleen Brej** for their commitment to welcoming new members and fostering engagement within the SCBA. Every new member welcomed into the SCBA strengthens our organization and ensures that our community continues to grow.

To my Board of Directors, thank you for your commitment throughout this historic year. Your willingness to volunteer your time, share your ideas, and work collaboratively made every accomplishment possible. I have been fortunate to serve alongside an exceptional leadership team: **President-Elect Alan Perez, Secretary Tamara Spires, Treasurer Jay Castle, Immediate Past President Bryan Kessler, Directors Caroleen Brej, Barbara Bush, John Getty, William Moth-erway, Tony Mowry, Chris Nigro, Tammie Sandoval, and Michele Stephan-Arsenault**, together with our South County Division President **Mark Creech** and Young Lawyers Division President **Jill Bowen**. Thank you for your friendship, your leadership, and your dedication to the Sarasota County Bar Association.

To our Executive Director, **Holly Lipps**, there simply are not enough words. Every successful organization depends upon someone who quietly keeps everything moving behind the scenes. Holly's professionalism, dedication, institutional knowledge, and tireless work made this year possible. Our members see the finished product; I had the privilege of seeing the countless hours that went into making it happen. We are incredibly fortunate to have her leading the day-to-day operations of our Association.

I would also like to extend my sincere appreciation to **Bunny Spek**, our administrative assistant. Her kindness, professionalism, and willingness to help with every detail—big or small—made the year run more smoothly than most members will ever realize. The SCBA is better because of her

dedication, and I am truly grateful for all she has done for our Association and for me this year.

Finally, thank you to every member who attended a luncheon, volunteered at an event, mentored a young lawyer, served on a committee, sponsored a program, or simply renewed your membership. Organizations like ours are not built by presidents. They are built by members who choose to invest in their profession and in one another.

As I pass the gavel, I do so with great optimism. The Sarasota County Bar Association enters its second century with talented leaders, dedicated volunteers, and a membership committed to professionalism, service, and collegiality. I have every confidence that our best days remain ahead.

Thank you for the privilege of serving as your President during this historic Centennial year. It is an experience I will always cherish.

With sincere gratitude,

Sara Castro

President, 2025–2026

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Passing the Gavel (and the Group Chat)



YLD PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

*By: Jill Bowen, Esq.
Shumaker, Loop & Kendrick, LLP*

When I took on the role of YLD President, I had a vision. It involved gavels, purpose, and the kind of calm, collected leadership you see in movies where someone walks into a room, and everyone just knows they are in charge. What I got instead was a year of group texts about who was picking up the paper plates, a phone that never stopped buzzing with emails, and the slow realization that my perfectly planned annual calendar was probably going to get thrown off course. Turns out, leadership is less about the gavel and more about the Calendar invite.

But here we are at the end of the bar year, and I can say with complete sincerity that this has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my professional life.

This year, the YLD put on events that I am genuinely proud of, grew membership, made new connections, and ran each meeting with a very disciplined approach to time management. Truly, we start right on time. We stay on topic. We end early. Every single meeting. Ask anyone. They will confirm this.

In all seriousness, one of the things I am most proud of this year is something that never made it into a docket article or an event flyer. Behind the scenes, we made leadership development a real priority at our board meetings. Not in a formal, seminar kind of way, but in a practical way. We learned how to keep meetings on track. We learned how to be respectful of our colleagues. We learned how to redirect a conversation that had wandered into the weeds without making anyone feel dismissed. We reworked our mission

statement to reflect our values. These are small skills, but they are the ones that matter when you are eventually chairing a committee, leading a firm meeting, or running a board of your own. And I watched this group get better at it, month after month.

That is what excites me most about the future of this bar. The next generation of bar leaders is not waiting for permission. They are already leading. They are the ones who showed up early to set up chairs, who followed up on the things no one asked them to follow up on, and who brought energy and ideas to every single meeting, even the ones that ran long. Which, for the record, rarely happened. Because, as I mentioned, I run a very tight ship.

I want to take a moment to recognize each of the board members who made this year what it was: **Tyler Stall**, thank you for being such an amazing sounding board for me this year. You have consistently showed up with support, kindness, and guidance that I would have been lost without. I am so lucky you remained involved this past year because your insights and knowledge were truly invaluable.

Michael Kostruba, thank you for your thoughtful contributions. You are not always the loudest voice in the room, but you listen intently and always provide a thoughtful opinion where needed and we are lucky to have you.

Meghan O'Connell, thank you for your dedication to making every one of our events this year run flawlessly. We could not have done it without you, and I'm so proud of you for how much you have grown.

Nick Roknich, thank you for bringing the humor to our Board and always encouraging socialization, with a beer of course. I appreciate that you have come out of your shell for the Board and for the commitment to the Baseball Event and Second Thursdays.

Forest Sutton, thank you for not taking things too seriously. You bring levity and joy to our group, even while paying close attention and moving your objectives forward. You have made

so much progress with membership this year, we owe a huge amount of our growth to you and your efforts.

Rian Davis, thank you for being such a grounding force for our Board. I could always count on you to bring thoughtful points of view to our conversations and remain grounded in who you are and what our mission is.

Kate Craig, thank you for your genuineness and intentionality. I am so grateful to have had you on the Board this year. You showed up when needed and helped us accomplish all we set out to do and the whole year you were a true friend to us all; we are lucky to know you.

Andrew Van Ness, thank you for bringing so much fun and friendship to our Board. You brought us together for the Board Social and Second Thursdays and forced us to bond, and we are so much better for it.

Marisa Agganis, thank you for your directness. We all benefitted this year from your cutthroat analysis and no-nonsense approach. You kept us focused and on track through all the different events we took on this year, and I look forward to seeing what you take on next.

Cori Coser, our President-Elect, you are going to

soar in this role. I have already seen the amazing things you can accomplish, and I am certain you will take this Board to new levels during your term. I look forward to seeing what comes next.

Holly Lipps, we could never do this without you. We are so lucky to have you, and although I have said it before, please know, I mean it so sincerely. I hope you aren't getting too excited to be rid of me, because I will see you on the SCBA board!

I also want to thank our incredible sponsors who have supported us all year. Events do not happen without generosity, and yours has made a real difference.

To the members of the YLD who came out to events, brought your friends, introduced yourselves to someone new, or simply showed up when you could have stayed home—thank you. You are the reason this division feels less like an organization and more like a community.

I am handing over the gavel, but you can't cut me out of the group chat just yet! The YLD Board made this year better than I imagined it could be and you reminded me, over and over again, that the best part of this profession is the people in it. Here is to good company, bright futures, and the kind of leadership that starts with our Young Lawyers. It has been an honor.



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Help us celebrate the many ways SCBA members are making a difference in our community!

**For purposes of this initiative, we're focusing on community-based nonprofit organizations rather than professional associations or bar associations. Service to the legal profession is certainly valuable, but this effort is intended to encourage attorneys to share their leadership and expertise with nonprofits serving our broader community.*

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What I Have Learned in Seven Years of Bar Leadership



SCD PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

By: Mark Creech, Esq.
The Law Offices of Mark A. Creech, PLLC

I am told this will be my final Docket article for a while. I am also told this article will be completely uncensored. So, with that in mind....

Ahem. As I reflect on seven years of hands-on involvement with the Sarasota County Bar Association, I realize that my one loyal reader, whom-ever you may be, could benefit from some of the things learned during that time. Things like coming up with ideas for articles month-in and month-out are hard, and perhaps I should take a break from bar leadership more often than once every seven years. Alas, just a few other things I have picked up in spending one-third of my legal career to date with our local bar, in no particular order.

One: We have a wonderful group of attorneys in our local bar. Not a shameless plug. It is rare (not unheard of) that a member of our local bar has caused me or anyone else difficulty on an ethical or professional level. Sarasota is a large enough community for our attorneys to be major players in the legal field while still being close enough to each other to treat our colleagues with honor and respect, and that is simply not true statewide.

Two: Sarasota boasts some wonderful non-profits, businesses, arts, and programs. I have been able to work with several local businesses and non-profit organizations on events that would likely have never crossed my path otherwise. I have been introduced to music and visual arts as

well as local outreach and charity programs that I never could have guessed resided right here in Sarasota County.

Three: Bar leadership has given me a chance to get to know attorneys across the spectrum of law on an individual level. While I get to see and know a lot of attorneys practicing in my areas of law, my involvement with the bar has allowed me to get to know attorneys from other practice areas as well or better. Who knew that personal injury attorneys existed outside of billboards? I have always heard the legend of estate planners, but the bar allowed me to actually see them in the daylight. The defense bar... They kind of remain their own thing, but come on over, and we'll get to know you too.

Four: It's a lot of fun. Admittedly, it's not all fun. Sometimes difficult decisions have to be made, or difficult issues arise (i.e. Covid), but on the whole, you get to be behind the scenes of bench/bar conferences, barrister's balls, holiday parties, and courthouse changes. You always know about the events and happenings. You get to help craft the bar into what you want to see.

Five: It is occasionally very serious work. It is a voluntary organization. It exists only because we want it to, but that existence is not always easy. Constantly providing programming, organizing even small events, and providing the framework for the organization to thrive is not always social hour. When something needs to be done at the bar, it is largely the board members and leadership who have to do it. Special plug for Holly Lipps for her tremendous support of the South County Division. From coordinating logistics behind the scenes to the many volunteer leaders who help plan, organize, and execute our events, every successful program is the result of a true team effort.

Six: It's not that hard to get into bar leadership. If you want to get involved, the best option is to reach out to someone currently on the board. They can get you involved immediately. Every winter we look for new applicants, and an e-mail

goes out requesting the same. Rarely can a person apply and not find themselves involved in some capacity.

Seven: It is not a paid position. I just assumed...

Eight: Most of what the bar does is paid for by sponsorships. Maybe not a surprise to some, but there are a lot of businesses out there who are delighted to get in front of a large group of lawyers with the hope that we will put them in front of an even larger group of our clients. For that reason, we tap a lot of connections to be able to fund the many events we put on each year. For anyone that has ever thought their local bar dues were high, they aren't nearly what they would be without a great deal of work on our end procuring sponsors.

And so, as I begin the end of my bar leadership involvement (*for now**), I want to encourage someone else to start their journey. I started with a small practice under development (it still is) and very little understanding about what our local bar does. Hopefully this article helps someone else start with a little more.

**Holly made me add that.*

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Dr. Sherika Evans' Transformative Summer as the 2026 Richard Garland Scholarship Recipient



CDI CHAIR'S COLUMN

By: Tonya Willis Pitts, Esq.
Pitts Law Firm

Each year, the Sarasota County Bar Association's Richard Garland Scholarship provides a deserving law student with more than financial assistance. It offers an opportunity to experience the practice of law firsthand while building relationships within Sarasota's legal community. For **Dr. Sherika Evans**, the 2026 scholarship recipient, the experience proved to be both professionally rewarding and personally transformative.

Dr. Evans, who earned her master's in early childhood education in 2004 and doctorate in education leadership in 2010, spent her summer interning with MCTLaw, where she discovered that practicing law involves far more than what can be learned in a classroom. While she entered the internship excited about the opportunity, she admitted that her expectations were modest.

"I thought I would mostly be assisting attorneys by gathering information and handling basic office tasks," she said. "Instead, I had the opportunity to experience what it is really like to be a practicing attorney."

Rather than serving as a passive observer, Dr. Evans became an active participant in the firm's daily operations. Throughout the summer, she worked alongside experienced attorneys, attended court hearings, observed depositions and mediations, met with clients, participated in litigation strategy meetings, and contributed to legal research and writing projects.

The experience gave her an authentic look into the profession while allowing her to apply the legal principles she had studied in law school to real cases involving real clients.



When asked which skills improved the most during the internship, Dr. Evans did not hesitate. *"My legal writing improved tremendously," she explained. "The internship also helped build my confidence."*

One of the most valuable outcomes of the internship was developing a professional writing sample which is an important milestone for any law student preparing to enter the legal profession. More importantly, however, she gained confidence in her ability to contribute meaningful work alongside seasoned attorneys.

That confidence was nurtured by the welcoming environment she found at MCTLaw.

Dr. Evans described the firm's culture as collaborative, inclusive, and supportive. Attorneys encouraged questions, welcomed her opinions during assignments, and made her feel like a valued member of the legal team rather than simply an intern. Informal lunches and day-to-day interactions provided opportunities to learn not only about the law but also about the professionalism, judgment, and relationships that define successful legal careers.

"The attorneys were approachable and genuinely invested in helping me learn," she said. "I always felt comfortable asking questions and sharing my thoughts."

When asked for constructive feedback regarding the scholarship program, she offered thoughtful recommendations for enhancing the scholarship program. One idea was to create opportunities for scholarship recipients to serve on Sarasota County Bar Association committees during their internships. Such involvement, she believes, would allow students to better understand the many ways attorneys contribute to their profession and communities while expanding their professional networks.

The internship also helped shape Dr. Evans' long-term career goals. Although she already had an interest in courtroom advocacy, her experience at MCTLaw strengthened that interest significantly, particularly in the area of civil litigation. Observing attorneys advocate for their clients and participating in case strategy discussions gave her a deeper appreciation for the preparation, collaboration, and analytical thinking required to successfully litigate complex cases.

Perhaps the most meaningful impact of the Richard Garland Scholarship, however, extended beyond legal skills. Dr. Evans explained that receiving the scholarship gave her access to an invaluable professional experience and introduced her to members of Sarasota's legal community. Building relationships with practicing attorneys helped her feel connected to the profession and reinforced the importance of mentorship within the legal community.

Most importantly, the experience shifted her perspective. She initially wondered if her Southern personality would fit the culture of the legal profession, but the summer experience proved that her authentic self was an asset.

Working closely with experienced attorneys showed her that successful lawyers remain authentic while serving their clients with professionalism, compassion, and integrity. Seeing attorneys who were approachable, collaborative, and willing to mentor a law student reassured her that she, too, could find her place within the profession.

"The internship gave me confidence that I belong in this profession," she reflected. "It showed me that attorneys can be themselves while making a meaningful difference in the lives of their clients and the community."

When asked what advice she would give next year's Richard Garland Scholarship recipient, her answer reflected the enthusiasm she brought to every aspect of her internship.

"Maximize every moment," she said. "Treat every assignment, every meeting, and every conversation as an opportunity to learn. Take full advantage of everything the experience offers."

Her advice captures the very purpose of the Richard Garland Scholarship. While financial assistance eases the burden of legal education, the true value of the program lies in the experiences it creates. Experiences that cannot be taught through lectures and textbooks alone.

The Sarasota County Bar Association continues to demonstrate its commitment to developing the next generation of attorneys through programs like the Richard Garland Scholarship. By connecting promising law students with experienced practitioners, the Association helps cultivate lawyers who are not only skilled advocates but also engaged members of the legal community.

For Dr. Sherika Evans, the summer represented much more than an internship. It was an opportunity to strengthen her legal skills, build lasting professional relationships, confirm her passion for litigation, and gain the confidence to enter the legal profession with purpose and optimism. Her experience is a powerful reminder that investing in future lawyers today strengthens the legal profession for tomorrow.

At the Crossroads: Taking Stock of Our Civil Rights



By: Jeff N. Eckert, Esq.
SEN Law, PLLC

"Where you see wrong or inequality or injustice, speak out, because this is your country. This is your democracy. Make it. Protect it. Pass it on."

Thurgood Marshall
1978 University of Virginia commencement speech

The disability rights movement built its foundation on the Civil Rights Movement.

America faces important questions about the values we embrace and the rights we choose to protect. The Civil Rights Movement recognized that segregation lay at the heart of systemic inequality for Black Americans. In my admittedly biased opinion, one of the most important disability rights cases in American history was not a disability case at all, it was *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* (1954).

In *Brown*, the United States Supreme Court overturned the "separate but equal" doctrine established in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896). By overturning that doctrine, the Court laid the foundation for the modern civil rights movement and desegregation of public schools. Linda Carol Brown was not the first child to encounter segregation, but she joined other plaintiffs in challenging the denial of her enrollment at her local school, Sumner Elementary. Her courage, and that of so many other civil rights advocates, helped pave the way for equal educational opportunities for future generations. The principles in *Brown* would later influence legal arguments advancing the rights of other marginalized groups, including individuals with disabilities.

Today, the legal profession continues to play an

important role in safeguarding rights recognized under federal law. As a special education and disability advocate, I encounter children and families who have experienced the effects of changes in federal agency guidance and enforcement priorities affecting students with disabilities. There has been credible reporting that changes in the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) enforcement priorities led the U.S. Department of Education to dismiss 90% of the discrimination complaints based on race, disability, and sexual orientation in 2025. These developments underscore the importance of remaining vigilant in ensuring that the legal protections afforded to vulnerable students are fully understood and effectively enforced.

The disability rights movement stands on the shoulders of the Civil Rights Movement.

Disability rights have long been hard fought and hard won. Many people are unaware that members of the Black Panther Party supported demonstrators during the 1977 Section 504 Sit-In by helping provide food and other assistance while protestors occupied federal buildings in one of the longest nonviolent occupations of a federal building in U.S. history. The demonstrations ultimately led to the issuance of the long-delayed regulations implementing Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance.

More than a decade later, disability advocates again drew national attention to barriers facing people with disabilities. During the 1990 "Capitol Crawl," children and adults with disabilities left their wheelchairs and mobility devices and climbed the steps of the U.S. Capitol, a powerful demonstration that helped galvanize support for passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act later that year.

Olmstead v. L.C. is another landmark disability rights case with important impacts for individuals with disabilities. This 1999 Supreme Court case established that individuals with disabilities have a right to receive state-funded services in

community-based settings rather than institutions. Lois Curtis, one of the lead plaintiffs, was a disabled Black woman and talented artist who, during her childhood and adolescence, was repeatedly incarcerated and in psychiatric hospitals.

Disability rights advocates recognize the profound influence *Brown v. Board of Education* has had on educational opportunities for students with disabilities. Fifty years ago, many students with significant physical and intellectual disabilities were excluded from public schools and, in some cases, institutionalized. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act, now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), built upon principles of integration and equal educational opportunity reflected in *Brown*, where the Supreme Court famously recognized that “separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.” Litigators in several of the landmark cases that shaped disability education law drew upon *Brown’s* equal protection principles in advocating for the educational rights of children with disabilities.

The legal principles underlying disability rights have continued to evolve alongside broader civil rights jurisprudence. As debates over the scope and implementation of civil rights protections continue, disability advocates remain concerned that changes affecting one area of civil rights law may have significant consequences for other long-established legal protections, including those afforded to individuals with disabilities. The growth of education voucher programs has redirected students and public funding, to private schools, while offering parents greater autonomy in selecting their child’s educational environment and instructional approach. Proponents view vouchers as expanding educational choice, while critics argue that they have contributed to declining student outcomes in some states and reduced funding for public schools through declining enrollment.

Disability rights advocates have also expressed concern that voucher programs may contribute to greater segregation within education, as private schools may be more selective in admissions and are not subject to all of the same legal obligations as public schools. In addition, many parents are unaware that students who enroll in private schools may not receive the same protections and procedural safeguards available under IDEA and, depending on the school and funding source, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

A threat to any civil rights is a threat to all civil rights.

Our country is navigating a period of significant debate over the scope and application of civil rights protections, whether involving equal educational opportunity, disability rights, reproductive autonomy, voting rights, or other longstanding legal protections. Whatever one’s views on these issues, lawyers have a unique responsibility to understand the legal landscape, anticipate its direction, and advocate effectively for those whose rights are at stake. That work also requires collaboration with allies, including those we may not have expected to stand beside.

Our nation’s history demonstrates that progress in civil rights has required persistence, courage, and an unwavering commitment to the rule of law. For those who are most vulnerable, thoughtful legal advocacy remains as important today as ever. Before Linda Brown and Lois Curtis, before *Brown and Olmstead*, and before Section 504 and the IDEA, there were burning crosses, firehoses, and institutions that isolated those society deemed different. Those chapters of our history remind us that civil rights have never been self-executing. They have required generations of advocates willing to defend them. Today’s legal landscape presents another pivotal moment, that the legal profession has an opportunity to meet that challenge. Perhaps, as this article suggests, we find ourselves at another crossroads.

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The Comma That Cost \$5 Million



By: Caroleen Brej
Bentley Goodrich Kison, P.A.
SCBA Board of Directors

There are few punctuation marks with a legal rap sheet. The semicolon has never bankrupted anyone. The em dash, for all its theatrical flair, has yet to appear as a named party in litigation. But the Oxford comma, that small, unassuming mark before the final “and” in a list, has repeatedly proven itself capable of moving millions of dollars and reshaping the meaning of statutes. It is, in the truest sense, a comma with a motive.

For the uninitiated: the Oxford comma is the one placed before the conjunction in a list of three or more items—as in “eggs, milk, and butter” rather than “eggs, milk and butter.” Whether to use it has long been the punctuational equivalent of a family dinner argument: passionate, recurring, and never actually resolved by anyone changing their mind.

Lawyers, however, do not have the luxury of shrugging and moving on to dessert. Statutory and contractual language must be interpreted, and ambiguity is where litigation goes to feast.

Consider the now-famous case of a group of Maine dairy delivery drivers who sued their employer over unpaid overtime. See *O'Connor v. Oakhurst Dairy*, 851 F.3d 69 (1st Cir. 2017). State law exempted employers from paying overtime for work involving “the canning, processing, preserving, freezing, drying, marketing, storing, packing for shipment or distribution of” perishable goods. Notice anything missing? No comma separates “packing for shipment” from “or distribution.” The drivers argued this meant the exemption applied to the single, combined activity of “packing for shipment or distribution,”

not to “distribution” as its own standalone category. Since the drivers distributed goods but didn’t pack them, they argued they fell outside the exemption entirely. The First Circuit agreed; the 29-page opinion even opens with the saying, “For want of a comma, we have this case.” The missing comma reportedly cost the company an estimated \$5 million in a subsequent settlement, covering 127 drivers.

This is the peculiar genius of the Oxford comma dispute: it exposes the gap between what a sentence *says* and what its author *meant*, a gap that contract drafters spend entire careers trying to close and that litigators spend entire careers trying to pry back open.

Grammar purists will say the Oxford comma is simply “more correct.” Legal drafters know better than to trust such absolutism, as the Oxford comma can also cause ambiguity when the last two items in a list *could* be read as an appositive (a renaming) of the item before them, rather than as separate entries. Nonetheless, most style guides and linguists agree the Oxford comma resolves ambiguity *far* more often than it creates. As a classic example where the Oxford comma is needed: “We invited the strippers, JFK and Stalin.” Without the Oxford comma, this reads as an invite list of two strippers, one named JFK and the other Stalin. Add the comma — “the strippers, JFK, and Stalin” — and suddenly it’s three separate guests, which is a very different (if still strange) party.

The real lesson is not that the Oxford comma should always be used, but that no comma should be trusted to do interpretive work alone. Careful drafters increasingly avoid the debate altogether, restructuring sentences into itemized lists or adding clarifying language rather than betting a client’s fortune on a fifteen-pixel mark. Still, for a piece of punctuation with no vote, no signature, and no bar admission, the Oxford comma has an unusually impressive litigation history.



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Making the Case for Dinner Out: A Review of Mister O! Extraordinary Pizza



By: Marisa Agganis, Esq.
Williams Parker | YLD Board of Directors

The practice of law has a way of making dinner an afterthought. Between deadlines, client calls, court appearances, and calendars that rarely slow down, it's easy to default to whatever is quickest and most convenient. Some nights, that's exactly what you need. Other nights, though, it's nice to have a restaurant that can be both—a place where you can enjoy an excellent meal without spending the entire evening waiting for it. Mister O! strikes that balance surprisingly well.



Pizza isn't usually the destination. It's the easy answer after a long day, the Friday night standby, or the meal everyone agrees on when no one can decide where to eat. Mister O! Extraordinary Pizza might change that for some people.

From the outside, the restaurant doesn't promise a flashy dining experience and thankfully, it doesn't try to. Instead, it focuses on doing the fundamentals exceptionally well.

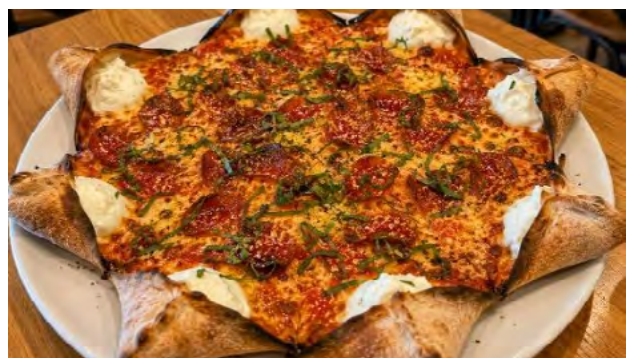
That balance is apparent almost immediately. The dining room has an energetic buzz, but it's still a relaxed, casual environment. Looking around the restaurant, it was clear Mister O! appeals to just

about everyone. Families shared pizzas a few tables away, couples lingered over glasses of wine, groups of friends caught up over dinner, and young professionals rounded out the crowd.



At one point, I overheard the table next to us talking about how they had discovered Mister O! on TikTok (even though they did not seem like the type to have TikTok downloaded on their phones). Between social media buzz and its Michelin recommendation, the restaurant seems to be attracting attention from every direction.

We started with the burrata, served with fresh tomatoes, arugula, and a drizzle of balsamic glaze. It was incredibly fresh and a reminder that simple ingredients don't need much embellishment when they're high quality.



Then came the pizzas.

The signature Star Luna is undeniably eye-catching. Yes, it's pretty cool looking, but more importantly, it's genuinely delicious. The distinctive star

shape isn't simply for presentation. Each point is filled with creamy ricotta, making every slice feel just a little different from the last. The crust is thin with a beautifully crisp bottom, providing the perfect foundation without becoming heavy. It's creative without feeling gimmicky, a difficult balance that Mister OI pulls off effortlessly.



The Margherita pizza proved that sometimes the simplest dishes leave the biggest impression. The tangy tomato sauce paired beautifully with fresh mozzarella, while the thin crust allowed every ingredient to shine. There were no unnecessary toppings competing for attention. Instead, it was a reminder that classic combinations become classics for a reason.

Although the pizzas are unquestionably the stars of the menu, I also appreciated that Mister OI encourages guests to make an evening of their visit. A thoughtfully curated wine list complements the menu, making it just as easy to linger over

conversation as it is to enjoy a quick bite. That attention to the overall experience is what separates the restaurant from so many other pizza spots. Nothing feels forced. Everything simply works together.

And then there was dessert. On the recommendation of our server, we ordered the small Nutella pizza topped with bananas, which made me feel like a child again. Warm, rich, playful, and just indulgent enough, it was the perfect ending to a meal that never took itself too seriously.

Life, especially in the legal profession, has a way of making meals feel transactional. We grab takeout between errands, eat lunch at our desks while answering emails, squeeze in a quick dinner before moving on to the next thing, or skip a meal altogether. But some of the best conversations happen around a dinner table, and sometimes the most productive thing we can do is slow down long enough to enjoy them.

Mister OI strikes a balance that's surprisingly hard to find. It's efficient enough for a busy weeknight but inviting enough to make you want to linger over another slice or another glass of wine.

You may come for the Michelin recommendation or the signature Star Luna pizza, but you'll likely leave appreciating something else entirely: a restaurant that makes an ordinary pizza night feel just a little more memorable.



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Are You Including the Clerk in Your Foreclosure Case?



*By Karen E. Rushing
Clerk of Court & County Comptroller*

THE CLERKS CORNER



Though the Clerk's Office undeniably performs core duties with respect to the recording and, when ordered by the Court, enforcement of liens, this does not indicate that the Clerk holds any interest in property subject to such liens. Recently, there has been a significant increase in actions filed in the courts of Sarasota naming the Clerk as a defendant and alleging that the Clerk holds a property interest premised on a lien that, on its face, clearly favors some other party. Whether due to the widespread and growing popularity of artificial intelligence tools or to another factor, the trend is concerning.

Bear in mind that though the Clerk's or a deputy clerk's name and signature may appear on many legal documents, that alone does not mean that the effect of such documents creates an interest on the part of the Clerk. While the Clerk may, in some limited instances, acquire a lien interest in property through a favorable judgment as any other party might, in the vast majority of circumstances the Clerk serves only as the record keeper of the lien. As a steward of public funds,

the Clerk may be obligated to pursue recovery of costs and fees associated with the defense of claims that do not have a basis in fact or law. When in doubt, legal practitioners are strongly encouraged to reach out to the Clerk's Office and confer with general counsel prior to filing a claim. We are happy to work with you to save time and resources for everyone involved.

The Clerk, as the keeper of the Official Records of the County, plays a fundamental role in Florida's lien system. Mortgages, notices, or other claims of lien that meet applicable legal requirements may be submitted to the Clerk for recording and indexing. Additionally, a party may submit to the Clerk a certified copy of the judgment which, once recorded, becomes a lien on real property within the county where it is recorded. Each document recorded in the Official Records is assigned a unique, consecutive number, which is a primary factor in determining lien priority. Though a lien may have legal force prior to recording, its place in the Official Record is essential for perfection of the interest and the securing of its position.

Further, the Clerk, when ordered, is central to the lien enforcement process. Upon entry of a judgment or order of foreclosure, the Clerk is directed by the Court to conduct a sale of the affected property, issue a certificate of sale and ultimately a certificate of title to the winning bidder at auction, and make disbursements of the sale proceeds, including any surplus. At each step in this process, there are requirements and deadlines to be aware of, such as the notice publication timeframes and windows for objections, that are largely laid out in section 45.031, Florida Statutes.

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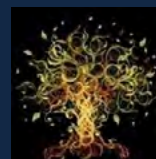
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PROGRAM AGENDA

8:30 - 8:45 AM	Welcome & Introductions	Mag. Larry Jacobs Chief Judge Diana Moreland
8:45 - 9:30 AM	The Why Behind the Work: ACEs and Their Impact on Families in Court *	Hon. Jack Helinger (Ret.)
9:30 - 10:20 AM	Replicable Wins: Trauma-Informed Approaches from Other Circuits *	Dr. Christine Profito Sarah E. Kay
10:20 - 10:30 AM	Break	
10:30 - 11:15 AM	Inside the Trauma Response: A Psych Perspective on Supporting Children and Families *	Dr. Christine Profito
11:15 AM - 12:00 PM	Courtroom Challenges Through a Trauma Lens: Solutions That Work *	Hon. Kevin Bruning
12:00 - 12:45 PM	Beyond the Courtroom: Community Supports for Trauma-Affected Families *	HOPE / Centerstone SPAARC
12:45 - 1:00 PM	Closing Comments	Mag. Larry Jacobs

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CONFERENCE OVERVIEW

PRESENTERS CONFIRMED TO DATE:

- **12 Month Case Law Update:** Sharon O'Day and Stephanie Roth, LMHC in Florida and New York
- **Vexatious Litigation & the New Statute:** Andrea K. Holder, Esq., Dax Nelson, P.A. and Lyndsey E. Siara, General Counsel, Office of Court Counsel, Sixth Judicial Circuit
- **Interplay of Family Law and Mental Health** (Multiple Topics & Presenters): Judge Diana Tennis and Don Moll, Certified Divorce Lending Professional
- **Judge's Panel**

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News Of Note



Trevor J. Johnson



Douglas E. Walker

Williams Parker has elected Trevor J. Johnson and Douglas E. Walker to the Firm's partnership.

Trevor practices Trusts and Estates, Corporate, and Tax law, advising closely held businesses on succession planning. He holds an LL.M. from New York University, a J.D. from Albany Law School, and a B.A. from Cornell.

Doug, Board Certified in Construction Law, brings 30+ years of industry experience representing clients in construction and design disputes. He earned his J.D., M.S. in Civil Engineering, and B.S. from the University of Florida.



Deborah J. Blue



Gary H. Larsen



Jeffrey D. Peairs

Sarasota-based Dickinson & Gibbons, P.A. announced that partners Deborah J. Blue, Gary H. Larsen, and Jeffrey D. Peairs have been named 2026 Florida Super Lawyers, a peer-driven Thomson Reuters recognition based on nominations, research, and evaluations.

Blue, board-certified in Marital and Family Law, is earning her 19th selection, while Larsen, a board-certified civil trial lawyer, marks his 13th year, and Peairs his 9th.

Larsen and Peairs are also Florida Supreme Court certified mediators focused on complex civil litigation. All three hold AV Preeminent Martindale-Hubbell ratings. Founded in 1937, the firm belongs to the ALFA International legal network.



Sandberg Phoenix announced that the entire Dunlap & Moran team has joined the firm, expanding its presence on Florida's Gulf Coast and strengthening its Southeast footprint. Effective June 16, 2026, the Sarasota and Lakewood Ranch offices will operate as Sandberg Phoenix.

The combination adds 30 professionals, including more than 15 attorneys and paralegals, enhancing the firm's capabilities in estate planning, private wealth, real estate, business law, and litigation. Clients of both firms will benefit from expanded legal resources, deeper practice expertise, and a fully integrated platform while maintaining the trusted relationships and local service they have long relied on.

Sarasota attorney, businessman and philanthropist **Hugh F. Culverhouse Jr.** has donated \$1 million to the University of Florida to establish an endowed chair in constitutional law, one of the first major philanthropic gifts announced since Stuart R. Bell became UF president July 1.



EVENT SCHEDULE

AUGUST 2026

WED 05	Wednesday Wine Down Social, organized by ADR Section	5:30 PM
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SEPTEMBER 2026

WED 9	SCD Kickoff Dinner	5:30 PM
THURS 17	YLD Kickoff	5:30 PM
THURS 24	Annual Installation Dinner	5:30 PM

OCTOBER 2026

TUES 20	Charitable Giving Opportunities for Residences & Vacation Homes: Lifetime & Testamentary Strategies	12:00 PM
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THANK YOU TO OUR 100% MEMBERS

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Steele Williams, Esquire

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