

OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE SARASOTA COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION

THE DOCKET



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FEATURED ARTICLES

Centennial Voices: The 2000's

SCBA President's Column: Follow, Like, Share:
Your Bar, Your Community, Your Story

YLD President's Column: Finding Your Place
in the Profession





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2026 -2027

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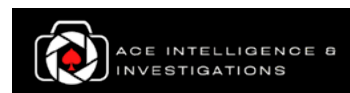
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CENTENNIAL VOICES: The 2000s: A Decade of Change, Challenge, and Perspective



Leslie Avery (formerly Talbot)

President, 2001–2002

"As lawyers, and simply as humans, I hope we never forget the need for kindness."

One of Leslie Avery's most memorable experiences as SCBA President began when she invited Catherine Ryan Hyde, author of *Pay It Forward*, to speak at her induction dinner.

Hyde accepted — and while in Sarasota, she also visited local middle schools to talk with students about the *Pay It Forward* movement and its simple but powerful message of extending kindness to others.

Just days later, Avery held her first SCBA Board meeting as President on September 11, 2001.

Against the backdrop of the extraordinary courage, sacrifice and compassion witnessed in the days that followed, Hyde's message took on an even deeper meaning.

Looking back, Avery says the experience remains a powerful reminder of something that is just as important today: the need to extend kindness to others and carry forward the good that has been shown to us.



Mary Alice Jackson

President, 2004–2005

“Diversity was critically important in 2005 and remains critically important in 2026.”

When Mary Alice Jackson served as SCBA President in 2004–2005, she was already looking ahead at two issues that would reshape the legal profession: technology and diversity.

Technology was creating new questions about privacy and access to information, while the SCBA was beginning to develop its diversity efforts. Those early discussions extended beyond racial diversity to sexual orientation, religious differences, and the experiences of women in the profession.

More than 20 years later, Jackson sees both how dramatically the profession has changed and how relevant those issues remain.

“Not everyone was buying into the new world of diversity, but all were capable of acknowledging our differences and bringing respect to the table.”

Jackson also remembers the people who shaped her SCBA experience — particularly Vicki Shesler, a friend and mentor she describes as “smart, incredibly well-organized, thoughtful, accepting, a doer, and completely self-effacing.”



Sherri Johnson

President, 2009–2010

“One of my great joys as a past president is watching the South County Division grow and thrive.”

One of the most significant initiatives of Sherri Johnson's presidency continues to shape the SCBA today.

In 2010, the SCBA worked with leaders of the Venice Englewood Bar Association to create the South County Division, bringing the two legal communities together while continuing to serve the unique needs of attorneys in South County.

Since then, the Division has grown its programming, strengthened connections among members and become an important part of the SCBA.

For Johnson, watching that growth has been one of the most rewarding legacies of her time as President.

Follow, Like, Share:

Your Bar, Your Community, Your Story



SCBA PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

By: *Alan Perez, Esq.*
Perez Law Firm

If you haven't already, take thirty seconds right now to follow the Sarasota County Bar Association on Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn. Then follow the Young Lawyers' Division too. It sounds like a small ask in the middle of a busy Docket read, but it's one of the easiest, highest-return things you can do this bar year. The best part is that it costs you nothing but a tap of the thumb.

Why This Matters

We talk a lot in the SCBA about community. Whether it's the relationships built at meetings and events, the camaraderie at the various retreats, the mentorship that happens between seasoned practitioners and young lawyers just starting out, our community is special. Social media isn't a replacement for any of that. But it is the connective tissue that keeps that community alive between events. It's the place where the winner of the annual High School Mock Trial Competition, a CLE announcement, or a photo from last month's happy hour reaches every member, not just the fifty who happened to be in the room at the time.

There's also a simpler, more human reason to follow along: we like celebrating each other. When a colleague makes partner, welcomes a new associate, wins a big verdict, or celebrates a birthday or work anniversary, our social channels are where that gets seen and shared. In a profession that can be isolating and adversarial by nature, a little public recognition among peers goes a long way.

A Benefit You're Already Paying For

The part that members sometimes miss, is that this is a membership benefit, not just a marketing exercise. Every SCBA member has an open invitation to tag us in content. Show us your photos, graphics, short videos, announcements, so that we can help get word out across the SCBA's channels. New hire at your firm? Settled or tried a significant case? Opening a second office? Hit a professional or personal milestone worth sharing? Send it our way. This kind of visibility, curated and distributed through the SCBA's platforms to members and non-members alike, is a benefit exclusively reserved for our members, and one that far too few of us are actually using.

Your firm's own social presence reaches your existing audience. The SCBA's presence reaches the entire legal community across Sarasota County, plus the many non-members, clients, and referral sources who follow us to keep a pulse on local legal news. That's real, free exposure for your good news. We just need you to include us.

We're asking every member, every firm, every practice group to treat this as a two-way street: follow us, and feed us. Tag us when you post

about a case result or community event. Send us photos from your firm's volunteer day. Let us know when an associate gets sworn in or a paralegal celebrates ten years with the firm. We want to be professional in how we present it, but we also want it to be fun. This is a place for genuine personality, not another dry press release feed.

Where to Find Us

- **Facebook:** Search "Sarasota County Bar Association" or find us at our page handle, @sarasotacountybarassn.
- **Instagram (SCBA):** @scba_sarasota
- **Instagram (Young Lawyers' Division):** @scba.yld
- **LinkedIn:** Sarasota County Bar Association — search "Sarasota County Bar Association" on LinkedIn or visit our company page directly at [linkedin.com/company/sarasota-county-bar-association](https://www.linkedin.com/company/sarasota-county-bar-association).

Follow all four. Like, comment, and share when something resonates. And most importantly, send us your news.

A Word of Thanks

None of this happens without the right partner behind the scenes, and we have a great one. A huge thank-you to **Ryderwild** (@ryderwild), our Sarasota-based branding partner, whose creative work is the reason our social presence looks and feels as sharp as it does. Our content is thoughtfully designed, on-brand, genuinely engaging material that makes the SCBA look like the vibrant, connected bar we actually are. If you've noticed our posts looking noticeably better lately, that's Ryderwild.

Special thanks to **Kristi and Abbi at Ryderwild** specifically, who have been hands-on with the SCBA account and endlessly patient, responsive, and creative in helping us tell our story well. Their work is a big part of why our channels have become something members actually want to follow, and why we can now ask you, with confidence, to make us part of your routine. Go give them a follow and a like too;; they've earned it.

This is one small piece of the "Bar Forward" push this year: modernizing how we communicate as a bar, meeting members where they already are, and making sure good news travels as far as it deserves to. Follow us, tag us, and send us your milestones. Your bar association is only as vibrant online as the stories its members choose to share.



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SCBA MEMBER GUIDE

Show Up. We'll Help Amplify.

A simple guide to engaging with SCBA on social — and growing your own professional presence in the process.

Your firm's social presence reaches the people who already know you. **The SCBA's presence reaches the entire legal community across Sarasota County** — plus the clients, referral sources, and community members who follow us to stay connected to local legal news.

Where to Find Us

Facebook	@sarasotabar	Professional updates, event announcements, community news
Instagram	@scba.yld	Real moments — events, milestones, the personality behind the profession
LinkedIn	Sarasota County Bar Assoc.	Professional milestones, thought leadership, industry news

Post on your own channels and tag us — that's all it takes.

No form, no email, no drawn out process. When you tag the SCBA, we'll reshare your news whenever possible.

Five Ways to Make the Most of Your SCBA Membership Online

- 01 Follow all three channels.** LinkedIn for milestones and industry updates, Facebook for community news, Instagram for personality and energy.
- 02 Tag us when you have news.** We'll handle the resharing and help your news reach the whole community.
- 03 Reshare when you're featured.** Share it to your own feed or stories to extend the reach on both sides.
- 04 Send us your event photos.** Real moments from real people always land better than anything staged.
- 05 Engage — not just follow.** A genuine comment or like takes five seconds and helps more people see the content.



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Finding Your Place in the Profession



YLD PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

*By: Cori Coser, Esq.
Bentley Goodrich Kison, P.A.*

Writing my first article as President of the Young Lawyers Division, I kept returning to a deceptively simple question: What does it mean to be a young lawyer? The technical answer is easy. The Florida Bar has a definition, and eventually each of us will age out of it, whether or not we ever feel ready. The more honest answer is that being a young lawyer means occupying a strange space between student and seasoned professional. You are trusted with real clients, real deadlines, and real consequences, while still quietly wondering whether everyone else received an instruction manual that somehow missed your inbox.

The early years of practice can be exciting, but also disorienting. Law school teaches us to identify issues, analyze cases, and defend a position. It does not always teach us how to manage a difficult client, recover from a mistake, develop business, set boundaries, or decide whether an email truly needs to begin with "Please be advised." Young lawyers must learn quickly and project confidence, often while encountering an issue for the first time. That tension between learning and performing defines this stage of practice.

There are practical pressures, too. Young lawyers are building careers while navigating student loans, rising housing costs, demanding schedules, family responsibilities, and the question of what comes next. We are told to become excellent lawyers, but also to network, find mentors, attract clients, serve the community, and maintain some recognizable form of a personal life.

Apparently, sleep remains optional. Even in supportive workplaces, admitting we do not know something can be difficult when our job is to provide answers.

Practicing in Florida adds another layer. Our state continues to grow and change, and the profession changes with it. Clients' needs reflect that growth: new businesses, new residents, development, aging communities, property disputes, storm-related issues, and increasing demands on courts and legal services. Technology has also accelerated practice. Clients expect quick responses, opposing counsel can reach us everywhere, and an "urgent" document has an uncanny ability to arrive at 4:57 p.m. on Friday.

Sarasota presents its own opportunities and challenges. It is large enough to offer sophisticated legal work across a wide range of practice areas, but small enough that reputations travel quickly. The attorney you meet at a YLD social today may be opposing counsel next month, a referral source next year, or the person who recommends you for an opportunity five years from now. That closeness can feel intimidating when you are new. It also makes Sarasota an unusually good place to build a career grounded in relationships, professionalism, and community.

For lawyers who did not grow up here or attend school nearby, breaking into an established professional community can be especially difficult. Sarasota has many long-standing firms, relationships, and traditions. Walking into a room where everyone appears to know one another can make even a confident lawyer consider checking an imaginary urgent email. But every established attorney was once the new person in that room. The only way to become part of the community is to keep showing up.

That is why getting involved early matters. Bar involvement gives young lawyers something daily practice may not: a broader professional home. Within our firms, we may know only lawyers in our practice areas. Through the Bar, we meet judges, government lawyers, solo practitioners, nonprofit attorneys, transactional lawyers, litigators, and people whose practices we did not

know existed. Those connections make us better resources for clients and remind us that the profession is larger than our current caseload.

Bar membership is not valuable simply because it adds a line to a résumé. Its real value is access to people, perspective, education, leadership, and service. A CLE may answer a question you did not know how to ask. A conversation at Third Thursday may lead to a mentor or referral. Committee service may offer leadership experience before work does. Volunteering at mock trial may reconnect you with why you became a lawyer. The return often develops quietly through relationships built over time.

Those relationships are also a source of support. The practice of law can be isolating, particularly when confidentiality prevents us from discussing the details of what is weighing on us. Other lawyers understand the pressure of a looming deadline, the sting of a difficult hearing, and the disproportionate joy of discovering that opposing counsel agreed to an extension. Having peers who can offer perspective—or simply confirm that a situation is, in fact, objectively frustrating—makes the profession more manageable.

Involvement also helps shape the kind of legal community we want to inherit. Young lawyers bring different experiences, expectations, and ideas about technology, workplace culture, wellness, public service, and access to justice. Our voices matter, but only if we use them. Joining a committee, attending an event, volunteering for a program, or suggesting a new idea may feel small. Collectively, those choices determine whether our Bar remains welcoming, relevant, and responsive to the next generation.

As YLD President, I want our Division to make involvement feel accessible. You do not need to know everyone, attend everything, or arrive with a five-year leadership plan. Start with one event. Introduce yourself to one person. Volunteer for one project that interests you. If walking into a networking event alone sounds terrible, bring a colleague, or find me! I promise there will be no cold calls, no seating chart, and no requirement that you have perfected your elevator pitch.

Being a young lawyer means learning in public, building confidence through experience, and discovering what kind of lawyer, and person, you want to become. We do not have to do that alone. Sarasota's legal community is at its best when we know one another, support one another, and invest in the profession together. Bar membership opens that door, but each of us has to walk through it. I hope this is the year you do.

Sherri L. Johnson

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Amendment 3:

What It Could Mean for Sarasota County



SCD PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

*By: Callie Cowan, Esq.
Ledbetter Cowan Law Group*

As attorneys and judges, we are often asked questions that fall somewhere between law, public policy and everyday life. With Amendment 3 appearing on Florida's November ballot, I suspect many of us will hear some version of the same question from clients, friends, neighbors and family members: **"What does this amendment actually do?"**

The easy answer is that it provides property tax relief to Florida homeowners. The more complete answer, particularly for those of us who live and work in Sarasota County, is more complicated.

My purpose here is not to advocate for or against Amendment 3. Rather, it is to provide some local context that may be helpful when those inevitable questions come our way.

Amendment 3, titled "Increased Homestead Exemption; Lower Cap on Increases in Non-Homestead Property Assessments," would increase the homestead exemption for non-school property taxes to \$150,000 in 2027 and \$250,000 in 2028, with inflation adjustments thereafter. It would also reduce the annual cap on assessment increases for non-homestead property from 10%

to 5%. If approved by at least 60% of voters, the amendment would become part of Florida's Constitution.

For homeowners, the appeal is straightforward: a larger exemption means less of a home's assessed value is subject to property taxes levied by counties, municipalities and other affected taxing authorities.

There is an important qualification, however: the increased exemption would not apply to school property taxes. Those taxes would continue to be assessed under the existing framework. That distinction is worth remembering when explaining the amendment because a \$250,000 homestead exemption does not mean \$250,000 is removed from the taxable value used to calculate every component of a homeowner's property tax bill.

There is also another side of the equation. What homeowners no longer pay in property taxes is revenue that local governments no longer receive. That is where Amendment 3 becomes particularly significant here in Sarasota County.

Consider my hometown of Venice.

The City of Venice currently estimates that, once the amendment is fully phased in, it would reduce the City's general fund revenue by approximately \$5.4 million annually, roughly 10% of its general fund.

I recently spoke with Venice City Manager James Clinch about what that means in practical terms. Clinch told me the City is very concerned about the potential impact. A 10% reduction may not sound enormous when viewed in the context of an entire municipal budget, he explained, but the reduction would hit the general fund—the

fund that pays for police, fire and EMS, parks and many of the services residents rely upon and value most.

The City's own published information puts that concern into perspective. Police and fire/EMS alone account for approximately 58% of Venice's general fund expenditure. The general fund also supports parks and recreation, planning and zoning, code enforcement, facility maintenance, emergency management, technology, and cybersecurity.

And Venice is not alone.

North Port estimates that Amendment 3 would create an initial general fund funding gap of approximately \$8.8 million, increasing to approximately \$14.5 million once fully implemented. North Port is particularly noteworthy because approximately 87% of its properties are residential, making changes affecting that affect residential property taxation especially significant. Police and EMS account for approximately 57% of its general fund expenditure, which also supports parks, emergency management, planning and zoning, facilities, and other municipal services.

Longboat Key has likewise identified a potential general fund funding gap, with preliminary estimates of approximately \$750,000 in the first year and \$1.4 million in the second. Property tax revenues there help support police, fire rescue and EMS, emergency management, parks and recreation, roadway and infrastructure maintenance, and other local services.

For voters, then, Amendment 3 presents two sides of the same equation.

On one side is property tax relief. Florida homeowners have faced rising insurance premiums, housing costs, and other financial pressures. For many Sarasota County residents, reducing their annual property tax bill could provide meaningful savings.

On the other side is the question of how local governments respond to the resulting reduction in revenue. Police officers, firefighters, paramedics, parks and other municipal services do not become less expensive simply because the taxable value of homesteaded property is reduced. Local governments would still need to balance their budgets. How they absorb those reductions, and what that ultimately means for service levels, will be part of the difficult budget decisions that follow.

So, when someone asks us, "What does Amendment 3 do?", perhaps the most useful answer is

that it changes both sides of the ledger.

For Sarasota County homeowners, it could mean meaningful property tax relief. At the same time, Sarasota County and its municipalities are projecting significant reductions in property tax revenue, including revenue currently used to support many of the services residents encounter every day.

Whether that tradeoff is worthwhile is ultimately a policy choice for Florida voters. Our role as members of the legal profession is not to make that choice for them. But when our clients, friends and neighbors ask what Amendment 3 means, we can help them understand that the answer involves more than simply what they may save on their next property tax bill.

UPCOMING SCD EVENTS

Mix & Mingle at Lord Higel House
Thursday, November 5 | 5:30 - 7:30PM

SCD Holiday Party
Friday, December 4 | 11:30AM - 1:00PM

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Understanding *Louisiana v. Callais* and the Gingles Framework



CDI CHAIR'S COLUMN

By: Tamara J. Spires, Esq.
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In April, the United States Supreme Court issued its decision in *Louisiana v. Callais*, a case involving congressional redistricting, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the constitutional limitations on the use of race in drawing electoral districts. Although the case arose from Louisiana's congressional map, the questions considered by the Court extend well beyond the borders of that state. The decision addresses the intersection of equal protection, voting rights, race, and the role of courts in evaluating legislative districting; all issues that have shaped American constitutional law for decades.

The case began after Louisiana redrew its congressional districts following the 2020 Census. Louisiana has six congressional districts and a population that is approximately one-third Black. The State's 2022 congressional map included one majority-Black district. Litigation followed, with challengers arguing that the map violated § 2 of the Voting Rights Act because it failed to provide

for an additional majority-Black district.

After a federal court determined that the challengers were likely to succeed on their § 2 claim, Louisiana ultimately adopted a new congressional map containing a second majority-Black district. That solution, however, generated a different constitutional challenge. A separate group of voters argued that race predominated in the creation of the new district and that the map therefore constituted an unconstitutional racial gerrymander.

That dispute eventually reached the Supreme Court.

In a 6–3 decision, the Supreme Court affirmed the lower court's determination that Louisiana's new map was unconstitutional. The majority concluded that § 2 of the Voting Rights Act did not require Louisiana to create the additional majority-minority district and therefore, Louisiana lacked a compelling interest sufficient to justify its intentional use of race in creating the district.

But the significance of *Callais* extends beyond a single congressional map. The Court also addressed how § 2 voting-rights claims should be evaluated going forward, including the longstanding framework established in *Thornburg v. Gingles*.

The longstanding *Gingles* framework begins with three threshold conditions: (1) the minority group is sufficiently large and geographically compact to constitute a majority in a reasonably configured district; (2) the minority group is politically cohesive; and (3) the majority votes sufficiently as

a bloc to usually defeat the minority group's preferred candidate.

Callais modified that framework. Under the first *Gingles* precondition, it is no longer enough for plaintiffs to demonstrate that an additional majority-minority district can be drawn consistent with traditional redistricting principles. Plaintiffs' illustrative maps may not use race as a districting criterion and must also satisfy the State's legitimate districting objectives, including its political goals. For the second and third preconditions, plaintiffs must now provide an analysis that "controls for party affiliation" and demonstrate that racial-bloc voting "cannot be explained by partisan affiliation."

The Court also reshaped the final "totality of circumstances" inquiry, directing courts to focus on evidence bearing on present-day intentional racial discrimination in voting. Taken together, these changes are likely to generate continued discussion among lawyers, scholars, legislators, and courts as the implications of *Callais* become clearer.

The differing views expressed by the Justices also demonstrate why *Callais* is worth understanding. Justice Alito authored the majority opinion, joined by Chief Justice Roberts and Justices Thomas, Gorsuch, Kavanaugh, and Barrett. Justice Thomas wrote separately in concurrence, joined by Justice Gorsuch. Justice Kagan authored a dissent joined by Justices Sotomayor and Jackson.

For lawyers, cases like *Callais* present an important opportunity. We do not have to agree about the outcome of a case to recognize the value of understanding it. Indeed, part of our responsibility as members of the legal profession is to remain informed about developments in the law, particularly when those developments involve significant constitutional questions and competing interpretations of longstanding precedent.

That principle is also consistent with the mission of the Council for Diversity and Inclusion: "to promote diversity and inclusion in the Sarasota legal community through outreach, education, and collaboration." Education is an important part of the Council's mission. It includes creating opportunities for members of our legal community to engage thoughtfully with developments in the law that touch upon issues of equality, access, and inclusion.

In that spirit, on October 22, the CDI will host a virtual CLE, *Louisiana v. Callais*: The Court's Reasoning and Legal Implications. The purpose of the program is not to advocate for a particu-

lar viewpoint, but to create an opportunity for thoughtful, informed discussion of an important and evolving area of constitutional law.

The discussion will be moderated by Judge Williams and will feature a distinguished panel representing judicial, academic, and civic perspectives: former Florida Supreme Court Justice Peggy A. Quince; Florida State University constitutional law professor Michael T. Morley; and Cecile M. Scoon, President of the League of Women Voters of Florida. Together, our panelists will examine the Court's decision, the legal principles at issue, and the questions *Callais* raises for the future of voting-rights law.

Our profession is strengthened when we are willing to learn, listen, ask difficult questions, and engage respectfully with perspectives that may differ from our own. *Louisiana v. Callais* gives us an opportunity to do exactly that.

I hope you will join us on October 22.

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Judge John M. Scheb American Inn of Court Celebrates 35 Years



*By: Erin Itts, Esquire
Itts Law, PLLC
SCBA Board of Directors*

The Judge John M. Scheb American Inn of Court, a platinum inn, has celebrated its 35th year. For those of you who may not be familiar with Inn of Court, it is a professional association of legal practitioners with the focus of the group being to advance the rule of law by promoting professionalism, ethics, and civility and to foster a culture of excellence in the legal profession by bridging the gap between legal education and practice. The Inn of Court format was founded in England in 1292 when King Edward I directed his chief justice to implement a plan to enhance the skill of advocates before the Royal Court of Westminster. The plan provided that judges and master lawyers would teach new lawyers to become barristers in a collegial environment, while fostering common goals and professional ideals and ethics. In England, there are four historic institutions known as the Inns of Court, and those Inns- Gray's Inn, Lincoln's Inn, the oldest of the Inns dating back to at least 1422, Inner Temple, and Middle Temple still operate today. These institutions are unique in that they function as both professional associations and collegiate education institutions, and they hold the exclusive authority to call qualified students to the Bar; membership in one of those Inns is mandatory for all barristers in England and Wales.

The American Inns of Court were established in 1977 after late Chief Justice Warren Burger and other legal leaders visited the Inns in England

and were impressed with their competency, civility, and professionalism. Upon their return, they discussed bringing the Inn concept to America. In 1980, the late Judge A. Sherman Christensen founded the first Inn of Court, essentially a pilot program, in the Provo-Salt Lake City area, and by 1985 the American Inns of Court Foundation was created, and the Inn of Court movement in America began. Today, there are almost 400 chartered American Inns of Court operating in 48 U.S. states and the District of Columbia, and there are nearly 30,000 members nationwide. The program is open to judges, lawyers, legal scholars, and law students.

The local Inn of Court was first established in 1991, initially known as the Sarasota County American Inn of Court, and received the designation of Inn #139. Judge John Scheb, a decorated judge of the 2nd District Court of Appeals and, before that, Sarasota City Attorney, local resident, and friend of this legal community, served as the Inn's first president. In 1994, the Inn members voted to rename the Inn to the Judge John M. Scheb American Inn of Court as a tribute to Judge Scheb's legal excellence, ethics, civility, and professionalism; all cornerstones of the Inn of Court system. Furthermore, Judge Scheb helped establish the Inn of Court in Sarasota County after he sought out a group of lawyers and judges in Sarasota to help establish a local Inn, knowing our local practitioners could benefit from such a program.

Judge Scheb was right: not only have local attorneys benefited from our local Inn of Court, but the Judge John M. Scheb American Inn of Court has also thrived and celebrated its 35th year at a celebration held at Michael's on East. Featured at the celebration was then President Judge Andrea DeCanio, who served as master of ceremonies. Throughout the festive evening there was the introduction of three honorary members, retired judge Kimberly Bonner, retired judge Lee Haworth, and Charles Bartlett, recognition of the

February pupillage group who won the Richard Garland Outstanding Program of the Year Award, presentation of the Judge John M. Scheb American Inn of Court Professionalism Award, as well as 12th Judicial Circuit Judge Charles Williams swearing in the 2026-2027 Executive Committee, and the evening ended with a showing of "Legacy of Professionalism: John M. Scheb and Our Inn of Court," a documentary film which premiered at the 25th anniversary of the Scheb Inn of Court. The film celebrates the life and career of Judge John M. Scheb and shares the story of the founding of the American Inn of Court in Sarasota. Overall, it was a festive evening filled with camaraderie and entertainment.

If interested in learning more about the Inn of Court, visit www.innofcourt.org, and if you believe that you are a local legal practitioner who displays the characteristics of professionalism, ethics, and civility, the application period for the Judge John M. Scheb American Inn of Court is open each spring, and questions can be submitted at any time. Congratulations to the Scheb Inn of Court on its 35th anniversary, and here's to 35 more!

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*Intro By: Yuliya V. Swaim, Esq.
Dominko & Swaim Law Group, PLLC
CDI Member-At-Large*

Introduction

Ever since the war in Ukraine began, people have asked me the same question: Where can a charitable contribution truly make a difference? Common Man for Ukraine is one answer. Its volunteers go beyond concern and turn compassion into action—delivering food and essential supplies to villages near the front lines and supporting trauma retreats for children and mothers of fallen or missing soldiers. Their work is direct, practical, and deeply human.

In “The Forgotten War,” JoAnn Fenton offers something no distant headline can: a firsthand view. The news may inform us, but distance, selectivity, and political context can leave us with an incomplete or distorted picture. Being there—meeting families, entering communities, and witnessing daily life near the front—replaces statistics with faces and abstraction with understanding.

JoAnn’s account is heartfelt, clear-eyed, and ultimately hopeful. It captures both the hardship ordinary Ukrainians endure and the extraordinary difference committed volunteers can make. To learn more or donate, visit commonmanforukraine.org.



*By: JoAnn Fenton
Writer and Long-term Supporter
of Common Man for Ukraine*

The Forgotten War

I just returned from Ukraine after 12 days with the aid group Common Man for Ukraine (CMFU). This was their 15th trip. The experience was truly indescribable. It was unsettling and at times very scary. It was also uplifting and profoundly poignant. I am forever changed by this experience.

Common Man for Ukraine (CMFU) was founded by two couples from Plymouth, New Hampshire: Alex Ray and Lisa Mure, and Steve Rand and Susan Mathison. The long-time friends were having coffee one morning in February 2022, shortly after Russia invaded Ukraine when they decided they needed to do something to help the people of Ukraine, especially the children. As members of the Plymouth Rotary Foundation, they reached out to fellow Rotarians in Poland and Ukraine and built an all-volunteer organization to help Ukraine’s most vulnerable citizens. This all-volunteer team includes a rotation of about 30 Polish Rotarians and friends who load the vans with food and supplies from a CMFU warehouse in Poland, drive to locations at the Ukrainian front lines, and help unload

and distribute everything to thousands of people waiting patiently for help. The founding two couples accompany them at least three times a year.

What began as a convoy of trucks delivering food and desperately needed supplies—such as food, sleeping bags, and generators—to villages and small cities near the front lines, soon included monthly retreats for children of fallen/missing Ukrainian soldiers, as well as monthly retreats for the mothers, widows of fallen/missing soldiers. With Polish Rotary partners, the CMFU retreat house in Zakopane, Poland, near the Ukrainian border, works with mental health professionals (medical doctors, psychologists, teachers) who volunteer their time to work individually and collectively with the participants, providing therapy and a much-needed respite from the war, as well as fun activities and a chance to connect with others. Both the Mothers' Retreat and the Children's Trauma Retreats are fully funded by the generous donations from people who care deeply about the innocent victims of the ongoing war in Ukraine.

We flew to Krakow, Poland and drove to the retreat house. We were able to join part of a retreat for both the children and the mothers, one at the beginning of our journey and one at the end. The retreats were emotionally searing. We gave out Beanie Babies, cards from a group back home, and sang and danced with the children. Their shy smiles soon gave way to hugs all around. They also gave us gifts! The resilience of these children and their capacity to think of others in the midst of such uncertainty and tragedy astounded me. During one activity, they wrote letters to President Zelenskyy. One young man wrote that he wants to grow up to fight in the war like his dad and kill Putin. Another wrote that he lost interest in living since his father was killed in the war. The counselors noticed towards the end of the retreat he finally broke through his sadness and was joyful and played with his peers on a trip to a trampoline park. One little girl drew her "dream circle," with a picture of her missing father returning. The women at the mothers' retreat were all so grateful to leave the war behind for a short time, to heal and be surrounded by others who understand, to give themselves time to just breathe. During an afternoon of art and music, one woman drew a beautiful flower in the shape of a heart, saying, "Yes, this is my heart. I probably want to fall in love. I think I still do. Well, in short, I want...I don't want to hold on anymore. I just want to live and breathe freely." The Ukrainian army provides CMFU with the names of the children and women who would like to go on the retreat. The need is boundless; the waiting list is bottomless.

The journey from Poland and across the vast ex-

ppanse of Ukraine to reach the villages and small cities near the front lines was long and intense. A convoy of eighteen cargo vans filled with food and supplies drove ten 10 hours the first day, fourteen 14 hours the second day, and continued on. The five of us in the lead van were told to turn off our location and emergency settings so we couldn't be tracked. There were long rides on the worst roads (some couldn't even be called a road.) The men driving the vans gave up twelve 12 days with their families and jobs to drive thousands of miles into enemy territory to help those in desperate need. They never lost their focus or their sense of humor. During very short bathroom breaks at gas stations along the way, they proudly showed me photos of their families—wives, children, grandchildren. I called these warriors a "band of brothers." During our journey, we had to repair or change vans three 3 times, once for a broken battery cable, once for losing the brakes, and once for snow tires due to a sudden blizzard. They also cheerfully changed a flat tire after our van went airborne from a crater in the road.

CMFU's goal was to deliver 50,000 pounds of food and supplies to ten 10 villages that desperately needed them. The 18 cargo vans were loaded with non-perishable food, two thousand 2,000 Beanie Babies donated by the good people of New Hampshire, hundreds of new sweaters donated by Rotary Clubs in Germany; decorated shoeboxes filled with art supplies and personal items for children donated by Rotary Clubs in the England; and bright yellow, decorated backpacks filled with toys donated by a company from New Jersey. Each person would get a month's supply of food, and every child would get a Beanie Baby, shoebox, sweater, and backpack.

The day we crossed the border from Poland into Ukraine, we learned Ukraine ordered the evacuation of children from the city of Sloviansk, near where we were headed. It was very unsettling to learn that Russian forces were slowly advancing from the north and east of the city and were about 12 miles from the outskirts. Russia wants to control the entire Donbas region, with its coal mines and heavy industry. Sloviansk is part of the Donbas area that is still in Ukrainian control. Russia continues to attack the city with rockets and drones. As recent as April 6, a residential part of the city was hit, killing one person and injuring five more, including a nine 9-year-old child.

This trip, the group traveled closer to the front lines than they ever have before. We went to villages that are so isolated they haven't seen any help in a very long time.

On our way east, we passed through Lviv two 2 days before a Russian drone attacked a UNES-

CO World Heritage site and residential neighborhoods in the middle of the day in Lviv's historic center. The Russians usually timed their drone strikes to hit 4 to 5 am and 11 to 12 pm. On March 24th, , the Russians changed their tactics and launched a massive attack with drones and different types of missiles during the day. They continued their attack all night, launching Russian Shahed drones, ballistic missiles, and missiles fired from bombers. We were in one of the areas targeted that night. We could hear the air raid sirens going off all day and all night. That night, we heard the anti-drone guns continually firing at the drones in the area. At one point, we heard a huge explosion that rattled the windows in the rooms where we were staying.

According to the Ukrainian Air Force, that day, Russia launched 392 drones and 34 missiles at Ukraine, a total of 426 attacks. Buildings were on fire and several people were killed (including a child) and many more were injured. The Ukrainian air defenses shot down or neutralized 390 targets— 25 missiles and 365 drones.

As we got closer to the frontlines, we had to pass through checkpoints every five 5 miles or so. They were manned by Ukrainian soldiers, standing in front of the bunker they slept in. We saw countless bunkers along the way, many covered in camouflage netting to prevent drones from getting in. We saw military trucks in the forests covered in camouflage. We passed countless military vehicles and soldiers seemingly getting ready for something. At a gas station stop, we encountered a group of soldiers putting supplies in their truck. Through our interpreter, they told us they were committed to taking back all of Ukraine, their county. They were never giving up. They looked battle-weary, but resolute.

We drove by many schools that appeared empty. We were told communities are now building schools underground or are setting up online classes. We saw schools that had small box-like structures in front of the buildings. They are bomb shelters. In the event of a bombing, there isn't enough room in the shelters to allow all the children to attend school at the same time. They have to attend school on different days. Ukraine is at risk of losing an entire generation in terms of education. They had already gone through the disruption of COVID;; now, the war is taking away their right to an education. According to the United Nations, since the war started, 4,100 Ukrainian schools have been damaged and 394 were completely destroyed, although that number is likely much higher. The European Union, UNICEF, and the World Bank are all actively working with Ukraine professionals to create safe learning environments, as well as providing psychological

support to the children, as well as and the educators.

Almost every village or city we passed through had their own memorial of fallen Ukrainian soldiers. There are larger-than-life photos of each hero, with flowers and the Ukrainian flag beside them. Some communities have so many fallen warriors, the memorials line the street for well over a mile. They seem to be a gathering point, to remind everyone to always remember and honor those that sacrificed everything for freedom.

On this trip, I learned more than I ever wanted to know about the different types of drones. These high-tech weapons have transformed war. Remote pilots now use FPV (First-Person View) drones equipped with a camera and almost invisible fiber-optic cables that can't be jammed. They can pinpoint any target with unerring accuracy. Ukrainian commanders say these drones have made the entire front line into "kill zones." According to the Ukrainian military, almost 80% of front-line casualties are now caused by these drones, which can fly up to 15 miles.

As we approached Izium, a city of 45,000 people, we had to travel through a corridor of white nylon netting, miles and miles of it. This tough nylon netting prevents the FPV from attacking people and vehicles. Before installing the netting, no one dared to move or drive unless it was a cloudy day. Now the road to Izium is covered with this netting, as they continue to add more and more of it. In early March, in another front-line area, a drone attacked a bus carrying workers on their way home. Twelve 12 people were killed. Now the Ukrainian government is putting up netting on other roads as well. They plan on installing 2,500 miles of drone nets on front-line roads by the end of this year.

As we entered the city, I noticed they were putting up netting everywhere. I also noticed the massive destruction caused by the Russian invasion of the city in March 2022. On April 1, 2022, Russian gained control of Izium until the Ukrainian army liberated it six 6 months later. The destruction was horrific. Everywhere I looked, I saw bombed out buildings, pockmarked with bullet holes and gaping holes caused by missiles. I saw only chimneys where homes used to be. City officials estimate more than 70% of Izium's buildings and 80% of its infrastructure was destroyed. Under Russian occupation about 1,000 people lost their lives. The Russians left Izium in shambles. Before they left, they ransacked the entire city, taking everything they could get their hands on. Terrible atrocities happened there: - rape, torture, murder; - many of the victims were civilians. After Izium was liberated by the Ukrainian forces,

police officers found mass graves of 440 bodies. As we parked the vans and started unloading, two women beckoned us down an alley where we saw stone steps leading down into a bomb shelter. As we descended the steps, we passed through a room that looked like a small kitchen. It had a refrigerator, an old-fashioned pot belly stove, plants, two bookshelves crammed with books, and a long table with kitchen utensils and assorted food items. I walked into the adjoining room and saw a young man in a clown outfit sitting on a tattered sofa. In front of him were children laughing as they watched his antics. There were chairs, small tables, a couple of twin beds, pictures on the wall and rugs covering the floor. Hanging from the ceiling were three flags: Poland, Ukraine, Canada.

Both rooms were neat and clean. I looked around this two-room shelter and was... I honestly can't think of the right word to describe what I was feeling. I was amazed that this community was able to bring a sense of normalcy to the lunacy of war by creating this warm, sheltering oasis from the harsh reality these children live with every day. I was hopeful and humbled that a young man from Italy was traveling through Ukraine to bring light and laughter to its children. I was crushed that we, in 2026, still needed bomb shelters to protect innocent children from senseless wars.

Leaving the city, the convoy stopped at a site overlooking water. The view was beautiful, but the ground was covered with a blanket of thousands of broken bricks. We found out it was the site of a luxury hotel that was completely destroyed. We could see remnants of a swimming pool down an embankment. There was literally nothing left of that hotel except for piles and piles of broken bricks.

We stopped at a village close to Izium and delivered food and supplies, before heading farther east. The last village we visited was so far east, that after leaving a village closer to Izium and turning off the main road, it took us over 3 hours to get to, on dirt roads riddled with potholes that were essentially craters. We passed rows and rows of trenches with coiled wire and "dragon teeth," rows of cement in the shape of triangles, used to deter tanks. We passed trucks with anti-drone guns in their beds.

We passed signs warning of land mines in the fields. According to the United Nations (UN), Ukraine is the most heavily mined country in the world. Over 25% of its territory is contaminated with mines, many unexploded. Since the Russian invasion, almost 1,700 civilians have been killed or injured, many of them children. In Ukraine, these mines are called "petals" because they are small

and look like toys to children.

We finally pulled into the village, and there were the villagers, all standing quietly by a shell of a building, waiting patiently with their bags, children staring expectingly at us. We brought with us boxes of clothing from another village. They were so grateful. It broke my heart watching them look through clothing that we in the US wouldn't wear or keep. Most of the villagers spoke Russian, not Ukrainian, but they were unwavering in their support of a free Ukraine.

The convoy was on its way to the last two villages, when we were told we could not go there because it was too dangerous. We ended up putting the food meant for those villages into two safe houses, so it could be delivered by Ukrainian volunteers when it was deemed safe.

Heading back to western Ukraine and into Poland, I had many miles and hours to think about what my experience meant to me and what would stay stuck in my mind when I came home to my safe existence. I thought about the thousands of people I met who were lined up at every village, – all of them women with children and much older individuals. There were no young men; they were all off fighting. I will never forget the faces of the children and their mothers. Many of the older folks were in tears. Everyone was so grateful. One elderly woman wanted to give us something in return. With tears in her eyes, she told us she was ashamed she had nothing to give us. She came back a few minutes later and gave each of us a small, wrapped, Ukrainian hard candy. I brought that candy home with me. It's sitting on the windowsill above my kitchen sink to remind me every single day that we are truly one world, and we need to look after each other.

What stays with me the most are the faces, the faces that bore the effects of four 4 years of war:

- The faces of the children waiting patiently in line: At once wary, then shy, then thankful. There was a look of wonder on their faces that someone remembered them and took the time to come and give them something.
- The faces of the older citizens: Who already saw so much, suffered so much, lost so much, and have no idea of what will happen in the future, but are so thankful for the help— – some sobbing they are so overcome by simple kindness.
- The faces of the mothers: exhausted, haunted by the fate of their husband, son, brother, father, keeping a brave face for their children, and allowing a smile to light up their face when they see their children forgetting the



war for a brief time and becoming just children.

- The faces of the soldiers: weary, hollowed out, fiercely determined to save their homeland, and perhaps wistfully thinking of family and home.

Seemingly small things also stayed with me when I came home. Things like:

- At one of our stops, a woman at a roadside stand was selling jams, honey and dried fish. The fish were hanging in rows under her umbrella. It seemed like such a normal scene in such an abnormal time. I bought a jar of honey to take home with me.
- The young widow at the mother's retreat, devastated by the loss of her husband, shared that she was still hopeful she would find love again someday, determined to choose hope over despair.
- Our convoy stayed at a small, quaint hotel close to the front, where the twenty-three of us were the only guests. The rooms were neat and clean, there was no hot water, and the bathroom smelled like methane gas; but we had running water and electricity. The hotel had an outside area with comfortable chairs and a separate building with a dining/event room. As it was our base for a few nights, we had breakfast and dinner there. As I walked into the dining room the night after the onslaught of air raid sirens, guns shooting down drones and the loud explosion, I stopped in my tracks. I looked at the room and the care the owners took with it. It was a formal dining room, with a chandelier, cloth seats, and walls with hand-painted flowers. The long table was set with an elegant beige tablecloth, delicate water glasses, silverware placed just so. I thought about their struggle to run a hospitality business in the middle of a war, where no one was traveling, for anything. Still, they took the time to create a welcoming space and an oasis of normalcy. As Lisa Mure said, "War has become the norm for many Ukrainians, but they are not defeated."

- Driving by miles and miles of fields of rich, dark, almost black Ukrainian soil, called Chernozem (literally "black earth" in Ukrainian) it struck me why Ukraine is called "The Breadbasket of the World." Before the war, experts say Ukraine grain, corn, barley and sunflower oil fed over 400 million people all over the world and it has the potential to feed 600 million people. Food supply is another casualty of this war.

- The use of drones has changed the way the world wages war. There are places like Oleshky, a city in the Kherson region, that has been under Russian control for almost 4 years and is suffering mass expulsion and widespread starvation because of the Russian blockade. What used to be a city of over 40,000 people, now has 6,000 inhabitants. Many Ukrainian cities and villages are trying to live a "normal" life, keep cherished traditions, and continue to nurture family and community, while at the same time never forgetting that death can rain down from the sky at any given moment. It is a disheartening way of life on a tragic scale.

Common Man for Ukraine has delivered 4 million pounds of food since the start of the war. They were the last aid group to deliver food to Oleshky. It is now more dangerous than ever before to bring aid to desperate areas, but the founders of Common Man are not giving up. As Susan Mathison says, "We can't let fear get in the way. These kids are waiting, people are waiting. They are all the innocent victims of a war they don't deserve. The conflict in Iran and the Middle East has captured all the attention, but the people of Ukraine still need the help. There are catastrophes all over the world, but that shouldn't divert our attention from this war."

For more information or to donate to Common Man for Ukraine, visit the website at: commonmanforukraine.org.

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*By: Annie Breitinger, Esq.
Legal Aid of Manasota*

Serving Justice Through Pro Bono: Honoring Attorneys Who Give Back

“Serving Justice. Strengthening Democracy.” is the 2026 theme for Pro Bono Week, celebrated October 25-31. In Manatee and Sarasota counties, many attorneys embody this theme throughout the year through the donation of their time, skills, and expertise to help low income clients navigate the judicial system. As attorneys, our lives pull us in many different directions between clients, family, self-care, community, friends, and hobbies (if you’re lucky!). Legal Aid of Manasota knows your time is in high demand and understands the sacrifice many attorneys make to take on pro bono cases.

A challenge that comes from operating a pro bono nonprofit is that our pool of volunteers is very small – only attorneys can take on the volunteer role we need to serve our clients. It is our honor to share the names below of the attorneys in Manatee and Sarasota counties who have answered this call to action since January 2025. If you are interested in joining the ranks of these volunteers, please email Annie Breitinger at AnnieB@legalaidofmanasota.org.

Serving Justice. Strengthening Democracy.

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Tyler Brown
Faith Brown
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Thomas Cherichello
Drew Clayton
Lisbeth Cload
Jessica Close
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Mark Creech
Leslie Curley
Wyndel Darville
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Amy Drachman
Robert "Tad" Drean
Jonell Dreznin
William Drumm
Katherine Fall
Emily Flinchpaugh
Ashley Gaillard
Timothy Gensmer
Whitney Glaser
Christina Goldberg
Jack-Andrew Miller Gonser
Kristina Gonzalez
Worth Graham
Paul Grondahl

Aidan Gross
Gregory Hagopian
Sarah Harnden
Michael Hassan
Michelle Hermey
Kaylin Humerickhouse
Jessica Israileff
Erin Itts
Adria Jensen
Andrea Johnson
Tom Icard, Jr
Stephen Rees, Jr
John Patterson, Jr
Edward Eliasberg, Jr.
Dana Keane
N. Macaire King
Amanda Kison
Lisa Kleinberg
Stanley Krawetz
Stephen Kurvin
Jason Lessinger
Julie Luhrsen
James Lynch
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Kerry Mack
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William Merrill
Lindsey Meshberger
Federico Mojica
Teresa Monfils
Michael Moran
Anthony Mowry
Harold Munter
Andrew Van Ness
Christopher Nigro
Alyssa Nohren
Jessica Ocasio

Meghan O'Connell
Ryan Opitz
Peter Peak
Alan Lopez Perez
Renno Peterson
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Nicole Price
Rebecca Proctor
Tyson Pulsifer
Jordan Riccardi
J. Edward Richards
Cynthia Riddell
M. Michelle Robles
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Tinley Rudd
Laurie Sams
Annelise Sander
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Neil Scott
Patrick Seidensticker
Tamara Spires
Tyler Stall
William Taylor
James Toale
Gianna Tomeo
James Turner
David Wallace
Kathleen Walz
John Waskom
Barbara Welch
D. Scott Wesley
Steele Williams
Matthew Willingham
Mary Van Winkle
Mark Zimmerman
Telese Zuberer

Everything Feels Urgent. Almost Nothing Is.



By: Rian Davis
At Home Auto Glass, LLC
YLD Board of Directors

About a year and a half ago I moved in-house, and I love it! It's the best career decision I've made. I get to be closer to the business, I'm invested in outcomes instead of hours, and I'm part of building something rather than papering someone else's deal. I'd recommend the move to almost any young lawyer wondering about it. But I'd be lying if I said it came without a catch. The day-to-day can wear on you, and the reason is simple. You're always on call.

In-house work rearranges the pressure rather than removing it. There's no billable hour, but the demand doesn't shrink; it just changes shape. You're no longer one of several outside advisors a client calls when something big happens. You're the lawyer, down the hall, on the chat, one message away, for everyone. Sales wants the contract reviewed now. Finance has a "quick question." A

vendor issue hits your inbox at 8 p.m. Legal quietly turns into a help desk that never closes, and every request lands with the same unspoken demand: this one can't wait.

It can. That realization is the whole game. Setting boundaries is critical to surviving this job with your energy and your enthusiasm intact. The linchpin that holds every boundary in place is a single skill: determining what is genuinely important from what merely feels like it must be answered this instant. Almost everything that crosses an in-house lawyer's desk is important. Very little of it is both important and immediate. Learning to feel the difference, quickly and confidently and without guilt, is what keeps the boundary from collapsing the moment someone marks a message "urgent."

In practice, it's a short pause before reacting. Does the answer actually change if it comes in three hours instead of three minutes? Almost always, no. The signature can wait until morning. The contract question is Thursday's problem. The "quick call" is just as quick tomorrow. Every so often, something truly is on fire. And when it is, you'll know, and you'll give it everything you've got. Everything else takes a number and waits in a line you control, not one the sender's anxiety controls for you.

The reframe that made all of this possible came

from my boss. In one of those stretches where everything was flooding in at once and I was quietly drowning in it, he said something I keep as a ready reminder: "We aren't performing surgery. No one is dying. It's just money." I don't repeat that to diminish the work, which matters and deserves to be done well, but as a reminder of proportion. A missed deadline is not a code blue. A frustrated colleague is not a catastrophe. Almost nothing an in-house lawyer touches is truly irreversible, and keeping that in view is exactly what lets you meet the genuinely urgent things calmly and let everything else wait its turn.

That discipline pays off for the business. Answer everything in ten seconds and you train your colleagues to escalate everything, which buries the genuine emergencies in noise and makes you slower exactly when speed matters. Teaching the people around you that legal is thoughtful rather than instant is a gift to them too. Over time they come to rely on your judgment instead of your reflexes, and that is a far better reputation to have than "fast."

But protecting the business is only half of it. That same discipline has to protect you too, so carve

out something that is genuinely yours: a fixed point in the week the job's demands don't get to move, and defend it like the material term it is. And model it. The lawyers coming up behind us are watching to see whether being permanently reachable is simply the price of the work. It shouldn't be, and we get to decide that.

Talk to people who get it. Going in-house can be isolating in a way outside practice usually isn't. You may be a department of one, or one of a few, without a floor full of peers who understand the particular weight of being everyone's lawyer. That's what the bar community is for. The CDI and YLD would genuinely love to see you at an event, so come find your people!

I still love this job, unreservedly. The always-on part is the tax it charges, and boundaries, held in place by the discipline of distinguishing urgent from important, are how I keep the work I love from quietly costing me the life around it. Everything feels urgent. Almost nothing is. Say that to yourself the next time your phone lights up, and you'll be most of the way there.



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TROY CROTTS
Troy@CroftsMediation.com
(727) 403-8107



Troy practiced for 37 years as a civil trial litigator and now has a statewide solo mediation practice. He is authorized to mediate in all State Circuit Courts and in the Middle and Northern Federal District Courts.

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- Selected as a Florida "Legal Elite", "Super Lawyer" and "Best Lawyers in America"
- Named by Best Lawyers as one of two Tampa "Lawyers of the Year" – Personal Injury Litigation (2014) and Medical Malpractice (2015 and 2023); and recently named as one of two St. Petersburg "Lawyers of the Year" – Personal Injury Litigation and Medical Malpractice
- American Board of Trial Advocates – Tampa Bay Member and Executive Board Member

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Seventy-Five Years Strong: FAWL's History and It's Future in Sarasota



*By: Amanda F. Davy, Esq.
Perez Law Firm
President, FAWL Sarasota*

In 1951, a small group of women lawyers in Florida decided they were tired of walking into rooms alone. They were a tiny minority in a profession that had not exactly rolled out the welcome mat. Most bar functions and networking circles were, in practice, closed to them. So, they did what lawyers do best. They organized.

That was the beginning of the Florida Association for Women Lawyers. What started as a handful of women meeting to support one another has grown into one of the largest voluntary bar associations in the state, with chapters stretching from Pensacola to Key West and a statewide voice that is heard in Tallahassee, at The Florida Bar, and in courthouses across Florida. FAWL's stated purpose has stayed remarkably consistent over the decades: to actualize the power of women in the legal profession, expand leadership opportunities, and promote the elimination of bias. Those are big goals, but every one of them has been advanced, year after year, through women lawyers showing up for each other.

A little history

The early members of FAWL were pioneers in the most literal sense. Many were the only women in their firm, their courtroom, or their county. The organization gave them a place to compare notes, share strategies, and frankly, vent. Over time,

that informal support became something more structured. FAWL began advocating for women to be appointed to the bench, pushing for policies that addressed the barriers women faced in practice, and building a pipeline of leaders who went on to serve as judges, Bar presidents, and elected officials.

Today, FAWL's members include justices, judges, managing partners, general counsel, public defenders, prosecutors, and solo practitioners. It has been at the table on issues ranging from judicial diversity to parental leave continuances to pay equity. Whether you agree with every position the organization has taken over seventy-five years, it is hard to argue with the results. Women lawyers in Florida have more seats at the table today than they did in 1951, and FAWL has had a hand in nearly every one of those gains.

Why the local chapter is where it happens

State-level advocacy is important, but the real work of FAWL happens in the chapters. It happens at lunch. It happens at happy hour. It happens when the new associate who has been practicing for six months sits next to a circuit judge and realizes the judge was once a nervous new associate, too.

Our profession is not easy. It is adversarial by design. We spend our days arguing with opposing counsel, defending our clients, and absorbing stress that most people outside the law never see. It is easy to become isolated. It is easy to view every other lawyer in town as an opponent rather than a colleague. And it is especially easy for young attorneys, who may not yet have a mentor, a peer group, or a sense of where they fit, to feel like they are figuring it all out alone.

FAWL Sarasota exists to change that.

Professionalism starts with knowing each other

There is a reason the courts and The Florida Bar talk so much about professionalism. Civility happens when lawyers know one another as people, not just as names on a pleading. It is a lot harder to send a nasty email to someone you had coffee with last week. It is a lot easier to work out a scheduling conflict with someone who knows you and trusts your word.

When our members gather, they build exactly those relationships. Plaintiff's lawyers meet defense lawyers. Family law practitioners meet criminal defense attorneys. Government lawyers meet the private bar. Judges meet the lawyers who will appear in front of them. Every one of those connections makes our local legal community a little more collegial and a lot more civil. That is professionalism in its most practical form.

A message for young lawyers

Nobody gets through this career alone. The lawyers who thrive are the ones who build a network early, ask questions, and find people willing to invest in them. FAWL is one of the easiest and most welcoming places to do that.

Our chapter is full of experienced attorneys who remember what it was like to be new, and who want to help. Come to an event if you do not know anyone yet. Introduce yourself to someone whose practice area is completely different from yours. You will be surprised how quickly those introductions turn into referrals, co-counsel opportunities, job leads, and real friendships.

Looking ahead

This year, our board has put together a full calendar of programming designed to do exactly what FAWL has always done: bring us together, sharpen our skills, and support one another. I hope you will join us. Whether you have been a member for decades or are considering joining for the first time, there is a seat for you at our table.

Seventy-five years ago, a few women decided they did not want to walk into rooms alone anymore. Here in Sarasota, we are still making sure no one has to.

FAWL Sarasota welcomes attorneys of every gender, practice area, and level of experience. For membership and event information, please visit our chapter page or contact any member of the board



When Estate Planning Means More Than Passing Down Assets



*By: Ian MacLean, Esq.
Farr Law
SCD Board of Directors*

What happens when the beneficiary of an estate plan may need support for the rest of his or her life? For many families in our community, that question is not hypothetical. It shapes everything. Estate planning attorneys are accustomed to helping clients decide who receives their property. But for a family with a loved one who has special needs, the harder question is not who inherits, it is how resources will be managed, by whom, and in a way that does not unintentionally jeopardize the benefits and quality of life that person depends on.

The person with special needs may be a minor. He or she may also be thirty, fifty, or seventy years old. Regardless of age, parents often remain deeply involved in that person's care, finances, benefits, housing, healthcare, and daily decision-making. Eventually those parents confront a set of difficult questions: What happens when we are no longer here? Who will advocate for our child? How do we provide financial support without disqualifying our child from means-tested benefits? Underlying all of it is one deeply human concern: will my child be okay when I am gone?

A Coordinated Effort

These questions rarely have a single-document answer. A family may have a will but no appro-

priate Special Needs Trust. A trust may exist while beneficiary designations quietly direct assets around it, defeating its purpose. Documents drafted years earlier may never have been revisited as a child became an adult or as circumstances changed. A well-intentioned inheritance, structured incorrectly, can create consequences the family never anticipated, including the loss of SSI or Medicaid eligibility.

Comprehensive special needs planning can touch Special Needs Trusts, revocable trusts with appropriate provisions, powers of attorney and advance directives, guardianship or supported decision-making arrangements, trustee and successor-fiduciary selection, beneficiary designations, retirement assets and life insurance, ABLE accounts, and public-benefits considerations. Not every family needs every tool. What every family needs is access to professionals who understand how these pieces interact.

That is why this work takes a team. A beautifully drafted Special Needs Trust does not solve the problem if assets are never directed to it, and a financial strategy cannot substitute for sound legal documents. Neither fully answers questions about future caregiving, housing, and advocacy. The strongest plans emerge when attorneys, financial professionals, and families communicate around a shared objective.

The Caregiver Behind the Plan

There is a risk in discussing these families only through trusts, benefits, and planning techniques: the caregiver disappears. Behind almost every planning issue is a parent or sibling performing enormous amounts of unpaid, often unseen work, that is constant, exhausting, and never truly "off duty." The goal of good planning is not merely a technically correct document sit-

ting in a binder. It is a family that feels better prepared, better informed, better connected, and better supported.

The Role of the Estate-Planning Attorney

This subject is personal to me. My sister has Down syndrome, so many of the questions above are not abstract—they are the ones my own family thinks about. It is part of why I have come to see how much the legal community can offer these families.

Estate-planning attorneys occupy a uniquely important position here. Families frequently do not know enough about special needs planning to recognize the questions they should be asking, and the attorney is often the professional who identifies issues the family did not know existed. Participation in a broader network need not be burdensome. It might mean accepting an occasional pro bono matter, offering a reduced-fee engagement, teaching an educational seminar, sharing expertise in a particular area, or simply making an introduction. Each attorney decides what falls within their expertise and what they can sustainably offer.

There are families throughout our community who have spent much of their lives protecting someone they love. For the attorneys who serve them, understanding how legal, financial, benefits, and caregiving concerns fit together, and knowing when to coordinate with other professionals, can make a meaningful difference in whether those families feel prepared for the future.

A Local Resource

These concerns have prompted local efforts to bring professionals and families together. One example is Friends of Philip, a newly formed nonprofit in Sarasota County founded by Lisa Damstrom Marshall and named after her younger brother, Philip Damstrom, who was born in 1978 with significant developmental delays and passed away in 2003. Lisa grew up watching her parents care for Philip while worrying about what would happen to him when they were gone—the same questions many families in our community face. The organization was formed with the goal of connecting these families with attorneys, financial professionals, and other resources, to provide education about special needs planning, and to recognize the caregivers themselves through respite and support.

Planning for a loved one with special needs is something no family should have to navigate alone, and as attorneys, we are privileged to be in a position where we can help to ensure that they don't have to.

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MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Serving Beyond the Practice of Law

SCBA members make a difference in our community in many ways — bringing their legal knowledge, leadership, and personal passions to organizations working to improve the lives of others.

In this issue, we're proud to spotlight five SCBA members who serve on nonprofit boards throughout the region. Their reasons for giving back are personal, purposeful, and rooted in a shared commitment to strengthening the communities they serve.



Stacey Maloney, Esq.

The Law Office of Stacey Maloney, PLLC

Founder and CEO, Liquid Castles, Inc.

"My mother entered St. Joseph's Orphanage in Peekskill, NY, at 13 years old. Having a mother from the foster/orphan system, I vowed as a teenager that I would serve to help foster youth obtain their first home. Please join me on this journey as we need to shine the light on these children and bring them 'home.' Every child deserves a castle!®"

For Stacey, this mission is deeply personal. Her commitment to helping foster youth find a place to call home reflects both her family's experience and her lifelong dedication to giving vulnerable children the opportunity to build a brighter future.



Alfred J. Pandl, Esq.

Pandl Law, PLLC

Director, Neuro Challenge Foundation for Parkinson's

"I am currently serving as a member of the Board of Directors for the Neuro Challenge Foundation for Parkinson's. I am in my fourth year of a six-year term. As the senior member of the Board of Directors, I also serve as the Chairman of the Governance Committee.

The Neuro Challenge Foundation for Parkinson's is a Southwest Florida nonprofit organization dedicated to serving the needs of people facing the trials of Parkinson's, including their caregivers."

Alfred's continued service reflects a commitment to strong nonprofit leadership while supporting individuals and families navigating the challenges of Parkinson's disease throughout Southwest Florida.



Joshua P. Perez, Esq.

Berlin Patten Ebling, PLLC

Trustee, The Venice Symphony

"I serve on the Venice Symphony's Board of Trustees because I believe in the value the arts bring to our community. As South Sarasota County's only professional orchestra, the Symphony enriches lives and educates thousands of students yearly. Serving lets me give back and stay engaged with the community I practice law in."

Joshua sees service on the Symphony's board as an opportunity to support both the arts and the broader community, helping ensure that music and arts education remain an important part of life in South Sarasota County.



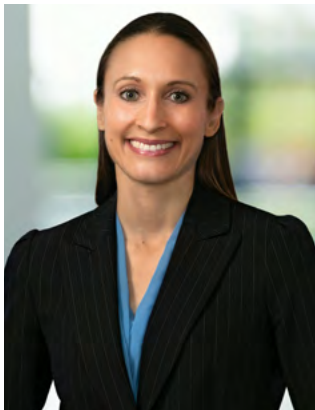
Richard B. Perlman, Esq.

Certified Family Mediator

Advisory Board Member, Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe

"I have served on the Advisory Board and in the Ambassadors Circle of the Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe for several years as I share in their mission to produce professional theatre that promotes and celebrates African American history, supports the development of aspiring artists, and builds confidence in youth of color."

Richard sees his service with the Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe as an opportunity to celebrate African American history while supporting aspiring artists and empowering youth through the arts.



Elizabeth M. Stamoulis, Esq.

Williams Parker Harrison Dietz & Getzen

Vice Chair, Children First

"I serve on the Board of Children First because I believe that children are the future of our community and that every child deserves the opportunity to thrive. Through its comprehensive approach to education, development, health, and well-being, Children First empowers both children and their families to build stronger futures."

Elizabeth's service reflects her belief that investing in children and families today creates a stronger, healthier, and more successful community for generations to come.



Calling All Nonprofit Board Members

Tell Us Why You Serve

The Sarasota County Bar Association is proud of the many members who generously give their time and talents by serving on the boards of local nonprofit organizations.

If you currently serve on a nonprofit board, we'd love to feature you in an upcoming issue of *The Docket* and on SCBA social media channels.

Please email the following to the SCBA office:

- A professional headshot
- The name of the nonprofit organization(s) you serve
- Your board position (if applicable)
- Brief (25–50 word) "Why I Serve" statement

**SUBMIT YOUR
FEATURE HERE**

**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.*



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

THE CLERKS CORNER



Proper Document Formatting Advisory

While the e-filing portal will accept both PDF and PDF/A formats, the Clerk's Office strongly recommends that practitioners manually convert any documents in PDF format to PDF/A prior to submission.

Documents submitted through the e-filing portal as PDF are automatically converted to PDF/A by the system. Although the portal is not maintained by the Clerk's office, we have received reports of conversion issues with some PDF files that can affect headers and footers. This can be especially problematic where essential information, such as a page number or footnote, is contained in a footer that does not survive the conversion to PDF/A. These issues may be further compounded when the missing information is used as a reference in another document, such as a Notice of Confidentiality.

PDF and PDF/A refer to Portable Document Format and Portable Document Format Archive, respectively. However, while the PDF format has been in use since the early '90s, PDF/A is a more

recent format created, in part, with the legal profession in mind. In the early 2000s, several government offices, including the Administrative Office of the United States Courts, participated in a workgroup within the International Organization for Standardization to develop a standardized file format that would better serve the professional and governmental communities than the standard PDF. Critically, PDFs may be dependent on external resources. As a result, content in a PDF may not function correctly outside of the system that a particular PDF was created in. By contrast, PDF/As are entirely self-contained. As a result, PDF/As are truly "portable" as intended.

As a best practice, and especially where an e-filing portal user is unsure whether their document is PDF or PDF/A, the Clerk's Office recommends reviewing filings in the docket for any conversion issues that may have occurred. Portal users should pay particular attention to headers and footers in submitted documents. Additionally, where pictures, graphics, or other media appear in a PDF, users should review them to ensure the media properly converts to PDF/A. Under some circumstances, a PDF may reference media located elsewhere on the user's personal device rather than importing the media into the file itself.

Finally, filers should be aware that formatting errors can occur when converting a document to PDF or PDF/A from a word processing document format. Minor spacing changes during conversion from one format to another can push text from one page onto the next, which can disrupt proper page numbering or otherwise break up text intended to remain together. Tables, charts, shapes, or similar additions to documents seem to be particularly susceptible to such shifts under some circumstances.

Manually converting to PDF/A and reviewing documents before submitting them to the portal can help avoid these errors. However, if you believe that submission through the e-filing portal is causing formatting errors that you are unable to resolve on your end, please contact us for assistance.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!



DAVID BRACCIANO, JR.
Associate
Najmy Thompson PL



JENNA EWING
Associate Attorney
Levin & Perconti



K. W. "WAYNE" MCCLANAHAN, II
Associate
Farr Law Firm, P.A.



JONATHAN ZACHARY
Associate Attorney
McDermott Law Offices, PLLC

NEWS OF NOTE

Icard Merrill Joins Gunster



On October 1, 2026, the attorneys and professionals of Icard Merrill joined Gunster, marking the renowned statewide firm's entry into Sarasota and Manatee Counties. The unified firms will continue to deliver the attentive, high-quality service clients have come to expect, now enhanced by Gunster's extensive practice capabilities and statewide collaborative approach.

"Icard Merrill has spent nearly 75 years building deep roots and a sterling reputation in this community, and their team's culture and commitment to client service align seamlessly with our own," said Bill Perry, CEO and managing shareholder of Gunster.

WILL SEARCH

In search of last Will and Testament of

George Hyde Marston

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DOD 9/29/24

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Contact:

Andrea Nelson
alnelson2011@gmail.com | (508) 509-2873

OCTOBER CLASSIFIED ADS



EMPLOYMENT

Bentley Goodrich Kison is seeking a motivated **Associate Attorney**. Our firm handles complex commercial litigation, real estate litigation, and appeals. The ideal candidate is an excellent writer, strong legal researcher, highly organized, and eager to take meaningful responsibility in challenging cases. This is an exceptional opportunity to work closely with experienced trial attorneys on significant and complicated matters. Competitive compensation and a collaborative, professional work environment. Submit resumes in confidence to bgoodrich@bgk.law.



EMPLOYMENT

Lutz Bobo is seeking a versatile **Associate Attorney** to join our Real Estate Group and provide client-focused representation to business clients and housing providers, including Fortune 500 companies, national operators, and resident-owned communities. Candidates should have 3 to 5 years of experience in commercial or real estate litigation, dispute resolution, community association law, housing law, or a related practice area. Recent law school graduates and entry-level candidates with strong academic credentials are also encouraged to apply. We seek an action-oriented professional who can deliver sophisticated legal analysis and practical solutions. We offer a competitive salary and benefits package, a collaborative team environment, a premier downtown Sarasota bayfront office, and periodic remote work flexibility. Submit resumes and writing samples to resumes@lutzbobo.com



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Furnished offices for lease at 7100 Beneva Road in the Ferrari Elder Law building. This upscale professional building with ground level entrance and extensive parking includes a receptionist, three conference rooms, and a spacious kitchen & break room. Lease payments are inclusive of utilities and taxes. Phone and internet service to be provided by tenant. Prices start at \$750 per month. Please contact Julianna Gentile at 941-960-1676 or via email at juliannag@ferrarielderlaw.com.



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Professional Offices For Lease

Newly renovated offices for lease on Lime Ave in the Greg Linehan Law building. This upscale and updated building includes two state of the art conference rooms, a spacious kitchen & copy room, a coffee bar, and many more amenities. Lease payments are inclusive of utilities and taxes. Phone and internet service can be included for an additional fee. Prices start at \$700 per month. Please contact Rebecca Curry at 941-387-6111 or via email at rcurry@greglinehanlaw.com.

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EVENT SCHEDULE

OCTOBER 2026

THURS 15	YLD Third Thursday Social	6:00 PM
FRI 16	CUT THE NOISE: Building a Smarter Legal Tech Stack	12:00 PM
TUES 20	Charitable Giving Opportunities for Residences & Vacation Homes: Lifetime & Testamentary Strategies	12:00 PM
THURS 22	Louisiana v. Callais: The Court's Reasoning & Legal Implications	12:00 PM
THURS 22	Wine Down with EPP	5:30 PM
THURS 29	The Intersection of Legal Ethics and Emerging AI Technologies	2:00 PM

NOVEMBER 2026

WED 4	Advocating for Your Professional Value: Strategies for Compensation Conversations...	12:00 PM
THURS 5	Mix & Mingle at Lord Higel House	5:30 PM
FRI 6	Boots + Beats: Line Dance for a Cause	5:30 PM
THURS 19	YLD Third Thursday Social	5:00 PM
FRI 20	How to Protect You and Your Clients From Litigation	12:00 PM

DECEMBER 2026

FRI 4	SCD Holiday Party	11:30 AM
THURS 10	SCBA + S-FAWL Holiday Party	5:30 PM
FRI 18	Building a Foundation in Florida Labor & Employment Law	12:00 PM



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