

TALLAHASSEE BAR BULLETIN

Quarter 4 2024

ARTICLES

DOAH Trial Academy,
Eminent Domain,
Court Considerations
for Determining
Compensation, Elevating
Your Brand, Pro Bono
Heroes, Tax Cuts &
Jobs Act

EVENTS

Past and future -
discover what you have
access to as a member

MEMBERS

Member News,
Highlights,
Special Offers,
and More



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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

FRIENDS, WE ARE INTO THE FALL SEASON AND TOO QUICKLY APPROACHING THE HOLIDAYS! THIS ALSO MEANS, THIS IS OUR FINAL BULLETIN OF 2024, AND MY LAST PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE. THE FEELING IS BITTERSWEET, BUT I WANT TO EXPRESS MY THANKS TO YOU ALL FOR MAKING THIS A SUCCESSFUL TBA YEAR AND SHARE OUR PLANS FOR THE REST OF THE YEAR AND INTO 2025.

First, we had an incredibly successful Chili Cookoff. Many thanks to the committee that put it on, the award winners, and all the sponsors that made it happen. And a thank you to those that attended and sampled some of the incredible (and unique) chilis and margaritas. Because of everyone's efforts, TBA raised some \$19,000 to support LAF's mission to provide legal services to underserved individuals.

And on the note of low cost legal services, I'd like to highlight the Low Bono Center, an important partnership TBA maintains with the Leon County Clerk's Office, and call each of you to consider taking a shift. I recently worked a shift at the Center, and my experience was powerful. It does not take a great deal of your time—I'm keenly aware we all have a great number of responsibilities (and billable hours) to tend to. There are staff there to assist if you do not have an immediate answer to questions. The consumers truly appreciate and are grateful for the assistance. And it is a great way to help our underserved community and positively impact Leon County and the Second Circuit we call home. Contact TBA Executive Director, Alva Smith, to get yourself on the schedule.

Second, looking to the future, I see nothing but bright things on the horizon. TBA announced its slate of officers and directors for 2025 at the November 7 annual meeting. Voting will open November 14, and all members will

receive an e-mail with a link to vote. Please do. Your engagement is what continues to make TBA strong. Also at the meeting, Florida Bar President Roland Sanchez-Medina, Jr. gave his State of the Bar address. He reported our Bar is strong and discussed the continued need for professionalism and the Bar's commitment to helping lawyers before any issues arise. And last, to close out the year, the annual Holiday Party will be on December 4, at The Monroe. I'm looking forward to the event and closing out 2024 with you all!

In closing, I want to once again express my gratitude for your dedication to TBA and the legal profession. I was honored to serve as your President this year, and I look forward to working with 2025 President Jami Coleman, her Board, and all of you as I take the welcomed position of Immediate Past President. I am not going anywhere and remain committed to strengthening TBA and the Second Circuit. Together, we did—and we will continue to—make a positive impact on the legal profession and our community.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sid Bigham". The signature is stylized and includes a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Sid Bigham, TBA President
sbigham@gbwlegal.com

“TALLAHASSEE BAR ASSOCIATION MEMBERS WORK TOGETHER TO ENHANCE THE LEGAL PROFESSION, PROMOTE FELLOWSHIP AMONG THEIR COLLEAGUES AND SERVE THE COMMUNITY.”

DOAH HOSTS 2024 TRIAL ACADEMY



The 2024 Division of Administrative Hearings (DOAH) Trial Academy (Academy), held from September 16 to 20, at DOAH's Tallahassee headquarters, brought together 60 attorneys for an intense, week-long course, intended to simulate

a formal administrative hearing and teach litigation skills. Sponsored by the Administrative Law Section, the Academy provided lawyers with practical experience through mock hearings, coaching sessions, and personalized feedback, aimed at improving participants' skills in real-world administrative hearings, with no cost to attendees. Lawyers who completed the program earned 50 hours of Continuing Legal Education credit and 50 hours of certification credit towards board certification in State and Federal Government and Administrative Practice.



"We had another great Academy this year. The attendees took it very seriously and arrived on Monday morning ready to work. We had 10 teams and were once again able to provide one-on-one coaching with a ratio of about 3 volunteer coaches per a team of 6 students," said DOAH Interim Director and Chief Judge Darren A. Schwartz.

At the beginning of the week, attendees were divided into 10 teams of 6 lawyers. 3 coaches were assigned

to each team. Coaches included Administrative Law Judges (ALJs), Judges of Compensation Claims (JCCs), and seasoned administrative law attorneys. The week's activities began with intensive coaching sessions over Monday and Tuesday designed to prepare the teams for the mock hearings. The heart of the Academy consisted of 20 separate mock hearings on Wednesday and Thursday, which served as the platform for participants to put their newly acquired skills to the test. Representing either the petitioner or respondent, each team engaged in simulated legal proceedings, going head-to-head with one another. This year, each participant was able to participate in at least four separate mock hearings.



Following each mock hearing, attendees reflected on their performance and received comments from the judges and their coaches. "The feedback given to the attendees following each hearing was instrumental in their growth, allowing them to identify areas for improvement as the week progressed," according to Chief Judge Schwartz.

On Thursday afternoon, each team nominated 2 members of their team to participate in one of two distinct mock hearings to be held on Friday. The first of these hearings, held Friday morning, was a final mock hearing witnessed by all attendees. Following the hearing, the attendees voted for the best representative in three categories. The recipients of the awards were: Elise Engle for "Best Opening Statement," James Branum for "Best Direct Examination," and Alexis Fowler for "Best Cross Examination." In the afternoon, and after a week of

hard work, the tone shifted to a humorous skit-based mock hearing, during which participants were given lighthearted prompts designed to test their quick thinking and adaptability while the judge and volunteer witnesses adopted quirky personas.

There is already anticipation for next year's program. "Agencies and law firms are eager to send attorneys to the Academy," Chief Judge Schwartz said. "Whether they are brand new to administrative practice or already have administrative litigation experience, the intensive practice and personalized coaching ensures that participants are more confident and prepared going forward."

If you are interested in attending next year's DOAH Trial Academy please send your name and email address to DOAH.Info@doah.state.fl.us so you can be notified when registration opens in 2025.



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FLORIDA EMINENT DOMAIN: THE CASE FOR GOING TO COURT

By Charles Stratton & Joshua Stratton



Under Florida eminent domain law, takings through the judicial process are initiated by the condemnor making an offer to the property owner to simply purchase the property and property rights needed for a particular price. The property owner can accept the offer and sell the property in lieu of a taking through eminent domain, or they can reject the offer and go to court, eventually either settling or proceeding to a jury trial. In our experience, going to court almost always results in superior outcomes for all parties. Considering that fees and costs in litigation are not paid by property owners (or out of their ultimate recovery) but by the condemnor, it seems inexplicable that most property owners agree to such initial offers, selling their valuable property rights for the initial offer amount. Property owners will usually achieve a better result by hiring attorneys and going to court.

Condemnors have an affirmative duty to ensure that property owners receive full compensation for their property, as guaranteed under the Florida Constitution.¹ Condemnors also are required to make offers to property owners based upon an appraisal.² In practice, however, condemnors typically hire appraisers with a reputation for finding low property values and make correspondingly low offers to property owners. For example, in our last trial in June of this year, the condemnor made an offer of \$23,050 for approximately 4½ acres of land at \$4000/acre plus some improvements. The property owner's position was at \$1.37 million, based upon a valuation of \$250,000/acre plus interest. And the case settled after opening statements for about \$1.1 million (plus fees and costs),

at \$200,000/acre plus approximately \$200,000 in interest owed. While not every case has such an extreme spread between the condemnor's valuation and the property owner's, it is typical for condemnors' appraisals to be substantially, sometimes even laughably, low.

Similarly, condemnors may attempt to take advantage of the threat of impending eminent domain litigation to acquire more rights through a sale than they could acquire in court. A condemnor can offer to purchase any sort of property rights from a landowner. In one instance that springs to mind, a utility company's offer to a property owner to purchase land for a new power line included rights to also install underground pipelines, as well as to install telecommunications lines that would be rented out to third parties. Florida law does not allow land to be taken for telecommunications lines other than in railroad rights-of-way, and the condemnor lacked any need for those lines or the pipeline; those rights were just on its wish list. When the eminent domain lawsuit was filed, it was for power lines only. In another instance, a county that was cooperating with FDOT on a road widening asked the owner to donate their road frontage to a depth of 75'. Later, when FDOT filed its suit, it could only claim it needed a 25'-deep strip of land. Condemnors are subject to various constitutional and statutory limits in takings suits, but not in the case of a pre-suit sale in lieu of eminent domain.

Florida law guarantees that condemnors will pay defendants' fees and costs in an eminent domain suit. This not only includes attorneys' fees, but also the cost of having a better appraisal report prepared, both of which are essential to getting full compensation, instead of simply whatever the condemnor self-interestedly alleges the property is worth. Such costs are not limited to an appraiser; all manner of experts, such as civil engineers, surveyors, land planners, arborists, hydrologists, drone photographers, and others are also covered if necessary to further the case. However, the guarantees only take

effect if the parties settle the issue in the course of pre-suit negotiations pursuant to section 73.015, Florida Statutes, or if the condemnor files suit.³ This makes hiring an appraiser pre-suit risky since the condemnor can decide not to take the property, and thus not be on the hook for fees or costs. It is safer for a property owner to wait until a suit is filed, since even if the condemnor backs out, it still has to pay the owner reasonable fees and costs once the suit is filed.

All told, there is little benefit and much risk for a property owner to sell land to a condemnor pre-suit (especially for the initial offer or any amount if uninformed by the property owner's own appraisal) as opposed to simply proceeding to an eminent domain lawsuit in which the only risk to the owner is having to be paid for the property taken, with all reasonably necessary fees and costs guaranteed.

Charles S. Stratton is a partner in the Dispute Resolution and Eminent Domain practice at Berger Singerman. He has handled hundreds of eminent domain cases across Florida, including numerous jury trials and appeals. A Florida Supreme Court-certified mediator, Charles focuses on resolving cases favorably for his clients, whether through mediation or litigation. His clients include national and regional businesses, small business owners, homeowners, churches, and property owners. Before private practice, Charles was the Chief Eminent Domain Attorney for the Florida Department of Transportation, where he managed thousands of cases statewide and led a team of attorneys.

Joshua Stratton is a partner of Berger Singerman's Dispute Resolution Team and Eminent Domain practice group. He exclusively represents private property owners and businesses against condemning authorities such as the Florida Department of Transportation, utility companies, and various cities, towns, and counties throughout Florida.

Endnotes

¹ See *Shell v. State Road Dep't of Fla.*, 135 So. 2d 857, 861 (Fla. 1961) ("Our Declaration of Rights, Section 12, Constitution of the State of Florida . . . makes it incumbent upon the condemnor to award 'just' compensation for the taking. In view of this constitutional mandate, the awarding of compensation which is 'just' should be the care of the condemning authority as well as that of the party whose land is being taken."); see also *Dep't of Transp., State of Fla. v. Nalven*, 455 So. 2d 301, 306 (Fla. 1984) (replacing just compensation standard under Florida Constitution of 1885 with more generous full compensation standard under Florida Constitution of 1968).

² § 73.015(1), Fla. Stat.

³ See *Calhoun, Dreggors & Assocs. v. Volusia Cnty.*, 26 So. 3d 624, 626–27 (Fla. 5th DCA 2009).

CONSIDERATIONS FOR DETERMINING COMPENSATION: AN ACCOUNTANT'S PERSPECTIVE

By Lee Allman



Compensation is a central issue for law firms of all sizes. Determining attorney compensation requires balancing a range of factors—from rewarding individual performance to maintaining fairness and promoting long-

term growth. As an accountant, my role is to help law firms structure compensation systems that are financially sustainable and aligned with the firm's strategic objectives. Here are some key considerations attorneys should keep in mind when structuring compensation plans.

Understand the Different Roles Attorneys Play

Not all attorneys contribute to a firm in the same way. While revenue generation is critical, an effective compensation plan should recognize the multiple roles that attorneys play, such as:

- **Originating Attorney:** Attorneys facilitating client development or business generation or expanding relationships with existing clients are critical to the firm's long-term success. Their compensation should reflect these contributions.
- **Responsible Attorney:** This is the attorney assigned to the matter that oversees the direction of the matter. Usually, this is a more experienced attorney and not all of this time is billable to the client.
- **Working Attorney:** This refers to how much time the attorney bills to a client's matter. Attorneys who consistently meet or exceed their billable hour targets contribute directly to the firm's revenue and profitability. However, their contributions should be weighed against other non-billable but essential work.
- **Leadership and Management:** Attorneys who take on leadership roles, whether managing a team, serving on a firm committee, or overseeing internal initiatives, add significant value that may not show up directly in

billable hours or revenue. These attorneys may also play key roles in developing junior associates.

A comprehensive compensation system should factor in these various contributions, not just focus on financial outcomes. Also keep in mind that an attorney can, and often times will, participate in multiple roles.

Transparency and Fairness

One of the most important elements of any compensation plan is transparency. All attorneys in the firm should understand how compensation is determined, the metrics used, and the criteria for bonuses or profit-sharing. When compensation decisions are too subjective, dissatisfaction and disputes can arise, especially if certain attorneys feel that their contributions are not being recognized.

To ensure transparency, all attorneys should know exactly what factors influence their compensation, whether it's billable hours, client generation, leadership roles, or other contributions. Also, compensation allocations should be reviewed regularly to ensure it remains aligned with the firm's objectives and rewards the right behaviors. Finally, open and clear communication about how decisions are made is essential to maintaining trust within the firm.

Determining Compensation

There are several common models for attorney compensation, each with its own advantages and challenges. Here, we will focus on a hybrid model that takes into consideration many factors. This model requires allocating fees **collected** into 4 buckets. The split of these fees can vary from firm to firm depending on various factors like ownership structure and size of the firm. Here are the ranges you will typically see:

- 1- Originating Attorney Fee: 5% to 15%
- 2- Responsible Attorney: 5% to 15%
- 3- Working Attorney: 30% to 60%
- 4- Firm share: 20% to 50%

The Firm Share includes operational overhead (staff

salaries, utilities, rent, insurance) as well as an amount for attorneys that spend time on Firm Management (items not directly related to a client). It is best practice to establish a budget of all expenses as a starting point to establish the Firm Share percentage. Attorney compensation for leadership and management should be considered part of the firm's operational costs in the budget. After determining the operation budget, you can back into the Firm Share percentage by dividing the budget by the budgeted fees to be earned for the year. The percentage of the 4 buckets needs to total 100%.

Once the percentage breakdowns are established, the amounts allocated to each attorney for the first 3 buckets are easy to calculate from fees received, if you are using a billing and reporting system set up for law firms. If you do not have this type of billing and reporting set up, it is crucial to do so to make reporting and tracking easy. The funds allocated to the Firm Share are then used to pay the operating costs, including the Firm Management.

Conclusion

Determining attorney compensation is a complex and sensitive task that requires balancing financial, performance, and cultural considerations. By incorporating clear metrics, ensuring transparency, and considering both short-term performance and long-term planning, law firms can develop a compensation system that rewards their attorneys fairly, promotes collaboration, and positions the firm for sustained success. Collaboration between attorneys and accountants is key to creating financially sound compensation plans that support the firm's strategic goals.

Lee Allman, CPA, is the Principal of All Law Accounting, PLLC, which provides Law Firm Accounting and Advisory Services. He can be reached by email at Lee@AllLawAccounting.com or phone at (850) 570-7757.

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ELEVATING YOUR LAW FIRM'S BRAND THROUGH VISUAL MARKETING

By Alena Johnson



Picture yourself outside the legal field, needing an attorney for the first time. As you scroll through countless law firm websites, you're trying to figure out who to trust with both your legal matter and your future.

You're not just looking for credentials; you're looking for connection, for a sense that this person, that this team, understands you and will truly advocate for you. You land on a site where the attorney's face greets you with a confident smile, where the team photo shows a group that looks approachable yet professional, and the office itself exudes warmth and integrity. Instantly, something clicks. You feel like you've met them before—like they're familiar. And that feeling of familiarity sparks trust.

Trust is built long before you ever meet someone in person, and it's often cultivated through subtle, repeated impressions—both online and offline. When people consistently see your face, your team's camaraderie, your firm's involvement in the community, they start to form an emotional connection. Consistency of your visual presence makes people feel like they already know you. Every image on your social media, website, and other platforms tells a piece of your story, reinforcing your credibility and creating a lasting impression.

This is why professional photography is so essential. A thoughtfully composed headshot shows potential clients that you're confident and approachable. Team photos create a sense of unity and professionalism, while images of your office environment reflect warmth and openness. Candid shots of your team working together or engaging in the community build a narrative of trust and connection. All these elements, working together, help ensure that when someone visits your website or sees your marketing materials, they feel like they're meeting someone familiar, not a stranger. When your

visual presence is cohesive and consistent, it becomes easier for people to choose you, because trust has already started to form.

In addition to photography, short videos—whether educational, behind-the-scenes, teamwork, or just fun—can enhance that connection. They give potential clients another way to engage with you and feel like they know who you are before ever stepping into your office.

Let's break it down: What exactly should you showcase in your visual marketing across platforms like your website, social media, and brochures? First, **start with headshots**. These aren't just formal photos—they are your chance to make a personal connection. Choose images that convey not just professionalism, but also approachability. You want potential clients to feel like they can trust you, so go for expressions that are confident, yet warm. For attorneys who specialize in different areas, consider having different types of headshots that match the tone of your practice—someone in family law might opt for a more friendly demeanor, while a litigator may want a stronger, no-nonsense look.

Next, think about **team culture photos**. Show your team working together in the office—or better yet, interacting with clients (or staged client meetings if privacy is a concern). Let people see the camaraderie and collaboration that happens behind the scenes. Office environment photos can also go a long way in helping potential clients feel comfortable. Show your conference rooms, the warm reception area, or any other space where clients will spend time. These visuals give potential clients a feel for what it's like to walk into your firm—whether it's cozy and welcoming or sleek and modern.

For your **website and brochures**, you'll want to include **branded photography** that reinforces your firm's values. Photos of your team engaging in the community, speaking at events, or simply hard at work tell a deeper story

about your commitment to clients and professionalism. These visuals create a sense of pride in your work and allow clients to envision you as an active participant in their success. Even simple, branded imagery of legal documents being reviewed or courtroom settings can enhance this perception.

Finally, consider **seasonal and special occasion photos**. Around the holidays, professional group photos with festive touches can make great social media content or holiday cards sent to clients.

You can also use these images for **client appreciation posts** on social media, showing how you celebrate milestones, whether it's a case win or a team member's promotion. The key is consistency: your imagery should tell a cohesive story across every platform, building trust, showcasing professionalism, and making your firm feel approachable and relatable.

In today's competitive legal landscape, your visual presence is more than just a photo—it's the foundation of how clients perceive you, both online and offline.

By thoughtfully curating everything from professional headshots to team culture images, and even seasonal or event-specific photography, you build a brand that clients trust before they ever meet you. Consistency across your website, social media, and marketing materials ensures that every interaction reinforces the same message: your firm is professional, approachable, and dedicated to excellence.

At Ti Adoro Studios, we specialize in helping law firms like yours create a cohesive, polished visual brand that tells your story with authenticity. From individual headshots to team photos, branded imagery, and even videos, we have the experience and expertise to elevate your firm's presence in every format. Ready to make your brand stand out and connect with clients before they even step through the door? Let's make it happen. Contact us at 850-270-7034, or visit www.ti-adoro.com to schedule your consultation today.

■ Alena Johnsen is the co-owner of Ti Adoro Studios, Inc.

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HOW TO BECOME A HERO: VOLUNTEER THIS FALL AS A PRO BONO ATTORNEY

By Rashel Johnson & Charlotte Walters



Each October, the legal community comes together to celebrate the extraordinary impact of volunteer attorneys during the [National Celebration of Pro Bono](#). Organized by the American Bar Association (ABA), this month highlights the transformative work of legal professionals who give their time, expertise, and passion to help those who cannot afford legal services. This year, the ABA chose a theme that resonates deeply within the legal community: “Making Justice a Reality in Our Communities.”

This theme reflects the dedication of attorneys nationwide who offer pro bono services to bridge the justice gap for low-income individuals, underserved communities, and marginalized populations. In a world where legal representation is often out of reach for those who need it most, pro bono attorneys—our modern-day heroes—step in to ensure that justice is not just a lofty ideal but a tangible reality.

Why Volunteer?

At Legal Services of North Florida (LSNF), pro bono attorneys are affectionately called ‘Pro Bono Heroes.’ They are a crucial force in ensuring access to justice. Volunteering as a pro bono attorney offers a unique opportunity to make a direct impact. Whether it’s helping a family avoid homelessness or securing healthcare for a disabled individual, the results of pro bono work can be life-changing for the client and attorney.

Next, pro bono work can provide attorneys who specialize in one area of law with the valuable experience

of learning other areas of law. Pro bono work often offers opportunities to sharpen legal skills, strengthen client interaction skills, gain courtroom exposure, or explore new areas of law.

What truly establishes volunteer attorneys as Pro Bono Heroes is the ripple effect of pro bono work beyond individual clients. Pro bono attorneys help strengthen the integrity of the legal system as a whole. **They send a powerful message: justice should not depend on one’s ability to pay.** And they instill trust in our community and legal system.

Pro Bono Celebration Month: A Call to Action

Pro Bono Celebration Month is an ideal time for law firms, bar associations, and legal aid organizations to raise awareness of the ongoing need for volunteer attorneys. It’s a time to recognize those who have already committed to pro bono work and to inspire more lawyers to become Pro Bono Heroes.

As we celebrate Pro Bono Heroes this October, let us remember the critical role these volunteers play in closing the justice gap. These legal professionals volunteer their time in various ways without financial compensation. Pro Bono Heroes leap into action in one of three ways:

- 1) **HELPLINE**—Providing advice and counsel via our Helpline (which can occur virtually or in person).
- 2) **CLINICS**—Attending a one-time clinic on advance directives or various areas of law for a two-hour block.
- 3) **TAKE A CASE**—Providing brief or full representation on a case from diverse areas of law.

Volunteering can range from a few short hours to however much time an attorney chooses to contribute. For many clients, these volunteer attorneys are lifelines in their most vulnerable moments. In a legal system that can be complex, intimidating, and expensive, the assistance of a pro bono attorney provides not only legal support but also hope and dignity.

Your turn to become a Pro Bono Hero is now!
Visit www.lsnf.org/volunteer.

Rashel Johnson, Esq., LSNF Director of Pro Bono and Volunteer Engagement; Charlotte Waters, LSNF Director of Communications.

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THE TAX CUTS AND JOBS ACT: AN OVERVIEW OF ITS EFFECTS ON BUSINESSES AND INDIVIDUALS

By Ben Gantt



The **Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA)** has been a hot-button topic since its inception in 2017. Almost every American will be affected by its expiration at the end of 2025, especially high earners and business owners.

While the runway seems long, the clock is ticking to take advantage of the current tax rates.

Here is what you need to know to ensure you and your clients are prepared for the changes on the horizon.

What is the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act?

The TCJA represents one of the most significant overhauls of the U.S. tax system in decades. Enacted at the start of 2018, the law made sweeping changes to the U.S. tax code with the goal of stimulating economic growth, reducing tax burdens for individuals and businesses, and simplifying the tax filing process. Unless lawmakers enact legislation before the end-of-year deadline, broad tax changes will automatically take place at the beginning of 2026.

What impact will the sunset have on business owners?

One of the largest implications affects some pass-through business owners, such as owners of certain sole proprietorships, partnerships, and S-corps, who will lose the 20% deduction for pass-through income. In addition, the law provided a phased approach to bonus depreciation on capital investments. Businesses could write off 100% of the qualified property cost in 2017, 80% in 2023, 60% in 2024, 40% in 2025, 20% in 2026, and zero thereafter.

These changes could have a significant impact on cash flow and should be considered when choosing investments for the years to come. Our team of financial planning experts specializes in helping business owners implement tax-efficient strategies that can be utilized

now to prepare for what's to come.

What impacts will the sunset have on individual taxpayers?

Individuals with a net worth of more than \$7MM will face significant impacts in regard to estate planning. The TCJA doubled the estate and gift tax. Currently, an individual can transfer up to \$13.61MM, and a couple can transfer up to \$27.22MM to their heirs without paying any federal estate or gift tax. The gifting amount will drop by 50% in 2026. Strategies are available to maximize wealth transfer to the next generation, but action must be taken before the end of 2025.

Individual taxes will also look different across the board, with marginal tax rates returning to their higher pre-TCJA levels and the standard deduction getting cut in half. Beginning in 2026, more itemized deductions will be available. With these changes imminent, it is critical to have a short-term strategy that takes advantage of the current rates and a long-term plan that utilizes tax-advantaged accounts like IRAs and HSAs.

As a Forbes top-ranked wealth advisor, we know that a financial plan is just one piece of the puzzle, but navigating these significant changes requires a team approach.

Sophisticated clients like yours require an elite team to serve their best interests. Consider partnering with our team of financial planning experts at Southern Wealth to help ensure your clients are set up for success—not just for today, but for years to come.

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other planning developments after the original date of publication may affect these discussions.

Please visit www.southern-wealth.com for additional information.

Ben Gantt, Private Wealth Advisor and Founder of Southern Wealth. With an Economics degree from Florida State University, Ben launched his financial services career in 2004, specializing in asset protection, wealth management, and tax-efficient retirement and income distribution planning. He has a proven track record of serving a diverse clientele, including legal professionals, medical experts, entrepreneurs, and business owners. Recently recognized by Forbes as a 2024 Best-In-State Wealth Advisor and a 2024 Best-In-State Top Financial Security Professional, Ben's expertise aligns with the unique financial needs of the legal community. Ben was born and raised in Tallahassee, where he resides with his wife, Bambi, and their five children.



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TBA YOUNG LAWYER SECTION “ADULTING 101” SEMINAR & ESSAY CONTEST

The TBA Young Lawyer Section (YLS) is pleased to report on its recent “Adulting 101” seminar and essay contest, a dynamic initiative designed to equip young professionals with essential life skills and foster positive engagement with the legal community.

Held in May, Adulting 101 offered practical insights into critical areas of personal and professional development. YLS board members produced the seminar as a YouTube video, offering high school students advice on a variety of topics, selected and prepared by each board member based on their expertise. With the help of local guidance counselors, YLS advertised the opportunity at public, private, and charter schools around Leon County. The goal of the seminar was for high school students to gather advice on topics like financial literacy, criminal procedure, and professional development, and obtain tools or learn skills to help navigate each topic. The seminar is only enhanced by the fact that it is presented by local young professionals who are relatable to students because they just recently mastered many of the presented “adulting” skills themselves.

In conjunction with the seminar, YLS hosted an essay contest where students were encouraged to submit essays about what they learned for the chance to win a cash prize. The contest, open to all high school students, invited participants to reflect on the importance of developing professional skills and explore ways they can utilize available resources to maximize their independence or expand their future career opportunities.

We are pleased to announce that two bright sophomores, Natalia Coombs and Henry Combs, won the grand prize for their exceptional essays. With the support of the Florida Bar Young Lawyer Division and funding from the Affiliate Outreach Conference Grant, the YLS was able to present \$500 prepaid Visa cards to both students.

YLS recognized the essay winners at the Leon County Courthouse. And we invited them to spend a “Morning



at the Courthouse,” offering them a glimpse of daily life immersed in the legal environment. Coincidentally, Natalia and Henry were excellent candidates for this experience because they are involved in Teen Court. By volunteering for Teen Court, they have served the roles of plaintiff’s attorney, defense attorney, and members of the jury in several real Teen Court sentencing hearings. The students brought with them an impressive understanding of criminal court, and their background in Teen Court further enriched the experience.

The “Morning at the Courthouse” included a tour, and Judge Ashenafi-Richardson graciously opened her

courtroom for a private meet-and-greet with the students, where they discussed the importance of candor before the Court during this new era of Zoom proceedings; and the Judge shared stories from her time on the bench, offered advice, and left the students with a homework assignment (to research the importance of *Gideon vs. Wainright*). She invited the students to stay for first appearance. The afternoon concluded with the YLS board joining the students and treating them to Goodies along with a debrief of the morning.



In this fifth iteration of *Adulting 101*, YLS hopes to have filled a role that has been understandably unsatisfied by traditional high school curriculum. As young lawyers, we are specially situated for an advisory role because we have both a wealth of legal advice and a personal understanding about the challenges of modern-day adulthood. Certain subjects like financial literacy, taxes, traffic laws, and family law, to name a few, are not often taught formally in high school curriculum but still begin to impact the lives of teens whether they are ready or not. With our acute understanding of the challenges facing young adults, and the education to share credible and meaningful advice on a variety of these elusive subjects, the YLS board is uniquely positioned to continue to provide new iterations of the *Adulting 101* seminar for the benefit of teens throughout our community. It is our hope that by participating in *Adulting 101*, high school students feel more confident and capable when they approach graduation and enter adulthood.

The 2024 YLS *Adulting 101* chair, Michael Manis, spearheaded the initiative, and committee members Alberto Garcia, Gannon Coens, and Eric Schab presented segments in the seminar. Overall, this initiative underscores YLS's mission to identify ways that young lawyers can contribute to the community and perpetuate service, in tandem with YLS's commitment to supporting the next generation of young leaders.

MEMBER NEWS

SUBMIT YOUR TBA MEMBER NEWS

Changing firms? Made partner? Receiving an award? Celebrating a personal or professional milestone? We want to hear about it!

Send your news to TBA@TALLAHASSEEBAR.ORG



Kathy Maus

Kathy Maus, Partner and Partner-in-Charge of the Tallahassee office of Butler Weihmuller Katz Craig LLP, was awarded the Louis B. Potter Lifetime Professional Service Award at the DRI Annual Meeting on October 18, 2024.



Liz Desloge Ellis

Liz Desloge Ellis, TBA Secretary, was promoted to Shareholder at Stearns Weaver Miller Weissler Alhadeff & Sitterson.



Alberto Garcia Marrero

Alberto Garcia Marrero, TBA YLS Board member, got engaged to Marnie Villanueva while on a trip to Quebec in late September.

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MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



HON. JAMES R. WOLF (RETIRED)

Our Bulletin profile this month is on retired Judge James Wolf. After serving on the First District Court of Appeal for thirty years, James Wolf reentered practice, became Florida Supreme Court Certified in both Circuit Civil and Appellate mediations, and now serves as an arbitrator/special magistrate at O'Steen & O'Steen. He is a graduate of Rutgers University, the University of Miami School of Law, and has a Masters of the Judicial Process (LLM.) from the University of Virginia.

Judge Wolf has been a member of the Tallahassee Bar Association since around 1985. He served for more than a decade on the Judicial Qualifications Commission, taught a variety of law courses in the United States and overseas, was a founding member of the First District Appellate Inn of Court and past president of the Stafford Inn, and has sat on numerous rules and other Florida Bar and Florida Supreme Court committees. He has assisted the FSU Moot court team as a coach and practice panelist for many years. He is also a past chair of the local government section of the Florida Bar.

Why do you find it important to stay involved with voluntary bar associations, like TBA?

The exchange of ideas and legal perspectives as well as learning what is important to your colleagues and your community is essential to being a better lawyer and person. The Tallahassee Bar provides opportunities to meet and discuss these issues with your fellow lawyers. Mentoring younger lawyers and being involved in community service are also important to many members of the TBA—and have always been important interests of mine. The TBA has great programs that meet these needs.

What motivates you?

As a judge, I was motivated to write decisions in accordance with the law, which I believed were practical and just. As a mediator, I am motivated to help reach a settlement that is agreeable to all parties involved. In describing the difference in my roles, I am reminded of a line from Ted Lasso, "Be curious and not judgmental."

What do you do for fun?

I am a fanatical baseball fan. I have visited over 40 major league stadiums (some no longer in existence) and have

had season tickets for FSU baseball for over 15 years. Assisting with FSU moot court teams. Getting up every morning, taking long walks with our dog, having a lot of coffee, and doing New York Times Crossword Puzzles and games with my wife. I also love to read.



If you could have dinner with one person (fictional or non, deceased or alive), who would it be, and why?

Lyndon Johnson and/or Robert Caro. Caro wrote a four-volume biography of Johnson. My favorite was "Master of

the Senate," which was about Johnson's time as majority leader of the U.S. Senate. I would love to talk to them about the politics involved in the passage of the Civil Rights Law in the 1950s.

If you could change one thing about the practice of law, what would it be and why?

I know I can't turn back the clock, but the extensive use of Zoom has cut down on personal contact. While Zoom in many cases is more efficient for a variety of reasons, I believe it has led to truncated arguments, loss of cordiality, and less effective fact finding.



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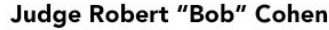
2024 Chili Cookoff

On October 23, TBA held its 27th annual Chili Cookoff benefiting the Legal Aid Foundation. Teams competed in a variety of categories, including Best Five-Alarm Chili, Most Unusual Chili, Best Bedecked, Most Magnificent Margarita, and the ever-popular People's Choice Award. Congratulations to all of our winners, and a big thank you to this year's judges: Judge Stefanie Newlin, Judge Steven Everett, County Attorney Chasity O'Steen, and County Commissioner Rick Minor. TBA raised \$19,000 for the Legal Aid Foundation, all of which will allow them to provide vital legal services to those who would otherwise not have access to legal representation.



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2024 CANDIDATES



2024 Candidates Forum

TBA held a Candidates Forum on July 24 at Stearns Weaver Miller's downtown offices. Over 20 candidates for local office addressed the membership regarding their plans if elected. Following that, the three candidates for County Judge participated in a moderated debate and discussed issues affecting TBA members. A big thank you to our event sponsors, Stearns Weaver Miller and Panza Maurer, and to our moderator Sean Pittman.

END OF SUMMER HAPPY HOUR

Happy Hour at Amicus

On September 18, TBA and YLS held a joint member happy hour to coincide with FSU Law's return to school for the 2024-2025 academic year. TBA and YLS members networked with judges, other attorneys, and law students at the downtown brewery.

2024 UPCOMING

TBA CALENDAR *of Events*

NOVEMBER 17 | 5:30pm-8:30pm

Battle of the Boards

House of Music



Karaoke Competition

TBA Board vs. YLS Board

November 19th
5:30PM-8:30PM

at the **House of Music**

Winner determined by local Second Circuit judges!



DECEMBER 04 | 6pm-8:30pm

Bench & Bar Holiday Party

The Monroe

A flyer for the 'Bench & Bar Holiday Party'. The background is white with a red grid pattern and large red snowflake graphics on the right. The text is in red and black. It includes the event name, date, time, location, host information, ticket prices, and logos of the organizing organizations.

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Co-Editors

Kyle Sill
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Liz Ellis
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Design and Editorial Team

ESPMedia Co.

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