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# VERMONT BAR JOURNAL

244

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37 Court St, PO Box 100  
Montpelier, Vermont 05601-0100  
802-223-2020 • 1-800-639-7036  
Fax: 802-223-1573  
E-Mail: [kvelk@vtbar.org](mailto:kvelk@vtbar.org)  
On the Web: [www.vtbar.org](http://www.vtbar.org)

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# PURSUITS OF HAPPINESS

## Julia Compagna Pursues Happiness Around a Track

**Editor's note:** Julia Compagna is an attorney at Sargent Law Office in Morrisville. She likes to run...

It is quite fitting that when asked to contribute an article about my running club participation, it would fall under a column entitled "Pursuits of Happiness." In my case the running experience literally involves actual pursuit, because at an 11-minute mile pace, I'm never at the head of the pack. Figuratively, I'm pursuing that relaxed, meditative state, achieved when the perfect combination of endorphins, dopamine, oxygenation and syncopated body rhythm, occurs. It feels so good when that happens! You can leave the law office wired, stressed out, mentally exhausted and drained, then a workout run acts as the reset to release all that negative energy and restore your brain's equilibrium.

Running triggers the release of endorphins and dopamine, which are key neurotransmitters that improve mood, create feelings of pleasure and reward, and reduce pain. Endorphins act as natural pain-killers, contributing to the «runner's high,» while dopamine is crucial for motivation and pleasure, creating a powerful, positive feedback loop for sustained exercise and a long-lasting sense of reward and motivation.

High school gym class was never my thing. I didn't have a competitive sports bone in my body. My Norwegian genes are sturdy, rather than athletic, and the co-ed curriculum choices seemed lame to me – Archery (welts on the inside arm), Orienteering (I could get lost on a dead-end street), or Flag Football (hello?). In a lesser-of-evils decision, I chose "Conditioning" with no idea what it was.

"Conditioning" turned out to be running the nature trails surrounding the school, alongside a river with cascading falls. I was consistently in the bottom three finishers every week, chugging along at my 11-minute mile pace. But surprise, surprise, I found I loved it.

An 11-minute mile pace is considered a solid start for many recreational runners and is equivalent to a speed of 5.5 mph on a treadmill. This pace translates to a 5K race time of approximately 34 minutes and 6 seconds, and a marathon time of nearly 4 hours and 49 minutes. It is a speed that falls within the typical range for beginners and is often described as a fast walk or easy



Julia, petting the dog, with friends.



Julia, bottom right.

run pace. I've never deviated from that pace. Sure, have I gone all out and landed at a 10-minute mile? Yes, but in my opinion, why should I? Running for me is about finding my zone, connecting to my working body, connecting to my breath, and feeling my personal best versus any competitive strive. I'm proud that from high school gym class, to today, I've maintained that pace.

Post graduation I discovered running on a track – no potholes, no HILLS! I prefer sunset runs over sunrise, and the hotter the temperature the better. Whether it was my college schedule, work schedule, or parent schedule, the track provided a safe space

to get in a workout, even after dark (with headlamp). On one occasion, my friends and I got locked in behind the track facility gate, running at 9 PM, and had to beat on the school doors for a night custodian to come let us drive out. I've run during both my pregnancies, through all seasons of the year, during temps in the humid 90's, or 10 degrees with a windchill, and soldiered on despite injuries. Mainly because I'm afraid to stop, as I may never have the "oomph" to start up again, and it's so, so easy and so, so frustrating, to lose all the conditioning you've achieved over the long haul, in just a matter of weeks.

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Julia, third from the left, at the Ugly Sweater Fun Run.

One running season I decided to challenge myself to a 5K run per month including the Slip Slidin' Away Winter 5K (cold, but flat), Shamrock Shuffle (cold, brutal hill, green beer), Parks & Rec Egg Run (free pancakes, brutal hill), CVHS Dog Run (free dog biscuits, brutal hill), BF Alumni Weekend Hangover Run (easy-peasy, didn't drink), July 4<sup>th</sup> 5K (hot and flat, yay!), Elmore 5K (flat, beautiful lakeside), Heady Trotter 4 Miler (great course, tailgate party), and ASCS Turkey Trot (brisk, brutal hill).

At the Morristown running track (Alexander Hamilton Copley Trust Running Track), I discovered the Northern Vermont Ridge Runners running club that has hosted weekly track workouts for about 20 years. Planned workouts are posted to Facebook, Front Porch Forum and LinkedIn. Attendees can follow the workout or do their own thing. The vibe is casual, drop-in, so no formal commitment is required. I'd found my tribe! We run as many weeks of the year as weather conditions permit. When the track is snow-covered, we migrate to the village streets.

NVRR members/participants range in age from their 20s to their 70s and include everyone from serious marathon trainees to recreational runners, to people rehabilitating their bodies from injury, surgery, and even cancer. Runners visiting Vermont from other areas join in; as well as members of VT Run 251 – a club dedicated to runners obtaining miles in all of Vermont's 251 towns and organized gores. And there is Zen Member – me. I'm in it for psychological reasons, as well as the physical fitness benefits I think of as an added bonus – my jeans fit better, and I keep my sanity.

I became involved in helping facilitate the group when longtime members moved

away. Additional group activities have been added. We've partnered with schools, the municipality and regional health service providers to host 5K races, providing race day equipment and manpower.

We've added a free *Ugly Holiday Sweater Fun Run* to our December schedule, complete with hot cocoa and candy canes for attendees.

New this season, I organized one of my all-time favorite events. On a perfect summer evening NVRR hosted a light run along the mapped route for Stowe's annual "Exposed" giant outdoor art displays. Attendees met at The Current (art center) to begin the tour – using a phone app to access curated information, provided at each installation. The route took us throughout the village. We then ran a trail up to the beautiful vista overlooking Stowe Village known as Sunset Rock and ran further up to Sunset Park at the top of the trail. Sunset Park is Stowe's version of Key West's Mallory Square. In tradition with the practice of gathering to watch the sun set, the NVRR group later gathered as a group for tapas, a campfire, and member-provided live music, as we celebrated sunset over the Mansfield Range. It was magical, and that wasn't just the endorphins talking.

So in the spirit of the pursuit of happiness, something as physically demanding as running, turned out to be for this non-athlete the key to inner balance. I highly recommend it for anyone seeking the same.

NVRR meets Tuesdays at 5:30 PM at the Morrisville running track; all ages and abilities welcome. 

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# WHAT'S NEW

## 2025 Annual Meeting in Review



Photo courtesy of Priscilla B. Dubé

The Vermont Bar Association held its 2025 Annual Meeting at the Hotel Champlain in Burlington on Sept. 26, 2025. A crowd of more than 200 Vermont attorneys, judges, special guest speakers, and 15 meeting sponsors were on hand. The hotel's lobby had been renovated since our last meeting there and it looked elegant. The sun shone all day on the lake. The mood was good. The business meeting (even the food!) got high marks from attendees.

The day followed the pattern that VBA members and friends have come to expect. It began with a continental breakfast with sponsors followed by CLEs with the Association's business meeting taking place during lunch.

### The Morning

The first CLE block of the day began bright and early at 8:30 AM. Attendees had their choice of one of three programs. There was a novel 90-minute attorney wellness program: "Defibrillators, Narcan, CPR, Choking Relief & You! A Hands-On Wellness CLE." Also on offer, a panel discussion, including many of Vermont's pre-eminent employment law experts: "Workplace Watch: Legislative Changes & the Future of Employment Law in Vermont." Another option was, "Ethical, Practical, Technical: Information and Considerations for the AI-Curious Attorney." All the sessions were well attended and well received. (All the sessions were also recorded and are now

available in the VBA digital library).

The organizers for the wellness session were Priscilla Dubé of Bergeron, Paradis, & Fitzpatrick, Bar Counsel Mike Kennedy, and Tamara McLaughlin. McLaughlin is an EMT and owner of Vermont Safety Net. Her company develops and delivers medical-based training. Dubé was the prime mover behind the session. She got in touch with the VBA to call to our attention that while all our courthouses are equipped with defibrillators, not many people have the first idea what to do with them in the event of an emergency. She also observed that many attorneys have clients and colleagues who may be struggling with addiction or mental health issues that might require intervention. Mike Kennedy gave some insights on his longtime theme of attorney wellness and good Samaritan laws. McLaughlin brought a full complement of training equipment (CPR mannequins, "choking vest" and Narcan for all – a first for a VBA takeaway). Hands-on demonstrations and a lively session ensued.

The employment law session was organized by the VBA Labor & Employment Law Section chair Steve Ellis of Paul Frank + Collins and Colette Schmidt, also of Paul Frank + Collins. (Schmidt is also the VBA Young Lawyer Division Secretary). They were joined on their panel by Jeremy Grant from the labor and employment practice at DRM, Raven Rae, Senior Vice President of Legal Affairs and General Counsel at World Learning and chair of the VBA's In-House Counsel Section, and Emily Adams, an As-

sistant Attorney General in the Civil Rights Unit of the Vermont Attorney General's Office. The group addressed employment law changes that became effective in Vermont in July, including parental and family leave and pay transparency. They also discussed the motivating factors and policy goals behind changes and shifting priorities and how Vermont's laws may fit within the larger legal landscape.

The third session in that block was, "Ethical, Practical, Technical: Information and Considerations for the AI-Curious Attorney." It was led by Ott Lindstrom of Paul Frank + Collins. Lindstrom is also the VBA's representative on the Vermont Judiciary Committee on Artificial Intelligence and the Courts. He was joined by Mike Servidio of TCI, and Ryan Kriger, attorney with the Federal Trade Commission's Division of Privacy and Identity Protection and former Vermont AAG. They covered a wide range of topics related to AI in the legal profession – opportunities, concerns, and ethics.

Those sessions wrapped up at 10 AM. After a break to get some refreshment and talk with sponsors (sponsor bingo cards were distributed and winning cards were drawn at the end of the day for prizes) the second CLE block got started at 10:30. Those on hand could choose between an update on the US Supreme Court from Rod Smolla, the past president of Vermont Law and Graduate School and well-known constitutional scholar (note – we have arranged for him to teach us again at our Mid-Year Meeting on March 27), or on the

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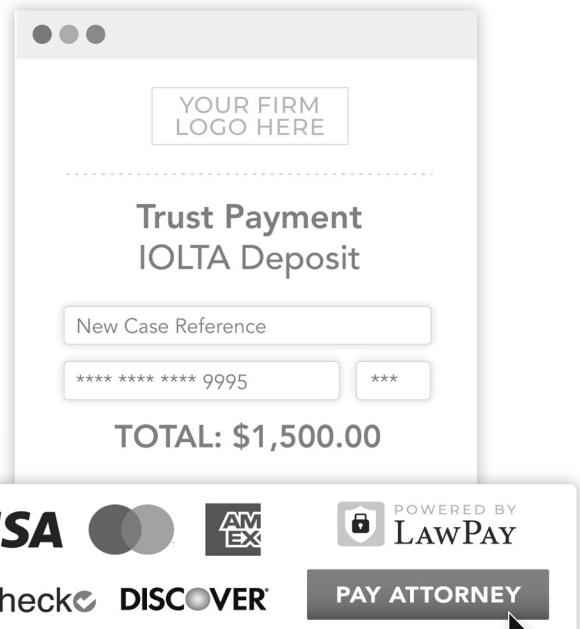
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*The annual meeting's lunch crowd.*



*Justice Carroll.*

ins-and-outs of real property distribution in divorce. "Yours, Mine, but NOT Ours: Real Estate Issues in Marriage Dissolution," was led by longtime family lawyer and chair of the Lamoille County Bar Association, Leslie Black, and Jim Knapp, co-chair of the VBA Real Property Section.

At the conclusion of the second block of CLEs it was time for the Association Business Meeting and lunch.

### **The Business Meeting**

Bar Association President Josh Diamond took the podium, and, after getting through the preliminaries (accepting the minutes from the previous meeting and approving the treasurer's report) he read the names of those Vermont lawyers and judges lost since our last meeting. Josh asked the crowd to observe a moment of silence

for them. (Brief remembrances of all the departed were included in the meeting packet).

Josh moved on to recognizing the emeritus members. Emeritus membership is conferred on attorneys who have been VBA members for 40 years and are 75 years of age or older. This year's emeritus members were listed on the meeting agenda and invited to the meeting. Those who

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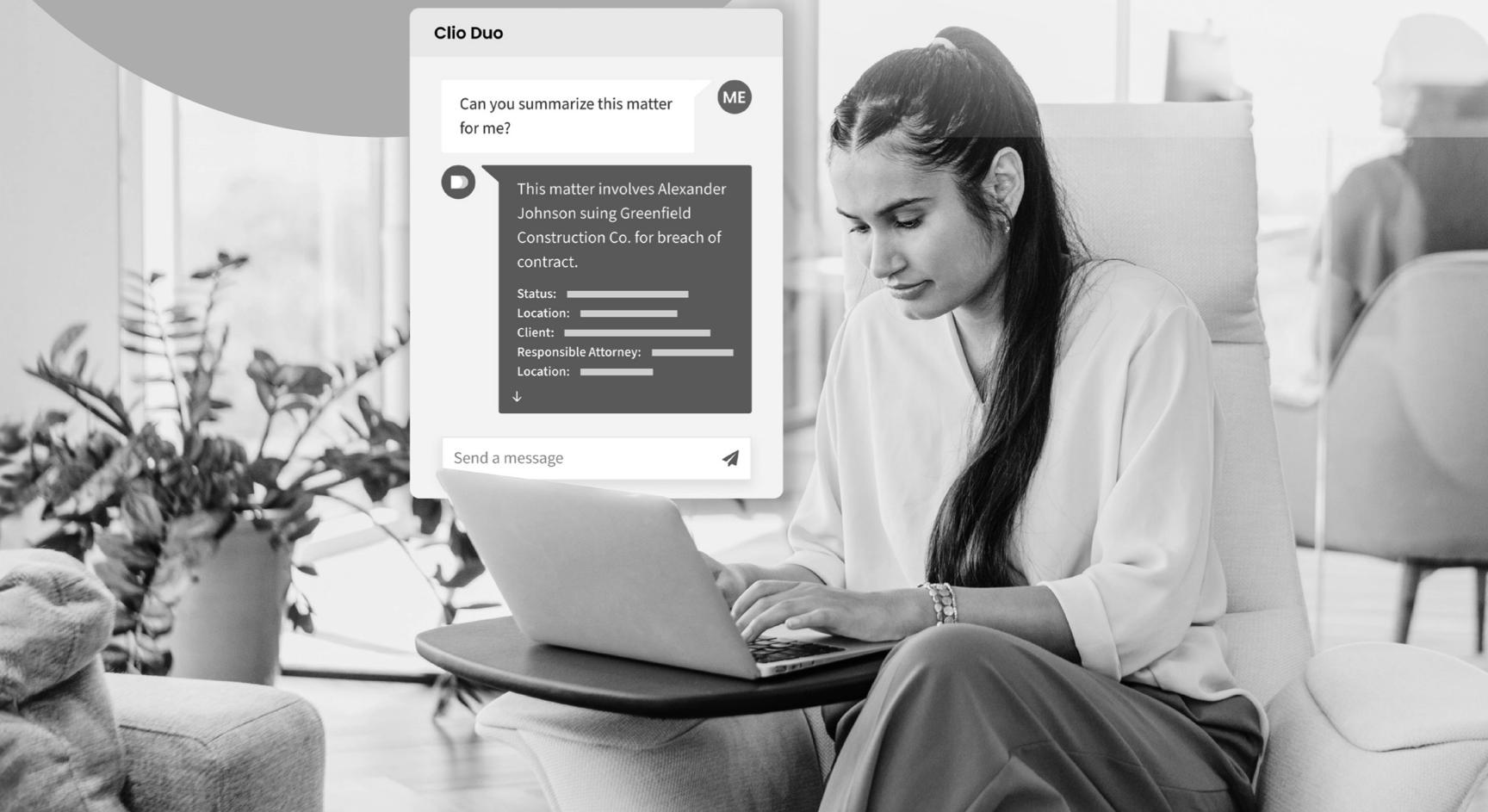
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were able to be present came to the podium to get their award from Josh. New emeritus member David Rath took the opportunity to encourage the crowd to sign up for the *Guardian ad Litem* program, in which he participates. He got a warm round of applause as did all the other new emeritus members.

Josh then moved on to the President's Awards. These are bestowed in the discretion of the VBA president each year to recognize those who have made exceptional contributions to the Bar.

The first award went to the very recently retired Vermont Supreme Court Associate Justice, Karen R. Carroll. Justice Carroll retired from the court at the end of August. Her long and distinguished career encompassed work as a state prosecutor, a U.S. Attorney, and as a Vermont superior court judge. She was sworn in as an Associate Justice of the Vermont Supreme Court by Governor Scott in April 2017. Josh noted Justice Carroll's contributions, particularly to access to justice efforts in the state. Justice Carroll, noting that she had to pull her work clothes out of the closet once more for the meeting, graciously accepted the award. She offered words of encouragement for carrying on the important work of making justice available to all Vermonters.

The next two President's awards were made to honor groups of attorneys in Vermont who have responded to the challenges to laws and norms that have been introduced by the Trump administration.

The first of these two awards was presented to three stand-out immigration law attorneys: Jill Martin Diaz, executive director of the Vermont Asylum Assistance Program, Dawn Siebert of the Defender General's office, and Brett Stokes, Assistant Professor of Law and Director of the Center for Justice Reform Clinic (CJRC) at Vermont Law and Graduate School. All three have assisted individuals, trained attorneys, and answered the need for immigration legal assistance this last year.

The third President's Award went to the



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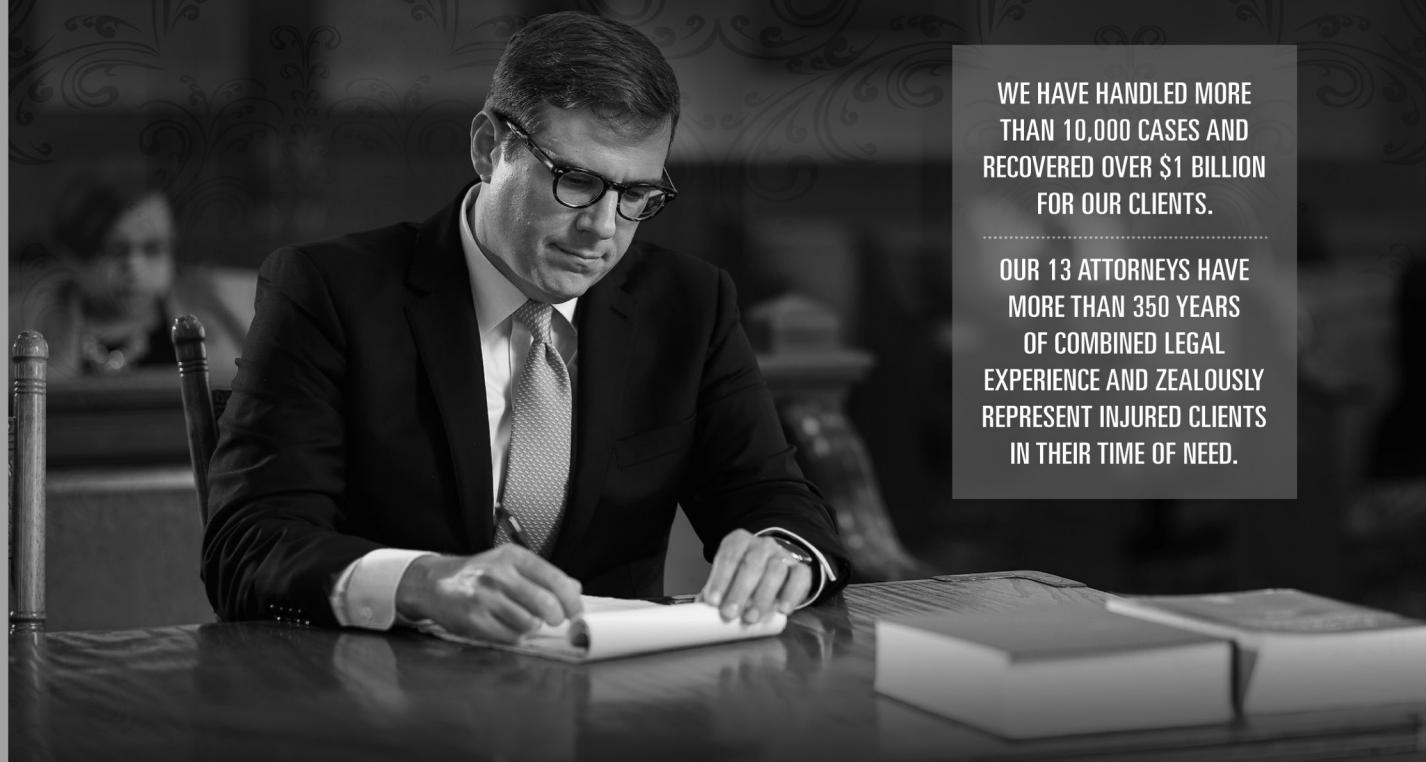
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organizers of the Vermont Lawyers March, which took place on May 3, 2025, in Burlington. The March was organized by an ad-hoc group of Vermont attorneys in response to the unprecedented challenges to the rule of law and legal norms that began in January. The Award was given to all the organizers of this signal event which brought some 700 lawyers and their supporters out to defend the rule of law. These included: Ron Fox, Craig Jarvis, Mark Koltner, P. Scott McGee, Tom Nuovo, Mary Beth Nuovo, Herb Ogden, Tony Roisman, Richard Rubin, Brian Sawyer, David Silver, Mary Welford, Amelia Silver, Natalie Silver, and Leslie Black. Leslie Black and David Silver were on hand that day to accept the award on behalf of the group.

#### Reports and Updates

The program was then handed over to Deanna Hartog, the current poverty law fellow, whose position is supported by the Vermont Bar Foundation. She gave an update on her work combatting homelessness in Vermont. Next, Bessie Weiss, interim executive director of Vermont Legal Aid and Sam Abel-Palmer, executive director of Legal Services Vermont, addressed the

crowd. Their organizations are the largest providers of legal services to marginalized Vermonters and recent funding cuts have threatened what they will be able to provide. In addition to raising awareness of these challenges, they urged everyone to buy tickets to the then upcoming Justice Gala (Nov. 6, Echo Center in Burlington). The Gala was co-sponsored by VBF, Legal Aid and Legal Services Vermont to benefit their programs.

Next Rob MacDougall, Vermont Deputy Attorney General, took the podium to announce the results of the ninth annual "Lawyers Fighting Hunger Food and Diaper Drive." During the two weeks of this year's food drive, which is sponsored annually by the AG's Office, the Vermont Paralegal Organization, and the VBA, professionals across the Vermont legal community raised \$14,304. This will supply more than \$57,216 worth of food to Vermonters. All funds donated went directly to the important work of the Vermont Foodbank. More than 1,600 food donations, diapers, and other items were brought to local food shelves or meal sites partnered with the Vermont Foodbank. In the nine-year history of the food drive, the Vermont legal community has raised more than \$99,000

and collected over 14,600 items. Many law firms and related entities participated again this year. The "winner" (biggest contributor) this year was Downs Rachlin Martin, PLLC.

Frank "Fritz" Langrock, who is currently serving as Treasurer for the American Bar Association, stepped up next to give an ABA report. In addition to highlighting the resolutions with reports to the ABA House of Delegates (noted on the agenda), Fritz spoke about the important work the ABA is doing in support of the legal profession in these times and encouraged us all to join the ABA if we hadn't already.

Josh then called for any new business or old business. Hearing none, he moved on to the passing of the gavel. Normally, at the VBA Annual Meeting, the outgoing President presents the gavel to the incoming President. Our President Elect this year was the storied Richard T. Cassidy. Rich, however, succumbed to a long illness in April of this year. To recognize him and all his service, the VBA passed the gavel ceremoniously to his wife, Becky Cassidy. Becky and Rich were ever a team and Becky was on hand at the meeting. She accepted a plaque, decorated with a gavel, on Rich's behalf. In her moving, brief address, Becky



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spoke of Rich's compassion for others and love and dedication for his work. Josh announced that the Board of Managers had voted the day before to fill Rich's term with a six-month addition to his own term and a six-month early start for the term of incoming president, Jordana Levine.

With that, as the apple pie was consumed and plates cleared, the afternoon programs began.

#### **The Afternoon and Close of the Day**

Again, attendees could choose among three CLE programs after lunch. On offer was, "Community Interventions to Keep Children and Families Together," taught by VBA Juvenile Law Section co-chairs Sarah Star and Julianne Woolard and Matthew Bernstein, the first Child, Youth, and Family Advocate for the State of Vermont. Another option was the "Immigration Law Roundtable" with one of the largest panels ever assembled for a VBA Meeting. Panelists included VBA Immigration Law Section co-chairs, Jill Martin Diaz and Becky Fu von Trapp along with Leigh Cole, Leslie Holman, Emily Kenyon, Brett Stokes, Hillary Rich, Dawn Seibert, and Sidney Collier. Rounding out the offerings was, "Bankruptcy as a Strategic Business Tool: A Practical Guide for Non-Bankruptcy Attorneys." It was led by VBA Bankruptcy section Co-chairs Greg Fox and Ryan Long. (Ryan is also President this year of the Young Lawyers Division). Greg and Ryan were joined by Adam Prescott and Michael Fisher, both of whom traveled from out of state to present at the meeting.

When those CLEs wrapped up, there was a brief break for attendees to chat with sponsors and grab cookies or brownies before the final CLE of the day: a plenary session led by Kevin Lumpkin, partner at Sheehy Furlong & Behm P.C. Kevin presented an engaging hour on Professional Responsibility Lessons from Other Jurisdictions.

tions.

With that, the formal part of the day ended. Winners of sponsor bingo picked up their prizes and attendees headed for their cars.

As has been the practice since in-person VBA meetings resumed post-pandemic, however, we followed the hotel meeting with our Basic Skills programs via Zoom the following week. Basic skills was sponsored once more by ALPs, and each of the six programs were very well attended.

The series kicked off the following Monday (Sept. 29) with the Basic Skills course on Professionalism and Ethics. It was ably taught again by Eileen Blackwood, Mike Kennedy, and Mary Ashcroft. The Civil Litigation Overview was next, and it was very well presented by Court Administrator Teri Corsones and David Casier. Jim Knapp once again taught the Real Property Overview with his characteristic wit and impressive depth of knowledge. On Tuesday, we started with the Family Law overview, taught by Amber Barber (who stepped in when the original presenter needed to go to court. Thank you Amber). The Administrative Law Overview followed, presented by fan favorites Ryan Kane and Kyle Landis-Marinello. A new offering on Appellate Law rounded out Basic Skills programming with an excellent presentation by Al Dean on Tuesday afternoon.

Thanks to all our presenters, sponsors, and to all who attended on Sept. 26 or the Basic Skills sessions. We will be back at the Hilton on March 27, 2026 for the VBA Mid-Year meeting. Again, we will follow the in-person meeting with Basic Skills taught remotely the following week. Save the date. Recordings of the CLEs presented at the Annual Meeting are now available in the VBA digital library – check our website [www.vtbar.org](http://www.vtbar.org).



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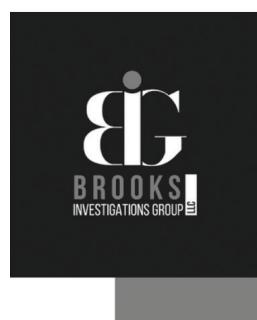
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# WHAT'S NEW

## VBA Board Elections to be held at Mid-Year Meeting on March 27

The Vermont Bar Association will hold its next business meeting during the Mid-Year Meeting on March 27, 2026, at the Hotel Champlain in Burlington. Registration details will be coming soon. Mark your calendars.

The agenda for the lunchtime business meeting will include elections for various VBA Board of Managers positions. The slate of candidates was determined by the nominating committee of the Board at its meeting in December. All candidates are

unopposed at the time of nomination. The slate is as follows:

- President elect, Kate Lamson
- Secretary, Alfonso Villegas
- Treasurer, Matt Valerio
- At-large-two-year term, 2026-2028: Lisa Campion
- At-large-two-year term, 2026-2028: Keith Roberts
- At-large-two-year term, 2026-2028: Alexander Cyr
- ABA Delegate, Elizabeth Kruska

Board members elected at the March meeting will take their positions the following September. Further nominations are possible by petition or from the floor at the meeting in Burlington on March 27. For more information contact VBA Executive Director Bob Paolini at [bpaolini@vtbar.org](mailto:bpaolini@vtbar.org). For information on Board service and the expectations of Board Members, contact Bob or see the VBA website. 

# WHAT'S NEW

## Bob Paolini Honored with "Rich Cassidy Award" at Justice Gala

The VBA's Executive Director, Bob Paolini, was recognized with an award at the First Annual Justice Gala on Nov. 6 at the Echo Center in Burlington. The Gala was sponsored by the Vermont Bar Foundation, Vermont Legal Aid, and Legal Services Vermont. Proceeds from the event, which drew some 300 attendees, were to benefit Legal Services and Legal Aid.

The program included information on the work and history of the two organizations. Speakers, including the Hon. Helen Toor (ret.) and Kevin Lumpkin, Esq., of Sheehy Furlong & Behm, and a recorded message from Sen. Peter Welch. Each emphasized the pressing need for support for both organizations at this time. After their remarks, the Master of Ceremonies for the evening, Sam Abel Palmer, Executive Director Legal Services Vermont, presented awards to Vermont attorneys who had made remarkable contributions to access to justice during their careers – including Bob.

Bob was the recipient of the first annual "Rich Cassidy Award," recognizing Leadership in Access to Justice for Vermonters.

"The Justice Gala Awards Committee was thrilled to recognize the career of Bob Paolini with the inaugural Richard Cassidy Award," Sam said. "The award honors the legacy of Rich Cassidy, who devoted his le-



Photos courtesy of Ryan Addario

gal career to expanding access to justice in Vermont. Since Rich channeled so much of his effort through the work of the Vermont Bar Association, it was especially fitting for Bob to receive this award. Through the many years of his leadership of the VBA, Bob has worked tirelessly to improve and expand access to legal services for disadvantaged Vermonters."

Bob was on hand at the Echo Center to receive his award. He noted how meaningful it was for him to have an award with Rich's name on it, and to get it with Becky

Cassidy, Rich's wife, in the audience that night.

Sam presented two more awards after giving Bob his plaque. This included the "Guen Gifford Award," recognizing Career Achievement in Legal Services for Vermonters. This was presented, posthumously, to David Santos, who worked for Legal Services Vermont for nearly 22 years. Sam also awarded the first "Sandra Baird Award," recognizing excellence in pro bono service to Vermonters, to Nancy Geise of Kolvoord, Overton & Wilson. 

## WHAT'S NEW

# The AI Mastermind Course for Vermont Lawyers

The pace of advancement in artificial intelligence is more rapid than any prior technology development in human history. And, at this point, we are still in the 'golden age' of AI, in the sense that it remains an assistive technology – you know, it can help you to do things much faster, rather than trying to kill you, like the Terminator. Now, if you're a business owner and you haven't been aggressively utilizing artificial intelligence, it is going to be very difficult for you to keep up with the pace of updates. However, if you have been, or if you start to, use AI effectively, efficiently, and regularly in your business, that can be a massive competitive advantage.

This is especially true for lawyers. Many attorneys are late adopters of technology. To that end, we have developed a mastermind course for AI specifically geared to lawyers. The VBA is offering this series of six courses, with nine CLE credits available, in a small-group, high intensity model. We'll address relevant issues for attorneys, including ethics rules and data confidentiality, but we'll also cover specific use cases for the technology that can convert your practice into an efficiency machine.

But don't get it twisted: a mastermind isn't like a regular continuing legal education program. It's a series of sessions during which attendee participation is required, not requested. **The goal is for attendees to do things, not just listen to speakers.** You'll learn how to interact with AI software, and you will develop your own AI use cases, unique to your practice, for both substantive and administrative matters. But you'll also have other attorneys with you on your journey, providing input, suggestions, and encouragement – as you work toward your goal of building an AI-ready law practice. This is decidedly a situation where, the more you put into it, the more you will get out of it. So that members of the cohort(s) are able to speak freely about their business models, participants will be asked to execute a non-disclosure agreement before the start of the course.

**So, what are you expected to put into it?**

**The mastermind sessions will run for a consecutive 6 weeks, beginning January 29<sup>th</sup> and each Thursday through March 5<sup>th</sup> – from 12pm – 1:30pm.** Each 90-minute session will feature a meeting lead-

er (or, leaders), as well as fellow members of your cohort – groups will remain small (no more than 6 attendees per cohort, and sometimes fewer), to maximize discussion & optimize results. At the end of each session, the meeting leader will assign homework, for each attendee to complete by the next week. (Didn't finish your homework? You'll be 'punished' with a live AI assignment to complete in the next session – we're not messing around here.) If there is sufficient demand, we will add a second cohort of up to six attendees that will meet on those same days from 2 to 3:30 PM.

Each session will be supplemented by unique resources, available to attendees forever after, which will include at least: one document on the subject matter of the session, one worksheet & one template.

If you're finally ready to stop talking about how to use AI in your law firm, and start doing AI in your practice, this is the crash course you've been looking for.

Pricing: \$3,000 for VBA members and \$3,900 for non-VBA members.

N.B. Live attendance of the registered attendee will be required. There will be no recordings made of the sessions. Questions? Contact [info@vtbar.org](mailto:info@vtbar.org).

*Jared D. Correia, Esq. is a former practicing lawyer, who has been a business management consultant, exclusively for law firms, since 2008. In that time, Jared has worked with 1000s of law firms, all over the world, ranging in size from solo offices to Big Law firms. He is an internationally recognized legal technology expert. Jared is the founder and CEO of Red Cave*

*Law Firm Consulting, which offers services directly to lawyers, as well as through bar associations, for member attorneys. Jared was the host of the 'Legal Toolkit' podcast on Legal Talk Network, from 2009 to 2025. He is currently the host of the 'Legal Late Night' podcast on the Legal Broadcasting Company, and the host of the 'Adventures in LegalTech' podcast for Above the Law, in addition to contributing to the ATL Tech Center 2025. Jared is a regular presenter for legal organizations, and writes often for law firm business management publications.*

*\*Red Cave Law Firm Consulting is the official consulting partner of the Vermont Bar Association.\**

*Josh Noffke, Esq. is a Michigan-based attorney and founder of Brass Tacks AI Consulting, where he helps law firms and service-based businesses bridge legal operations with transformative AI strategy. With a legal background in commercial transactions, intellectual property, data privacy, and tech law, Josh builds AI solutions that are grounded in practice—not just theory. Since launching Brass Tacks in 2022, Josh has worked with small and mid-sized firms across the country to bring structure and momentum to AI adoption. Whether speaking to legal masterminds, coaching groups, bar associations, or professional organizations, Josh offers a clear, grounded perspective on what it takes to move AI from an abstract idea to a working part of the legal engine—focused on performance, precision, and sustainability. *

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## SESSION 1

### An AI Overview for Curious Lawyers

#### January 29, 2026 • 12pm – 1:30pm

Even if you don't think you're using artificial intelligence, you probably are and AI affects your life and law practice every single day. In our initial session, we'll lay out what AI is (and is not), as well as how it works. We'll cover general tools, business tools and legaltech. After this, you'll be ready to jump off the starting blocks on the way to becoming a pro user!

Topics to be addressed include:

- defining artificial intelligence
- AI software solutions
- return on investment considerations for AI adoption in law practice

## SESSION 2

### How to Use Generative AI Like a Boss

#### February 5, 2026 • 12pm – 1:30pm

This session will focus entirely on generative AI – the most popular and accessible version of the platform for the majority of users, including business users. Mastering generative AI is the functional building block for using any AI product. We'll get you up and running on generative AI use cases specific to law firms and test your abilities in a real-time baptism by fire.

Topics to be addressed include:

- best practices for prompting generative AI
- iterating with generative AI tools to get more tailored results
- utilizing AI as a 'second brain'

## SESSION 3

### AI Ethics & Data Security: Vetting Tools, Intellectual Property Considerations & More

#### February 12, 2026 • 12pm – 1:30pm

This is the crux of the AI question for lots of lawyers – whether and how attorneys can use the technology, given the requirement to adhere to specific ethics rules. In this session, we'll talk about where traditional technology vetting criteria for law firms remains viable for AI tools, and where it lacks – to get you to place where you can confidently review your AI software options. This session will include one hour of ethics credit.

Topics to be addressed include:

- relevant federal & state laws and local ethics rules for attorneys using AI
- how to ensure confidentiality for AI tools post adoption
- the muddle of intellectual property and IP ownership

## SESSION 4

### AI Governance: Internal Management & Client Engagement

#### February 19, 2026 • 12pm – 1:30pm

Once you've unleashed AI onto your law practice, you still need to corral the usage internally. Just as you would never give unfettered access to any technology in your firm, you also have to be careful about how you launch AI products, and who has access to them, and in what ways. We'll also discuss the options for addressing AI usage within the practice, with your clients.

Topics to be addressed include:

- how to build a framework for AI governance within your law firm
- ongoing data security obligations & training modules
- AI coverage in engagement agreements & other client communications

## SESSION 5

### Fees & Fee Setting in AI-Enabled Law Firms

#### February 26, 2026 • 12pm – 1:30pm

The chief problem with fee setting in a law firm that heavily leverages AI is that most practices still offer hourly billing – and AI allows you to process that work much faster. If you're an hourly biller, and you're billing fewer hours – you're making less money. So, opting for heavy AI usage really means that you've got to at least consider alternative billing models. We'll talk over your options.

Topics to be addressed include:

- value billing models for lawyers
- how to sell alternative billing options to clients
- marketing for an increase in case volume for remaining hourly work

## SESSION 6

### Agentic AI: Workflow & Automation Development

#### March 5, 2026 • 12pm – 1:30pm

In our final session, we'll address the next big thing in AI: agents. In this session, we'll discuss how to build workflows, and automate them, via agentic AI. We'll also cover the variety of options available to create and manage agents, for different use cases. Once you complete this course, you'll be ready to build your own agents – maybe even live, during this last meeting!

Topics to be addressed include:

- how to build processes for the development of agents
- agentic AI tools, tips & tricks
- integrating agents into your existing tech stack

# WHAT'S NEW

## Fundraising Underway at VLGS for Durkin Memorial Scholarship

The Hon. Thomas S. Durkin passed away on Dec. 3, 2024 at 67 years of age after a battle with cancer. Judge Durkin was a pioneering environmental court judge, and a revered member of the Vermont legal community. He was also a long-time member of the Board of Managers of the Vermont Bar Association and a great supporter of the VBA. In the months before his death, he was honored at a special meeting and reception at the State House, sponsored by the VBA's Environmental Law Section, and a few weeks later, with a President's Award at the VBA annual meeting at Lake Morey on Sept. 27, 2024.

An effort is underway now at the Vermont Law and Graduate School, Judge Durkin's alma mater, to commemorate and honor his legacy with a scholarship: "The Honorable Thomas S. Durkin JD'85 Memorial Scholarship."

The effort is being led by a committee "of the willing" including his son, attorney Mike Durkin, and many other friends and family members. The goal is to raise



at least \$100,000 to endow the scholarship and the success so far has been tremendous. You can find out more about the effort and make a contribution via the dedicated webpage at VLGS: <https://connect.vermontlaw.edu/durkin-memorial-scholarship-campaign>.

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VP, State Underwriting Counsel  
(802) 243-0200  
[sean.king@fnf.com](mailto:sean.king@fnf.com)



Peter Zuk  
Account Executive  
(802) 999-4649  
[peter.zuk@fnf.com](mailto:peter.zuk@fnf.com)

# WHAT'S NEW

## Your 2025-2026 Section and Division Chairs

The VBA is built around members sharing their knowledge for the betterment of the profession. A key part of this effort is supported by our section and division chairs. These are our own local experts in substantive areas of the law, and leaders of our bar. We rely on them to keep us abreast of developments in their area, to teach CLEs and write for the Bar Journal, advise on legislation, and to plan events (think of the Mid-Winter Thaw hosted annually by the Young Lawyers Division).

Thanks to all who serve in this important role. If you have a particular interest in any of the sections or divisions, the chair is a resource for you as well. Each of the sections has a forum on VBA Connect, which you can access from our website.

Here is a current list of our section and division chairs. It is also available on our website.

### Animal Law Section

LAURA J. FOX  
lauraj.fox@yale.edu  
703-887-7892

### Appellate Law Section

BRIDGET C. ASAY  
basay@stris.com  
802-858-4285



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### Bankruptcy Law Section

GREGORY W. FOX  
gfox@vtlegalaid.org  
802-391-9338  
RYAN M. LONG  
rlong@primmer.com  
802-864-0880

### Business Association Law Section

WILLIAM A. MASON, IV  
cmason@gravelshea.com  
802-658-0220

### Cannabis Law Section

TIMOTHY BRYON FAIR  
tim@fairlawvt.com  
802-540-9333

### Collaborative Law Section

NANCI A. SMITH  
nanci@nancismithlaw.com  
802-878-8775  
COREY F. WOOD  
cwood@bpflegal.com  
802-879-6304

### Consumer Law Section

JEAN L. MURRAY  
jmurray@vtlegalaid.org  
802-223-6377

### Criminal Law Section

KATHERINE M. LAMSON  
kate.lamson@vermont.gov  
802-442-8316  
ERICA A. MARTHAGE  
erica.marthage@vermont.gov  
802-442-8116

### Disability Law Section

VACANT

### Dispute Resolution Section

NEIL H. GROBERG  
neil@grobergmediation.com  
802-399-2240  
RICHARD D. HECHT  
rdhecht@burlingtontelecom.net  
802-864-9191

### Diversity Law Section

ALFONSO VILLEGAS  
alfonso.villegas@vermont.gov  
802-685-3036

### Elder Law Section

K. HEATHER DEVINE  
heather@tarrantgillies.com  
802-223-1112  
GLENN A. JARRETT  
glenn@vtelaw.com  
802-864-5951

### Environmental Law Section

DAVID K. MEARS  
david@tarrantgillies.com  
802-223-1112  
HANNAH L. SMITH  
hannah.smith@vermont.gov  
802-828-1454  
ALISON MILBURY STONE  
astone@velco.com  
802-773-9161

### Family Law Section

RACHEL B. STRECKER  
rebstrecker@gmail.com  
802-363-0131

### Federal Practice Section

JUSTIN B. BARNARD  
jbarnard@dinse.com  
802-859-7082

### Fee Dispute Committee

JEFFREY M. MESSINA  
jmessina@messinalawvt.com  
802-304-5134

**Government & Non Profit Division**

RYAN P. KANE

ryan.kane@vermont.gov

802-828-2153

DOUGLAS KEEHN

douglas.keeuhn@vermont.gov

802-793-3892

**Health Law/IPR Doctors Section**

ELIZABETH R. WOHL

ewohl@brattlebororetreat.org

802-258-6988

**Immigration Law Section**

JILL MARTIN DIAZ

jill@vaapvt.org

802-999-5654

BECKY VON TRAPP

beckyvontrapp@vontrapplaw.com

802-335-9849

**In-House Counsel Section**

RAVEN RAE

raven.rae@worldlearning.org

802-451-6838

**Insurance Law Section**

MEGAN A. SIGUR

msigur@pfclaw.com

802-860-4115

**Intellectual Property Law Section**

ANDREW D. MANITSKY

amanitsky@manitskylaw.com

802-999-7150

**Juvenile Law Section**

SARAH R. STAR

sarahstar.esq@gmail.com

802-385-1023

JULIANNE RENEE WOOLARD

julianne.woolard@vermont.gov

802-334-2037

**Labor & Employment Law Section**

STEPHEN D. ELLIS

sellis@pfclaw.com

802-658-2311

**Landlord/Tenant Section**

MATTHEW M. SHAGAM

matt@mmslegalvt.com

802-448-6936

RENEE STAUDINGER CALABRO

rstaudinger@vtlawoffices.com

802-863-5538

**Lawyer Well Being Section**

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**Paralegal Section**

CARIE TARTE

carietarte@gmail.com

802-318-0338

**Practice & Procedure Section**

GREGORY A. WEIMER

gweimer@vtlawfirm.com

802-651-0960

**Probate & Trust Section**

MARK A. LANGAN

mlangan@dinse.com

802-864-5751

**Public Utility Practitioners Section**

JENNILLE SMITH

jennille@landkeyconsulting.com

802-495-6458

JOSLYN L WILSCHEK

joslyn@ilovt.net

802-249-7663

**Real Property Law Section**

BENJAMIN H. DEPPMAN

bdeppman@middlaw.com

802-388-6337

JAMES E. KNAPP

jkvtlaw@outlook.com

802-363-2476

**Solo & Small Firm Section**

MICHAEL D. ACCAVO

michael@vtestatelaw.com

802-476-4856

**Tax Law & Accountants Section**

CHRISTOPHER J. LEFF

cleff@pfclaw.com

802-658-2311

**Women's Division**

CARYN L. CONNOLLY

Caryn.Connolly@brockandscott.com

401-217-8701

**Worker's Compensation Law Section**

BRENDAN P. DONAHUE

bdonahue@bradydonahue.com

802-885-2001

**Young Lawyers Division**

RYAN M. LONG

rlong@primmer.com

802-864-0880

# BE WELL

## Meet Kelly G. Poupore — Our New Attorney Wellness Section Co-Chair

As the new co-chair of the Attorney Wellness Section, I was asked to introduce myself and share why this work matters so deeply to me. The reason is simple: for a long time, I practiced law in ways that were not healthy for me. I know what it feels like to push through stress, exhaustion, and isolation, and I want to be of service to other attorneys.

I grew up in a "suck it up" family in an area where farmer stoicism was the norm, and where most social events revolved around alcohol. In college, I adopted the "work hard, play hard" attitude that was common on campus. Though I certainly worked hard in my undergraduate studies, as time went on, I played harder and harder. In law school, alcohol was everywhere, and I began to increasingly rely on alcohol to cope with stress.

I stopped drinking alcohol in September of 2018, and that choice became a turning point. I wasn't fully cognizant of it at the time, but that was the beginning of my passion for attorney wellness. Once I stopped drinking, I was forced to look at all the other areas of my life that needed improvement, and I've been on that path toward healthier living ever since.

My story isn't unique or even unusual in the legal community. I know many attorneys that have a problematic relationship

with alcohol. The adversarial nature of our work rewards toughness and punishes vulnerability. For many attorneys, alcohol consumption may feel like the only socially acceptable coping mechanism. I know I felt that way for a long time.

I am not here to tell every attorney in Vermont to quit drinking. But I am here to tell you that it is possible to practice law without relying on alcohol, even in a profession like ours that is steeped in drinking culture. I am also here to tell you that there are multiple avenues toward living booze-free, and Alcoholics Anonymous is not the only way.

If you are reevaluating your relationship with alcohol, you are not alone! If you need somewhere to start, you can start by reaching out to me.

As Co-Chair, I hope to focus on practical and compassionate techniques for strengthening attorneys' emotional and mental health. In addition to encouraging a booze-free lifestyle, I hope to help attorneys process and release the vicarious trauma that accumulates through legal practice. I also want to help attorneys address the unresolved trauma that many of us carry from our own lives, and to learn how to feel our feelings instead of numbing them.

Another priority of mine is helping the legal community rediscover wonder and awe, stop doom-scrolling, and improve the way we speak to ourselves. Finally, I want to support attorneys in staying grounded in the present moment rather than mentally living in the past or in the future.

I look forward to connecting with each of you and learning from your experiences, insights, and perspectives. It is truly an honor to serve the Vermont legal community, and I am excited for the conversations we will have.



*Kelly is an Attorney Investigator with the Vermont Human Rights Commission, a role she has been in since September 2023. She received her B.A. from the University of Notre Dame in 2009, and her J.D. from Seton Hall University School of Law in 2014.*

*Before relocating to Vermont, Kelly practiced law in Malone, New York until December 2022. She served as an Assistant Attorney for the Department of Social Services, an Assistant District Attorney, and later Chief Assistant District Attorney in Franklin County, New York. She has litigated hundreds of cases; from child welfare matters and juvenile delinquency proceedings to domestic violence and homicide cases. Kelly moved to Vermont and was admitted to the Vermont Bar in 2023, working first as a Deputy State's Attorney before joining the Human Rights Commission.*

*Kelly is fiercely dedicated to public service and believes firmly in justice and equity for all. She lives in Berlin with her dog, Hank. She can be reached at kelly.poupore@gmail.com. ☺*

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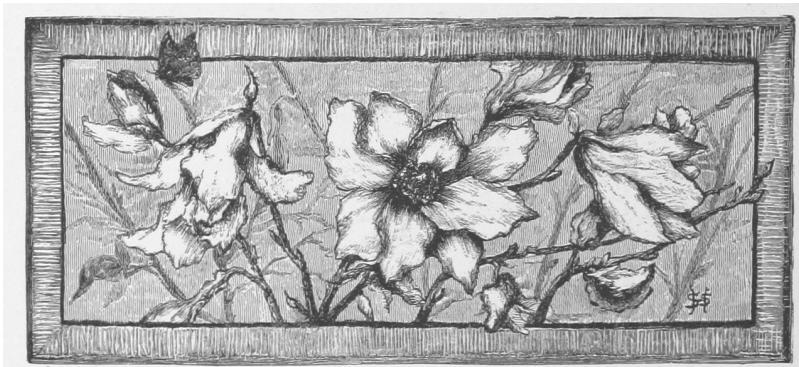
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# Vermont Bar Foundation Wraps Up A Big Year in 2025 and Calls for Volunteers in 2026

As we move through the winter season and reflect on the close of another year, I am filled with gratitude for the momentum, collaboration, and shared commitment that continue to define Vermont's justice community. Over the past year, the Vermont Bar Foundation (VBF) has experienced meaningful growth in visibility, partnership, and impact - all grounded in our collective belief that access to justice should be a right, not a privilege.

This winter, we are proud to release the Vermont Bar Foundation's first comprehensive Impact Report, which highlights the reach of our grantmaking, the strength of our partnerships, and the critical role Vermont's legal community plays in expanding access to justice statewide. Over the past year alone, the VBF partnered with more than 30 organizations and distributed over \$1 million in grants to programs providing direct civil legal representation across housing stability, domestic and sexual violence advocacy, disability rights, immigration defense, family law, and elder law. In addition, through the Richard Cassidy Special Grant Program, the Foundation made a \$100,000 investment in organizations providing wraparound services that intersect with legal needs - strengthening long-term stability for individuals and families across Vermont. You can find the full Impact Report on our website: [www.vtbarfoundation.org](http://www.vtbarfoundation.org).

This year also marked the launch of "One Hour for Justice," our statewide call to action inviting Vermont's legal community to donate the equivalent of one billable hour to expand access to civil legal aid. We formally launched this fundraising campaign on Giving Tuesday, and the early response has been deeply encouraging. Today, one in five Vermonters is income-eligible for legal aid, and requests for help have increased by more than 300% in recent years. Without support, matters like eviction, custody, and access to benefits often go unresolved - placing families and communities at risk. Your "one hour" fuels organizations that help families secure safe housing, protect survivors of domestic violence, advocate for people with disabilities, and ensure justice is accessible statewide. To give your hour and support access to justice, donate at: [www.vtbarfoundation.org/donate](http://www.vtbarfoundation.org/donate).

This fall, the VBF, in partnership with Vermont Legal Aid and Legal Services Ver-



mont, hosted our First Annual Justice Gala. On Nov. 6, 2025 attorneys, advocates, community leaders, and supporters from across the state gathered at Burlington's Echo Center to celebrate the people who strengthen Vermont's justice ecosystem every day. Beyond being a joyful night of recognition and connection, the Gala served as a significant fundraiser for direct legal services and community-based justice work. Some 300 people attended the Gala and together we raised about \$30,000. The generosity, energy, and shared purpose in the room made clear what many of us already know: Vermont's legal community is deeply committed to ensuring justice is accessible to all.

None of this work happens in isolation. The Vermont Bar Foundation is guided by a dedicated volunteer Board of Directors and committees who steward our mission with care, expertise, and integrity. As our work continues to grow, we are actively seeking two new board members from Southern Vermont to strengthen statewide representation and bring new voices into our leadership. We are also welcoming new volun-

teers to join our IOLTA, Grants, and Promotions & Revenue Committees - a meaningful way to contribute without serving on the full board. Committee members play a vital role in guiding funding decisions, strengthening financial sustainability, and advancing our outreach and fundraising efforts. If you are interested in learning more about board or committee service, please reach out to me directly at: [hannah@vtbarfoundation.org](mailto:hannah@vtbarfoundation.org).

Winter is often a season of reflection, but at the Vermont Bar Foundation it is also a time of strategic preparation and renewed commitment. From releasing our Impact Report, to launching One Hour for Justice, to celebrating our first Justice Gala, we remain focused on one central purpose: strengthening access to justice for all Vermonters.

It is an honor to serve this community and to work alongside so many who believe deeply in a more equitable Vermont. Thank you for your time, your advocacy, your generosity, and your continued trust in the Vermont Bar Foundation. 

# How to Minimize the Risk of Becoming a Victim of Wire Fraud

Lawyers remain a high-profile target for scammers hoping to get away with wire fraud and the attack vectors they are using continue to evolve. Here's just one example of how these scams typically work today. A lawyer represents a seller in a real estate transaction. Unbeknownst to anyone involved, someone has hacked into and been monitoring the seller's email for a period of time. Once aware that a transaction is about to take place, the hacker uses a spoofed email address of the seller to send new wiring instructions to the lawyer in order to have the funds sent to an account the hacker has access to. The lawyer fails to catch the altered email address and ends up wiring the proceeds to the wrong bank. So not good.

As an aside, some may wonder what a spoofed email might look like. Although there are a number of ways to spoof email, it can be as simple as this. If an actual email address is Lawfirm@gmail.com, a spoofed address might be Lawfirm@gmail.com. If an actual email happens to be Mark.Bassingthwaigte@RECompany.net a spoofed address might read Mark.Bassingthwaigte@RECompany.net. Given the busy days we all have, would you catch a subtle change made in an email address like the two examples above? Many would not. It's particularly hard to see that the small letter l was changed to a capital letter L in the Gmail example. Also, be aware that in situations like the above example, the person whose email account has been breached varies, sometimes it's a lawyer's account, sometimes it's the seller's, and often it's the realtor's.

Regardless, all lawyers need to understand that hackers don't act immediately. Often, they will monitor breached email accounts for at least several weeks, and sometimes for months, in order to understand the business practices that are in play and to wait for an opportunity to redirect a significant wire. And just as important, lawyers need to know that these scams are not directed solely at those who practice in the real estate space. Scammers know that lawyers in a variety of practice areas move money and thus view all lawyers as potentially lucrative targets.

The more common wire fraud attack vectors scammers are currently using include bogus invoices, altered documents to include e-faxes, email spoofing, false impersonation, and the oldie but goodie counterfeit check scam that continues to trip up far too many, which begs the question of what can be done to avoid becoming the next victim. Short of never being responsible for

transferring funds of any kind, there isn't anything you can do that will make you safe 100% of the time. However, the good news is you can get close.

First, security basics will always play a significant role. Of particular importance are the following. Never open any attachments or click on any links in email if the email comes from someone you don't know or is unexpected. Make a habit of checking to make sure inbound email addresses are legitimate. Periodically review sent and deleted email for suspicious activity. With cloud-based email accounts, periodically check account rules to make sure no unauthorized rules have been created, for example, an automatic forward rule to an unknown account. Use unique strong passwords (a combination of letters, numbers, and symbols) on all email accounts. Beware of SMS text messages notifying you that your password has been reset without your knowledge. Enable two-factor authentication if available on all email and all financial accounts. Keep your firewall, operating system, and security software current and avoid using unsecured Wi-Fi. Limit what you post on firm websites and other social media accounts such as information about staff roles and responsibilities and out-of-office information because hackers can use this kind of information to determine who to target and when.

Second, establish a policy on wire transfers and couple that with appropriate training of anyone at your firm who may at some point be involved in a wire transfer, to include all attorneys. Initially, the policy should mandate the gathering and verification of contact information from all parties involved at the outset of representation and prohibit the use of any other non-verified contact information during the course of representation.

With that in hand, the most important provision of any such policy would be the implementation of a process that mandates that all wiring instructions must be confirmed using the previously verified contact information by way of an out-of-band communication channel. For example, if wiring instructions initially come via email or eFax, use a previously verified cell number to place a call to the relevant party to confirm the accuracy of the information received.

An additional relevant provision might be that all last-minute changes requesting that funds be transferred by a different method or to a different account be treated as highly suspect. The request should never be honored until verified as legitimate after con-



tacting the person purportedly making the request through the use of previously verified contact information. If email security is a concern, another provision might be to require the use of encrypted email or a secure client portal to pass along wiring instructions. The absolute best option might be a provision that requires wiring instructions be delivered in person, for example, by the seller at a closing.

Finally, everyone in the firm should be trained to be suspicious and learn how to spot these kinds of scams. Underscore the necessity of remaining vigilant at all times. Training examples that address how these attacks look today might include the following. Look for inconsistencies with email such as various email addresses in use, different spellings of a name, and be suspicious of any email that comes from a free service such as Gmail or Yahoo. Always carefully check the address of relevant email coming in to make sure it exactly matches the previously verified address in your file. Always question requests for money to be sent to an account that is not in the name of the seller or not in the jurisdiction where the seller is. Be suspicious of requests to wire money when key personnel, such as the attorney in a solo practice, are out of the office or requests that are urgent in nature. And last but not least, remind everyone that just because the grammar and spelling look great, that doesn't mean the email is legit. Scammers can be quite adept in drafting professionally written email.

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**Mark Bassingthwaigte, Esq.** is the resident Risk Manager at ALPS Insurance. To learn more about how ALPS can support your solo or small firm visit: [alpsinsurance.com](http://alpsinsurance.com). 

# When the Robotic Gavel Falls: AI in Our Courts and the Lawyer's Imperative

The law has always been a deeply human affair: attorneys arguing, judges deliberating, juries weighing credibility, precedent, and plain old common sense. But now, something new has entered the courtroom — and it doesn't bill by the hour or even need a coffee break. Artificial intelligence (AI) has arrived, and it's quietly moving closer to the bench. AI is no longer just lurking in the background. Judges, clerks, and law firms are using it to draft, summarize, and "streamline." Some courts are even testing it to predict outcomes or suggest sentencing. The question isn't whether AI will become part of the justice system — it's how far we'll let it go before someone objects on constitutional grounds.

## Humans vs. Algorithms

Many in the legal field are excited about the efficiency AI offers. Others are quietly appalled. One senior judge recently said there are "some things AI can't do, and which it is desirable it doesn't do." That's judicial code for: let's not have a robot judge handing down sentences just yet.

Still, AI's scope continues to expand. Law students are now learning to use it as part of their curriculum. Clerks are using it to organize case files. And let's be honest — more than a few partners are using it to draft legal documents they'll later falsely claim they "reviewed extensively."

The line between legal aid and legal authority is blurring rapidly. When AI begins helping determine who wins and loses, we're not just talking about convenience — we're talking about the very definition of justice.

## What's Really at Stake

At risk are the pillars that support the entire system: fairness, accountability, and transparency. Human judgment — flawed though it may be — at least provides reasons, ethics, and sometimes mercy. Machines don't understand nuance. They process data.

Imagine explaining to a client that an algorithm decided their fate based on pattern similarity. That may sound efficient, but it's a long way from the "independent and impartial tribunal" that due process promises.

Some courts have already banned AI use in affidavits and witness statements after experiencing too many AI hallucinations. It

turns out, citing fake cases doesn't sit well with judges — human or otherwise. The bigger concern isn't that AI will turn evil; it's that it will become just another normal tool. As we start to accept machines reasoning for us, the problem quietly grows. No evil robot overlord needed — just a generation of lawyers who stop questioning, "Is this argument actually sound?"

## What Lawyers Should Do

### 1. Audit your own workflows

If you or your associates use AI tools for drafting, research, or analysis, ensure you understand what they are doing. You can't delegate professional judgment to an algorithm and still consider yourself a professional.

### 2. Document and verify everything

Keep a record of what the AI generated, how you verified it, and who reviewed it. When something goes wrong (and it will), "the bot did it" is not an acceptable excuse.

### 3. Review your contracts and policies

If you're advising clients, update your engagement letters and vendor agreements

to include AI use. Someone must be responsible for the risk if a model hallucinates a citation — ideally not your client.

### 4. Preserve the human parts of law

Machines can process data, but they can't replicate judgment, empathy, or persuasion. A closing argument still needs a heartbeat, not a heatmap. The day AI can move a jury to tears is the day we should all pack it in.

## Leverage Without Losing Control

AI won't replace lawyers, but it's already taking over some of their tasks. The risk isn't losing our jobs — it's losing our judgment.

Treat AI like a talented but unreliable intern. Let it draft, summarize, and organize information, but never, ever let it speak for you. When the robotic gavel finally drops and someone asks, "Who made this decision — you or the algorithm?" you'd better be ready to answer "you" confidently, not with confusion.

After all, the future of law may be digital, but accountability still must be human. 

## KNOW A DESERVING PRO BONO ATTORNEY? LET US -KNOW, TOO!

Nominations are now open for candidates for VBA's Annual Pro Bono Service Award. The Award is given each year to one or more attorneys who have devoted themselves in a noteworthy way to provide pro bono legal services.

Standards for the award reflect Rule 6.1 of the Vermont Rules of Professional Conduct which exhorts lawyers to provide at least 50 hours of pro bono publico legal services per year. The majority of this time should be given without fee or expectation of fee to persons of limited means or to the organizations which serve them.

Nominations for the pro bono award may be made by attorneys, court staff, judges, clients or law office staff. The VBA Pro Bono Committee reviews the nominations and selects one or more for recommendation to the full VBA Board.

The deadline to nominate an attorney for the 2026 pro bono award is **Friday, Feb. 13, 2026, by noon**. The nomination should include a brief description of the attorney's pro bono legal activities, and should be addressed to VBA's Legal Access Coordinator, Mary Ashcroft, Esq.: [mashcroft@vtbar.org](mailto:mashcroft@vtbar.org).

The Pro Bono Service Award will be presented at the VBA's Mid-Year meeting on March 27 at the Hotel Champlain in Burlington.

# When Ransomware Meets AI: The Next Frontier of Cyber Extortion

Ransomware used to be a high-stakes game requiring specialized skills. You needed serious coding chops, a custom exploit, and weeks of preparation. Now? All you need is a malicious idea, a large language model, and an internet connection.

Attackers are turning to generative AI to write malware, craft ransom notes, and automate campaigns. What used to require an experienced hacker team can increasingly be done with a few well-engineered prompts. That shift isn't theoretical — and for law firms and their clients, it's a legal, operational, and reputational powder keg.

## AI Lowers the Barrier to Entry

Criminal groups are using generative AI to develop ransomware tools — even without deep technical expertise. Meanwhile, researchers have demonstrated proof-of-concept malware capable of dynamically generating attack code, adapting to defenses, and hiding its tracks in real time.

Translation: the entry barrier for ransomware is collapsing. What once took months of work can soon be launched in hours by someone with more ambition than expertise.

## Why Lawyers Should Care

This isn't just an IT problem. It's a legal headache waiting to happen:

- Attribution gets fuzzy. If an attack is partially AI-generated, was the "actor" the hacker or the model itself? Blame will get murky fast.
- Regulation lags. Many cyber laws assume human-driven attacks; AI compli-

cates breach notification, liability, and compliance obligations.

- Contracts will be tested. Indemnities, force majeure clauses, and "malicious acts" exclusions weren't drafted with autonomous code in mind. Expect disputes.
- Duty to foresee risk expands. If firms know AI ransomware is coming, regulators and plaintiffs may argue they had a duty to prepare for it.

Lawyers advising on risk, contracts, or governance can't treat AI ransomware as tomorrow's problem. It's already here.

## What Counsel Should Tell Clients — Now

If you have clients with any meaningful digital footprint, this is your checklist:

- Stress-test incident response plans: Assume an attacker can regenerate malware instantly if the first attempt fails. Update playbooks for adaptive, AI-driven threats.
- Audit contracts and indemnities: Push clients to revisit liability provisions in tech agreements. Define "malicious acts" broadly enough to include AI-generated attacks — or risk ambiguity later.
- Add AI scenarios to tabletop exercises: Ransomware plans often assume static attacks. Add scenarios where the payload evolves mid-incident or uses generative tools to craft spear-phishing campaigns on the fly.
- Require transparency from vendors: If third-party vendors use AI in their sys-

tems, demand to know how they monitor, secure, and update these tools. Silence in contracts here could lead to future lawsuits.

- Monitor evolving regulations: As AI threats grow, lawmakers will respond. Clients should anticipate tighter reporting requirements, shifts in liability, and sector-specific dates.

## We're Not at the Apocalypse — Yet

AI-generated ransomware is still developing, but it is not yet the next WannaCry. However, it indicates the direction in which things are heading. Criminal groups are already experimenting with AI to reduce costs, increase scale, and automate extortion.

For lawyers, the message is clear: update your risk perspective before reality catches up. When the first AI-generated ransom note arrives, you don't want to explain to your client — or a regulator — why no one prepared for it.

Because the era of AI ransomware isn't on its way, it has already arrived.

*Michael C. Maschke is the President and Chief Executive Officer of Sensei Enterprises, Inc. Mr. Maschke is an EnCase Certified Examiner (EnCE), a Certified Computer Examiner (CCE #744), an AccessData Certified Examiner (ACE), a Certified Ethical Hacker (CEH), and a Certified Information Systems Security Professional (CISSP). He is a frequent speaker on IT, cybersecurity, and digital forensics, and he has co-authored 14 books published by the American Bar Association. He can be reached at mmaschke@senseient.com.*

*Sharon D. Nelson is the co-founder of and consultant to Sensei Enterprises, Inc. She is a past president of the Virginia State Bar, the Fairfax Bar Association, and the Fairfax Law Foundation. She is a co-author of 18 books published by the ABA. snelson@senseient.com.*

*John W. Simek is the co-founder of and consultant to Sensei Enterprises, Inc. He holds multiple technical certifications and is a nationally known digital forensics expert. He is a co-author of 18 books published by the American Bar Association. jsimek@senseient.com.*

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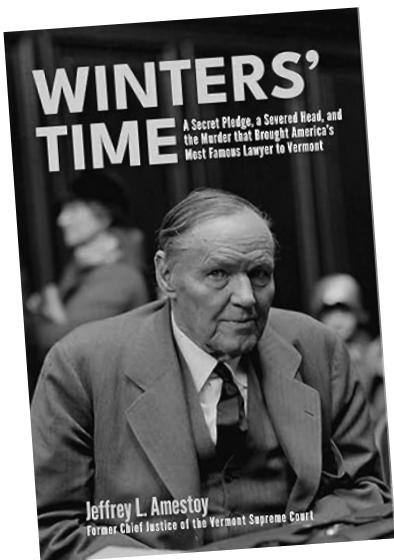
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# BOOK REVIEWS



## ***Winters' Time: A Secret Pledge, a Severed Head, and the Murder that Brought America's Most Famous Lawyer to Vermont***

By Jeffrey L. Amestoy, Former Chief Justice of the Vermont Supreme Court  
Vermont Historical Society (2025),  
123 pages, \$19.95 Paperback  
Reviewed by Gary G. Shattuck, Esq.

Picture closely a recently severed female head, one bearing significant injuries, resting on the knee of a man manipulating irregular-shaped metal objects into and out of it. Step back and see that his actions are prompted by questions posed from another during a trial watched by a spell-bound judge and jury hanging on his every word. Then, turn and witness the many spectators and members of the press seated about, with craning necks and straining ears to see and hear the proceedings. Welcome to Woodstock, Vermont in January 1927, where one of the most ghoulish criminal trials in American jurisprudence took place. If that is not enough, know that there are no recorded instances in the country of a similar event ever occurring.

The circumstances surrounding this event, in the matter of *State v. John Winters*, is the subject of Jeffrey Amestoy's second book describing in rapid fashion its background, unfolding, and ending. But there is more to it than just a murder trial as the story also includes the participation of America's most recognized defense lawyer of the time, "the attorney of the damned," Clarence Darrow. In a concise 107 pages (with additional notes), broken into 21 brief chapters, accompanied by period photographs, the author has offered up a gratifying, page-turning experience describing what occurred. While the ambitious goal

of raising other contemporary issues in so few pages is laudable ("justice, gender, class, and celebrity in the Roaring Twenties in rural Vermont") (xi), the book succeeds most in its focus on justice – rough as it might have been – confronted in its operation by the zealous Darrow.

Just two months earlier, in November 1926, John Winters was little more than a 32-year-old drunk. His unsurprising past includes serving a 12 to 15 year stretch in Windsor State Prison for rape and statutory rape before gaining his freedom in 1919. He married, had a small family, and found employment as a handyman by day, while prowling Windsor's streets at night in search of liquor, a card game, and women. His conduct and whereabouts on the night of November 6, as he plied his drunken journey, quickly became an overnight sensation when, on the following day, he became the prime suspect in the murder of an admired local businesswoman.

Forty-three-year-old Cecelia Gullivan was the complete opposite of John Winters. Arriving in Windsor from Massachusetts in 1908, the attractive woman began her ascent in the Precision Valley's growing machine industry, recognized for her ability to deliver results in a male-dominated world. She also entered into a relationship with a company owner, Frank Cone, organizing his business into an effective operation. On the surface, their workaday interactions appeared professional, but drew attention when it was revealed that Cone was the last person to see her alive the night of her grisly murder.

The first half of this rapidly moving story paints a picture of a frantic prosecution garnering headlines across Vermont and New England describing Gullivan's death, clamoring for the arrest of the person responsible. For reasons never identified, authorities soon dismissed Cone's recent presence with her, resting their eyes instead on Winters, swept away to Windsor Prison's "death cell" to undergo a five-day, non-stop interrogation. This only begins Amestoy's indictment of the investigative process that saw, among other deficiencies, questionable tactics and techniques used by investigators. These included: the manner of obtaining a suspect "eyewitness" identification of Winters committing an assault on another woman near the murder scene on the same night; their manner of obtaining a "confession" in this pre-Miranda era when a suspect's right to an attorney was more of a courtesy than a fundamental right; all topped by the participation of the buffoonish Windsor County sheriff - himself recently convicted of hav-

ing sexual relations with wards of the state - chortling to the press that authorities would obtain a confession from Winters before he was even questioned.

In just a matter of weeks, the story moves from Winters' arrest and indictment to the trial at the Woodstock courthouse. It is in his scouring of the three-volume, 660-pages of transcripts, contemporary news accounts, and other archival material where Amestoy has put his legal expertise on display. Walking the reader through the trial, strategies and pertinent questions posed to witnesses by the prosecution and defense, and the answers they elicited, are recounted explaining aspects of an investigation built on circumstantial evidence. In the process, they reveal the varied competencies of the participating attorneys, the judge's slanted rulings favoring the state, capped by the shocking display of Gullivan's severed head (admitted into evidence without objection!) that a medical examiner probed with metal objects to show her manner of death.

The jury's unsurprising finding Winters' guilty of first-degree murder moves the second half of the story into the appeal process that saw Darrow enter the fray. He only did so because of a promise his son made years earlier to Winters' mother that if she ever needed legal assistance, his father would help her. Ready to retire at the time, the pugnacious Darrow agreed to delay it to help with the appeal. Of particular interest to the reader is Amestoy's recounting of Vermont's experience with the death penalty, a topic that Darrow vehemently opposed to his core and drawing him to the Green Mountains. Amestoy uses this moment to trace Vermont's uneven and

### **Want to review a book for the Vermont Bar Journal?**

You can review your own book or one that you think would be of interest in VBJ readers. We look especially for reviews of new titles, or new editions of old titles, that have some connection to Vermont. (A Vermont-based reviewer counts!)

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disturbing history with capital punishment, a subject that gives the book enduring relevance.

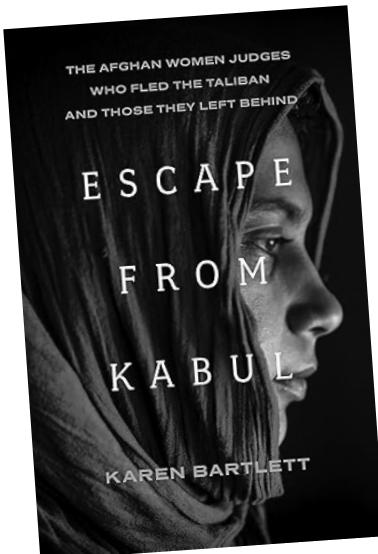
Under Amestoy's close observation, we learn that Darrow's expertise did not necessarily lie with forming legal arguments to support an appeal. Rather, it was his ability to seize, focus, and vigorously argue evidentiary points forcing his listeners to pause and reconsider their own preconceptions and prejudices. His arguments before the Vermont Supreme Court in January 1928 and March 1929 – the second time for "peculiar circumstances" that Amestoy explains (96) – drove home the issue of "fairness" on evidentiary rulings issued during the trial, rather than on points of law. Darrow redirected the court's attention elsewhere, not asking it to consider that the trial court's prohibiting the defense from introducing certain evidence harmed the defendant *per se*. Rather, he argued that such action affected the ability of the trier of fact to reach a credible verdict. "I don't know what the jury would have done with [the evidence]," he said, "but the jury had a right to it." (83) It is a distinction that few would have recognized but for someone with Amestoy's insights.

Darrow's strident advocacy succeeded, resulting in Winters' conviction being overturned and a new trial ordered. Events moved quickly thereafter as Darrow counseled his trial attorneys to convince their client to plead guilty to obtain a life sentence rather than face certain conviction by a jury and a death sentence. Winters did so, was sentenced to life imprisonment, but then immediately repudiated his plea outside the courtroom maintaining his innocence, before being paroled in 1949.

*Winters' Time* shines a revealing light on the condition of Vermont's justice system in an era better remembered for Prohibition, jazz, and modernity than for small-town murder trials. By bringing the story to light, Amestoy has created a vivid legal history, one that combines grisly detail with broader reflections on fairness and punishment.

The fortunate intersection of a forgotten case and an inquisitive former chief justice has provided a compelling book. *Winters's Time* deserves a wide audience – particularly among those in the legal profession, but also anyone fascinated by the intersection of crime, justice, and history.

**Gary G. Shattuck, Esq.**, is a graduate of Vermont Law School, former Vermont State Police commander, assistant attorney general and assistant U.S. attorney who also acted as a legal advisor to the Kosovo and Iraq governments. He is the author of many publications concerning Vermont history viewed from a legal perspective. 



### **Escape from Kabul**

By Karen Bartlett  
The New Press, 2025,  
265pp, \$27.81 hardcover  
Reviewed by John P. Wesley

In the spring of 2002, at a conference sponsored by the International Association of Women Judges (IAWJ), Patricia Whalen, a Vermont Family Court Magistrate and member of the IAWJ, first met Judge Marzia Basel. Marzia was one of a few women judges then sitting in Afghanistan. The meeting between these two women jurists had an element of fate attached, and the result of their ensuing friendship has had international repercussions still playing out in the present.

Karen Bartlett's insightful reporting in *Escape from Kabul* examines the history of women's place in Afghan culture before it was dominated by Taliban rule between 1994 – 2001, and the progress made between the first Taliban regime and the present one. She is especially interested in women's entry into the judiciary, and the precarious fate awaiting them upon the Taliban's swift return to power in August 2021. Judge Whalen plays an important role in Bartlett's story, which includes a chapter describing the project resulting from Patti's chance meeting with Judge Basel, that forever motivated her activities to improve the status of women in Afghanistan, and to take a lead role in rescuing the women judges there from the retribution promised by the Taliban.

The rights of women in Afghan society are encompassed in a complex and vacillating history. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, several rulers installed reforms ostensibly broadening the roles open to women. For some periods, women could take advantage of opportunities for higher education, and some made successful ventures into commerce and public culture. Yet, nearly every decade, any loosening of the

strictures which were insisted upon by very conservative proponents of Islam, inspired a backlash of social upheaval to reimpose the curbs. Severe limitations included denial of education to girls and women, restrictions against participation in any work life outside the home, and forbidding a woman's appearance in public unless completely veiled, and accompanied by a male relative.

In the period of communist rule from 1978 – 1992, following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the government prescribed measures to create greater equality between men and women. Some women gained credentials as attorneys, and a few attained the authority of a judge. Yet, there was determined resistance to such liberalization of limits rooted in centuries of tradition and oppression. In 1994, the Taliban realized its aim of creating an Islamic state in Afghanistan, after years of persistent guerrilla opposition to communist authority. Once again, with harsh penalties levied against disobedience, the Taliban enforced rigid prohibitions including: no schooling or studying by girls and women; no employment; no leaving the house without a male chaperone; no health care treatment by a man, rendering most health care virtually inaccessible; no public speaking or involvement in politics. Any woman who had realized the status of lawyer or judge saw her efforts dismantled.

In the immediate aftermath of the terrorist bombing of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, the U.S. and international allies intervened militarily in Afghanistan, and ousted the Taliban from power by the end of 2001. The civil rule that followed, supported by the armed presence of foreign military might and massive amounts of foreign aid, had the effect of reopening schools to girls, and permitting women back into the workforce. Some women whose careers as attorneys or judges had been radically terminated by the Taliban sought to resume participation in the legal framework of Afghan society. In the twenty years between 2001 – 2021, the number of women judges presiding in Afghanistan's courts swelled to 270, a modest percentage in a country with 42.6 million people, but a notable resurgence following the overthrow of the Taliban government.

At their providential first meeting, when Patti asked Judge Basel how she could be of assistance to women seeking participation in law in Afghanistan, Marzia immediately responded, "Bring our women judges here! Let them see how the rule of law can work in a democracy." Like a match to good kindling, Marzia's unhesitant plea sparked Patti's community-minded networking impulses. She was in touch with three of her long-standing friends (one of whom is my

wife), sisters in arms on prior projects like the creation of a battered women's shelter in Brattleboro in the 1970s. They put together a program that came to be known as The Rural Women's Leadership Institute of Vermont (after learning that the more apt title Sister-to-Sister had been already claimed by another non-profit). With initial seed money from Ben & Jerry's Foundation, and the Vermont Sisters of Mercy, and substantial assistance from the State Department and the International Association of Women Judges (IAWJ), RWLIV sponsored a cultural exchange experience resulting in visits to the US by 35 Afghan women judges, 3-4 each summer from 2004 – 2014.

The structure of the visits was grounded in exposing the judges to fundamental aspects of substance and procedure in the framework of American law. In several sessions, the visitors took part in the Vermont Judicial College, with some tailoring to accommodate the need for translation, as well as attention to elementals. There were opportunities to watch judicial proceedings, followed by question-and-answer exchanges with a judge and other participants (I participated in such discussions each year of the project). From the point of view of Patti's team, though, none of the rest of whom had a legal background, the crucial component of the women-to-women exposure was placing each judge in a home visit, arranging for their guests to meet with women playing numerous important roles in their communities, and generally providing them with a cultural milieu in which mutual respect between women and men was practiced as a shared social value; a key ritual in that approach was the group pot-luck supper, at which cooking was often supplied by men!

Bartlett titles her chapter describing RWLIV's decade long engagement with Afghan women judges, "A Sisterhood Forms in Vermont." She makes clear how the deep bonds created each year inspired the continuation of the program, against seemingly insurmountable financial and logistical challenges. In addition to their two weeks in Vermont, the visiting judges also spent another week in Washington D.C., meeting with high governmental officials, including each year having tea with the women justices on the U.S. Supreme Court. Nevertheless, in the evaluations provided by each participant, she invariably touted the week in Vermont as having the greater impact. The scale of the legal system was smaller and more comprehensible; and the hospitality of the host families, the accessibility of the presenters, and the appearance that social problems could usually be handled fairly made a deep impression. As Bartlett recounts, the outcomes from RWLIV's Afghan Women Judges Project stretched back to Afghanistan, where participants in

the program organized their own women judges' association, inviting Patti to give a memorably described address in 2007 at their inaugural conference.

During the run of the Project, Patti made a career change taking her away from her position as a Vermont Family Court Magistrate and placing her in Sarajevo as a judge on the International War Crimes Tribunal for Bosnia-Herzegovina. Nonetheless, she remained intensely committed to her work with RWLIV, never failing to return to Vermont for the visit by new guests from Afghanistan, fashioning a personal relationship with every Afghan sister on the judicial bench. Patti's broadened perspective from bearing witness to terrible acts of inhumanity, while she fell in love with Bosnian culture and friends and colleagues she met there, only deepened her sympathies for women under siege in Afghanistan, especially her sister judges. Thus, as the peril to her friends and colleagues became suddenly overwhelming in face of the Taliban's devastating takeover, Patti saw no other course but to throw herself into a seemingly unfathomable undertaking: to get them all out!

In vignettes worthy of cliffhanger spy fiction, Escape from Kabul tells the story of the heroic rescue of almost every women judge who went into hiding after August 17, 2021, together with most of each one's immediate family. Prior to the takeover, several judges were assassinated. Others died under suspicious circumstances. Most initially despaired of leaving their homeland, until the dire alternative became frighteningly clear. There was never any single or simple template – each extraction required complicated coordination, with painfully inadequate funding, using digital communication resources somehow cobbled together to meet the needs of each rescue. The initial bootstrap assignment of getting numerous judges through the chaos around the Kabul airport, and into planes bound for Poland or other points in the Middle East, could be made into an online streaming series. Then the airport was shut down, and new stratagems had to be whisked up into bare plausibility.

The "mission impossible" team initially consisted of Patti, and six other seasoned members of the IAWJ located around the globe, all of them judges. There was no "mission control center," just a group zoom call often running 24/7. There was no head commando, just a collaborative effort by highly functioning professionals whose only prior training was the proven ability to make difficult decisions under pressure. Most had been handicapped by ethical strictures from wheeling and dealing in any transaction with political implications, to say nothing of delving into the murky world of transporting refugees across in-

ternational borders with only scant credentials. Still, networks sprang up. Funding sources materialized. Allies came onboard as word of the magnitude of the crisis spread, some of them with quasi-commando type skill sets. When all official US personnel had left Afghanistan, the stories are legion of many who engaged in desperate efforts to save individuals or groups left behind and deemed at risk of deadly retribution. Most of those efforts were futile. Although her book could not possibly account in individual detail as to how so many judges and family members were safely taken beyond immediate harm's way, Bartlett's examples and overview leave no doubt as to the stupendous magnitude of the accomplishment by Team IAWJ.

Escape from Kabul is divided into three parts: Escape, Building Justice, and Judges in Exile. After describing the harrowing strategies leading to the successful evacuation of most of the women judges, Bartlett steps back to provide a more in-depth understanding of their place and predicament through short biographies of several individual judges. One of them, Judge Anisa Rasooli, was in the first group of judges to come to Vermont through RWLIV's Afghan Women Judges project. Anisa's story inspires, though describing a bittersweet trajectory.

Knowing from a young age that she hoped to become a judge, and with strong encouragement from her father – and paternal support was mentioned by several other women interviewed by Bartlett – Anisa accomplished her training and rose to the bench before the first Taliban takeover. Afterwards, through carefully clandestine efforts, she was able to continue working to further education for girls, even though she was expelled from public service as a judge. Following the allied overthrow of the Taliban, Anisa eagerly sought her return to the bench. Determined to seek justice from the plight of girls and women, to which she had been exposed continuously while pursuing her judicial ambitions, Anisa sought assignments first in the juvenile courts, and then in a newly created division, the Court for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, a special jurisdictional focus for which she had advocated.

Though she explained to Bartlett that she was regularly presented with corrupt demands for favoritism in her rulings, in several instances by judges in superior positions, Anisa managed to gain respect for her work while firmly resisting pressure to misuse her judicial authority. In 2015, the president nominated her to become the first woman on the Supreme Court of Afghanistan. She fell just short of the votes needed for parliamentary confirmation, in a debate marked by denunciations that

her appointment would be seen as a grave insult to Islamic belief. Despite her disappointment, Anisa was proud at being nominated, telling Bartlett that she believed she was paving the way for a woman to eventually sit on the high court. Indeed, Anisa was nominated again in 2019, and the initial reaction seemed to favor her confirmation. However, the parliament was dissolved in the Taliban takeover before her nomination could be brought to a vote.

Anisa Rasooli escaped from Kabul on one of the last planes to leave the airport, the breathtaking account of which Bartlett tells in the first part of her book. After a two year stay in Poland awaiting U.S. visa approval, Anisa relocated with her family to Burlington, VT, a destination she fervently pursued based on her experience as one of the first participants in the Afghan Women's Judges project. She remains in close contact with Patti and members of the original group that founded RWLIV. She keeps a mug on her desk with a cartoon figure of Ruth Bader Ginsburg, a reminder of the days when she came close to realizing her admirers' predictions that she

would become "the RBG of Afghanistan." At the 2025 commencement celebration at Vermont Law School, Anisa was given an honorary Doctor of Law degree in recognition of her passionate devotion to the rule of law.

The women judges of Afghanistan now live in exile in many countries across the globe, as Bartlett examines in the final part of her book. Like Anisa, many struggle with enormous challenges to pick up lives torn asunder by hatred and violence. Handicapped by not speaking the language of their adopted countries, not finding culture or community, having unpredictable financial resources, most face daunting obstacles to resume careers in the law, with the exercise of judicial authority virtually out of reach. Yet, most refuse to give in to despair, just as they remained steadfast in the belief of a woman's proper role in the administration of justice; just as they risked much and endured much to seek safer, more welcoming, societies in which to begin anew. Their stories were made possible not only by each one's resilience, but also by the resolve and resourcefulness of indi-

viduals and groups of women determined that their survival would be a cause that could not be denied. That cause persists, in the helping hands of many new friends, an effort that harkens back to those acts of friendship by the women in Patti's sister-to-sister program that first brought Anisa Rasooli and many others to Vermont. As Anisa affirms in the closing summary of Bartlett's important book: "Despite all of this suffering and all of the bad news and the hardship, as a Muslim woman, I am hopeful for the future. I believe that the future will be good --- but to ensure that, please don't leave the women of Afghanistan alone. Be with them. Speak for them and support them. Help them to rise up."

*Jack Wesley is a retired Vermont Superior Judge, serving from 1993-2015. As a colleague and friend to Judge Whalen, and husband to one of the founders of the Rural Women's Leadership Institute of Vermont, he participated in each of the Afghan Women Judges programs between 2004-2014. During that time, he cooked many potluck supper dishes. ↗*

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# IN MEMORIAM

## Charles Thomas Shea

Charles T. Shea passed away peacefully on Sept. 7, 2025, at the age of 95. He was born in Montpelier, Vermont on Feb. 18, 1930 to Dorothy (Paige) and Harold Shea, the third of five children. Charlie, as he was affectionately known, was a shining light in the lives of all who had the privilege of knowing him. He was a kind, loving husband, father, father-in-law, and grandfather; a man who never complained and was the ultimate optimist. He remained full of curiosity and intellectual pursuit throughout his life.

Charlie graduated from St. Mike's High School in 1948, where he excelled in academics and sports, especially basketball. He obtained a bachelor's degree from Holy Cross College in 1952, and went on to Georgetown Law School, graduating from there in 1955. His legendary legal career began when he opened a solo practice in Montpelier in 1955. He then worked for the Internal Revenue Service in Boston, Massachusetts, during which time he obtained a Masters degree in Taxation from Boston University. He went on to serve as Tax Commissioner of Vermont for several years before moving to South Burlington, in 1965. Charlie was a brilliant lawyer and a founding partner of Gravel and Shea, a prestigious Burlington law firm. His vision, determination and leadership was instrumental in building a premier law firm in the State of Vermont. A highlight of his career was his client's win in an historic antitrust punitive damages case at the U.S. Supreme Court.

Charlie married Patricia Ann Thomas in April 1955 in Barre, Vermont. Together, they raised eight children, instilling in them a love and appreciation of strong family bonds and

the importance of community. Charlie was a proud Vermonter, generous with his time and resources. Over the course of his life, he served on numerous boards, planning committees and councils, including, Christ the King School Board, South Burlington School Board, the American Heart Association, the Associated Industries of Vermont, and the Vermont State Employees Labor Relations Board. He was also regularly involved in bar association activities.

Charlie's love and dedication to family was ever present. He relished family gatherings, holidays, vacation trips, his children's sports games and events, the famous annual Shea Croquet Tournament on the Fourth of July, his apple orchard and the home-made cider that he shared with family and friends, evening concerts at Shelburne Farms and the Trapp Family Lodge in Stowe, his trips with Patty to Montreal and New York City, and their winters in Scottsdale, Arizona, where he learned to love the game of golf.

Charlie was utterly devoted to Patty, his wife of seventy years. They met on a blind date at Lake Morey Inn in 1951 and immediately fell in love. They engaged in a long-distance relationship, writing many letters to each other while she attended nurse's training in Vermont, New York and Boston and he attended Holy Cross College and Georgetown University Law School. They were each other's best friends, and anyone in their presence could easily recognize their abiding, romantic, one-of-a-kind love.

Charlie's quick wit and sense of humor made every interaction personable and fun. His ease at public speaking and his excellent communication skills commanded the room. His children remember his toastmaster abilities on any and every occasion. His toasts were long, but humorous and meaningful. As he would say, "It's my nickel." His ability to communicate with people from all walks of life made him an endearing and trusted person in the hearts and eyes of the many whom sought his advice and companionship. He loved his views of the Vermont mountains and could often be found deep in thought on his Ford tractor mowing the fields of his property at 64 Shea Drive. Sometimes a grandchild would hop on with him.

Charlie was an avid reader of history, biographies and newspapers. He enjoyed politics and sports, and for many years, he read five newspapers a day. He and Patty were "news junkies" and often watched the evening news together. According to Charlie, there was nothing like a nice glass of pinot noir at the end of day, and later, a dessert either of fudge, chocolate chip cookies or vanilla ice cream. Actually, chocolate any time of the day was acceptable.

Charlie is survived by his wife, Patricia, and their eight children, Thomas Shea, Carol Shea, Kelley Shea and her husband Terry Breen, Marybeth Roc-Sennett and her hus-

band Sudhir, Christopher Shea, Timothy Shea and his wife Sue, Jaime Shea and his wife Cheryl, and Katie Danforth and her husband Mark. He is also survived by fourteen grandchildren: Oliver, Lauren (and her husband Dan Thompson), Electra, Casey, Taylor (and her husband Eric Dubuque), Timmy, Conner, Caroline, Shea, Paige, Lisi, Katherine, Natalie and Pierce. He also leaves numerous nieces and nephews and his brother-in-law, Loriman Brigham. He was predeceased by his parents, his brother Mike Shea, and his sisters Marolyn Palmer, Ellen Brigham and Margie Lahiff.

## Robert D. Rachlin

Robert D. Rachlin, 89, died peacefully on Saturday, Dec. 27, 2025, at his home in Burlington, Vt. His wife, Catharine, to whom he was married for over 45 years, was by his side.

Robert was born in West Hartford, Conn., in 1936, the son of Pauline and John C. Rachlin. He was predeceased by his sister Eleanor Kooby. Robert was a graduate of Yale University and the University of Chicago Law School. In 1959, he relocated to St. Johnsbury, Vt., where he became partners with John Downs. The later addition of Allen Martin established the law firm of Downs Rachlin & Martin (DRM), which grew over the years to become the largest law firm in the state of Vermont.

Robert had a distinguished legal career, representing a wide range of clients and interests over a period of more than 60 years. In keeping with his lifelong commitment to social justice, he provided pro bono legal services to detainees held in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. Robert was also a gifted concert pianist, performing throughout New England as a founding member of the Vermont Chamber Group, an accomplished instrument rated pilot and flight instructor who flew his own plane for years, and a talented linguist with a working knowledge of numerous languages, including German, French, Spanish, Russian, Greek and Hebrew. He was an adjunct lecturer, Department of German and Russian at the University of Vermont, and visiting associate professor at the Vermont Law School.

Robert was an active member and participant in the Burlington Chabad community. He devoted many years to the study of Torah and Chassidic thought.

All who knew Robert were struck by his approachable and inquisitive nature, as well as his extraordinary intellect and lightning-quick wit. He was a loving husband, father, grandfather and great-grandfather who will be greatly missed by everyone who knew him. He is survived by his wife, Catharine, and their daughter, Julia; his four children from a previous marriage: Deborah, Paul, Rebecca and John; 10 grandchildren; and one great-granddaughter. 

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