

TRIAL LAWYERS SECTION ANNUAL REPORT 2022-2023

The Trial Lawyers Section will soon conclude another successful year of supporting and enhancing the skills of Florida's trial lawyers through its seminars and publications and representing the interests of Florida's trial lawyers to our government and communities through in-person outreach and community programs. All of this is done with a focus on the purposes of the Section described in our Bylaws, including, promoting the art of trial advocacy, promoting civility professionalism and ethics, assisting the courts in improving the administration of justice and preserving and protecting the constitutional right to a trial by jury.

Three of our four premier programs have already taken place. In January, our yearly Trial Summit was held at the Gaylord Palms in Kissimmee. The Summit included the Chester Bedell Memorial Mock Trial Competition, which was contended by eighteen teams from nine Florida Law Schools. The competition was chaired by Whitney Untiedt, Esq. and Mark McLaughlin, Esq. Circuit and County Court Judges from throughout Florida served as judges for the competition trials and attorneys from throughout the state served as jurors, judging the teams. In addition, the Teachers' Law Symposium was also held in conjunction with the Summit. Each year we provide the highest quality judges and lawyers to speak to over a hundred civics and social studies teachers from middle and high schools, about the importance and functions of our jury trial system. This year was notable for the presence of Chief Justice Carlos Muniz, who presented on the Supreme Court and the Florida Constitution. The program was chaired by James Gassenheimer, Esq.

The annual Civil Trial Update and Board Certification Review seminar was held February 9th and 10th, in Tampa. This program is chaired every year by Edward K. Cheffy, Esq. and provides trial lawyers with essentially all the legal information and resources to effectively litigate their cases.

On February 21st, a contingent of the Trial Lawyers Section Executive Council attended meetings with various legislators in Tallahassee to discuss current legislation and the interests of Florida's Trial Lawyers. We spoke with numerous legislators about court funding and supported Bills providing for increased due process resources and pandemic recovery support.

In May, our annual Advanced Trial Advocacy program will again take place in Gainesville, Florida, at the University of Florida Levin College of Law. This program is chaired by J. Charles "Chuck" Ingram, Esq. and Kurt Alexander, Esq.

This year, the Section, for the first time, has engaged the services of a marketing company, Compass Legal Marketing. The Section entered into a contract with Compass to assist and oversee our outreach to lawyers and the communities we serve, through management of our social media sites, website, email blasts and press releases (when appropriate or necessary). We believe the use of Compass will improve our communication with our constituents and be a greater asset to our sponsors.

As we look forward to the next bar year, the Section continues to expand its sponsorship program, allowing us the opportunity to access additional resources to further improve our programs and outreach. We thank our Signature Sponsor, Searcy, Denney, Scarola, Barnhardt & Shipley, P.A. We are in the process of seeking legislative financial support for the Teachers' Law Symposium, which will allow us to further enhance the program and provide greater access to the program for even more teachers

throughout the State. Efforts are already underway to edit the Florida Handbook on Civil Discovery which will be ready for publication in late 2023 (every other year). The Handbook chaired by Jeremy Branning, Esq.

The Section receives tremendous support from The Florida Bar and thank you for assisting us in making 2022-2023 another very successful year.

Weston Smith

Chair – Trial Lawyers Section of The Florida Bar.