



**George "Chip" H. Rieger
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AREAS OF PRACTICE

American with Disability Act Claims (A.D.A)
Appellate Practice
Arbitration
Automobile Liability (PIP/PD/BI/UM)
Bad Faith/Extra Contractual Litigation
Civil Litigation
Commercial Ground Transportation Litigation
Commercial Litigation
Condominium and Homeowners' Association Litigation
Construction and Construction Defect Litigation
Coverage & Declaratory Judgment Actions
Director & Officer Liability (D&O)
Employment Law/Employment Litigation
Errors & Omissions Liability (E&O)
First and Third Party Property and Casualty Claims
Garage and Garagekeepers Liability
General Liability Defense Litigation
Liability Defense
Liquor Liability
Mediation and Alternative Dispute Resolution
Negligent Security
Nursing Home Litigation
Premises Liability
Product Liability
Professional Liability/E & O
Rideshare Defense
SIU/Suspicious & Fraudulent Claims

Chip Rieger was born in Indianapolis but spent his formative years in Connecticut before moving to Tennessee in 1983. Chip earned a Bachelor of Science from the University of Tennessee and graduated from the Cecil C. Humphreys School of Law at the University of Memphis. While a law student, he was a member of Phi Alpha Delta (Chief Justice) in addition to serving as a Bankruptcy Court Extern and as Vice President of the Student Bar Association.

Chip is the Department Managing Attorney for the Nashville, TN office of Vernis & Bowling. Prior to joining the firm, he was a partner at a national law firm. Chip was also the founding Member of The Rieger Law Firm and was a founding Member and Managing Partner of Oakley Rieger PLLC. He founded Oakley Rieger after spending the majority of his career as a partner in a large regional litigation defense firm, where he also served as a Managing Partner.

Prior to receiving his *Juris Doctorate*, Mr. Rieger was a Manager of a National Bank, responsible for operations and personnel at the retail level. After Law School, Chip started with a boutique employment law firm in Memphis before moving to Nashville and joining a regional firm. Mr. Rieger subsequently became a partner with his previous firm, where he served as a Managing Member of the Nashville office, overseeing operations and personnel. After 15 years, Chip decided to take his entrepreneurial spirit to another firm with a goal toward developing closer, more personal relationships with his clients by learning their business operations and goals, and partnering with them to achieve those goals.

Chip has a broad range of experience in litigation, including cases involving employment discrimination, FLSA, FMLA, ADA, retaliation, harassment, products liability, premises liability, transportation, personal injury, workers' compensation, insurance law and general civil defense. Chip has extensive experience supervising litigation teams in complex civil lawsuits. A part of his practice is also spent in the representation of management in employment law and related matters, pre-litigation corporate counseling, preventive strategies to avoid discrimination, management training and the creation of human resource tools.

Chip is proud to serve as a founding Board Member of Old School Farm, where he has served since its founding in 2013. Old School

Trucking
Uninsured/Underinsured Motorist Liability
Vertical Transportation Defense (Elevator/Escalator)
Workers' Compensation Defense
Wrongful Death

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Farm is a non-profit dedicated to producing quality farm-to-table food while providing vocational training and employment for individuals with disabilities. Old School Farm was founded on the belief that creating a sustainable farm can also produce sustainable jobs while giving back to the community at large.

When Chip is not defending lawsuits or counseling clients, he is a frequent seminar speaker on a variety of industry topics. He is also a regular presenter for The Society of Human Resource Managers, Lorman Education Services and Sterling Education Services. Chip also offers more personal in-house training and counseling for his business clients.

Mr. Rieger is a Member of The Society of Human Resource Managers. He has served on the Employment Law and Civil Rights Committee of the Nashville Bar Association and as the Legal Counsel and Director of the Nashville Area Junior Chamber of Commerce. He has also served on the Board of Directors of the Young Lawyers Division of the Nashville Bar Association and was a Professor of Employment Law and Tort Law at the Southeastern Career Institute. He is a member of the Memphis, Nashville, and Tennessee Bar Associations.

Chip is admitted to practice in all Federal Courts in the State of Tennessee and the U.S. Court of Appeals, Sixth Circuit.

Chip was motivated to go to law school by a friend who convinced him he could take his law degree and apply it in any industry that interested him. That concept holds true today, as Chip gets the most enjoyment out his practice by meeting people in a wide variety of industries, learning what is important to them and helping them to achieve their goals.

Chip is an avid hockey player, snow skier and water skier. He loves to travel the world but lately spends most of his travel visiting his kids at Clemson, Tampa and Tennessee Universities.



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Karen J. Jerome Smith is originally from Brooklyn, New York and moved with her family to a suburb of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania as

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a child. She graduated with high honors from Pennsylvania State University, earning a Bachelor of Business Administration with a major in finance and a minor in economics. She attended law school at the Harrisburg campus of Widener University School of Law where she graduated *cum laude*. Upon graduating, Karen and her husband moved to Florida to escape the cold weather.

Early on her career, Karen practiced as a commercial litigator for a top tier international law firm where she handled a variety of issues relating to business and property litigation, including representation of Homeowner and Condominium Associations and their Board of Directors. Karen also has extensive experience in property insurance defense and worked as a Managing Attorney and in-house counsel for one of Florida's top insurance companies. Most recently prior to joining the firm, Karen had been focusing her practice on construction defect litigation.

Karen prides herself on her attention to detail and her thorough preparation for the matters she handles and her client-oriented focus. She has built her reputation based upon professionalism and candor and works diligently to bring matters to a prompt resolution and provide the best outcome for her clients.

During her time away from work, Karen enjoys playing trivia, traveling, cooking and spending time with her family.

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Mariel Weber was raised in Canoga Park, California. In 2010, she received her bachelor's degree in political science and a minor in economics, cum laude, from California State Northridge University. Mariel then pursued a *Juris Doctorate* at Florida Coastal School of Law, where she also earned a certification in Advanced Legal Research and Writing. Upon graduation, she was honored with the distinguished *pro bono* honors service award for her volunteer work at Jacksonville Area Legal Aid. Further expanding her expertise, Mariel secured a Master of Business Administration from the University of Florida.

Mariel went on to practice civil litigation with a specialty in federal consumer protection and foreclosure defense representing homeowners in all phases of litigation, including

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handling bench trials across the State of Florida. She then went on to serve as in-house counsel for a holding company for three years overseeing all legal aspects of the business by ensuring legal conformity, minimizing probability of exposure, and negotiating all joint ventures, reverse mergers, partnership and corporate financing agreements. Prior to joining Vernis & Bowling, Mariel also gained experience in insurance defense by representing carriers in property damage claims and personal injury protection litigation.

As a defense attorney, Mariel brings her passion for advocacy to every case. Her goal is clear: to provide confident, top-tier representation for her clients, while forging lasting relationships built on trust and outstanding legal outcomes.

Outside of work, Mariel enjoys playing tennis, golfing, snowboarding, and cherished moments with her family.



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Thomas is a native of Charleston, South Carolina. He comes from a multi-generational family of legal professionals with deep roots in Charleston and the Lowcountry. He attended the University of South Carolina as an Alumni Scholar. During his undergraduate years he served as a page in the South Carolina House of Representatives, an intern in the office of the President of the University of South Carolina, Chief of Staff to the Student Body President and an officer in his fraternity. In May of 1989, he received his Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science, with a minor in History. He enrolled in the University of South Carolina School of Law in August of 1989, where he received his *Juris Doctor* degree in May of 1992.

Upon graduation from law school, Thomas was offered and accepted a judicial clerkship with Judge William L. Howard, Sr., Resident Judge of the Ninth Judicial Circuit for South Carolina. During his year spent in judicial clerkship, he had the opportunity to participate in over forty civil and criminal trials around the State of South Carolina. A most valuable learning experience, affording the opportunity to observe a number of preeminent trial lawyers from around the State.

In November of 1999, Thomas was elected to begin a six-year term as a commissioner of the Commissioners of Public Works for the City of Charleston. Thomas was re-elected 2005, 2011 and 2017. His current term expires in 2023. He has served as chairman of the Commission since 2003. During that time, CWS has been upgraded to a AAA credit rating, one of fewer than thirty combined water and sewer utilities in the Country to receive such designation from both Moody's and Standard & Poor.

Thomas is a Department Managing Attorney in the firm's Charleston, SC office. He is excited and energized by the opportunities to provide quality legal representation to Vernis & Bowling's array of clients and happy to be a part of the team.

Thomas has extensive experience in civil and administrative trial practice as well as experience in appellate practice, having argued before the South Carolina Court of Appeals, South Carolina Supreme Court, United States Court of Appeals, Fourth Circuit and the Multi-District Litigation Panel, having been involved at the earliest stages of EIFS litigation in the Southeast.

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His primary practice areas include Construction Defect, Personal Injury, Automobile Liability, Premises Liability Dram Shop Liability, Professional Liability, Products Liability and Intentional Torts. He also practices in Insurance Coverage, Mass Torts/Environmental/Toxic Torts, Bad Faith, and Appellate Practice. He is well-versed in all aspects of Insurance Defense and General Civil Litigation.

His extensive civil trial experience includes having tried more than sixty cases to verdict. He has participated in more than two hundred fifty mediations, both as an attorney for a litigant and/or as mediator. He has tried more than a dozen cases before single arbitrators or arbitration panels.

Thomas is a Certified Circuit Court Mediator by the South Carolina Supreme Court Board of Arbitrator and Mediator Certification, having been first certified in 2011.

Thomas knows the venues, and many of the attorneys and the judges around the State, a knowledge gained through over thirty years of experience and multi-generational legal exposure and is able to share those insights with carriers when assessing individual cases.

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Mark Erdman is a South Florida native and graduated from Florida State University with a dual-major BA in History and English Literature. He attended law school at the Florida International University College of Law, and obtained his *Juris Doctorate* with a certification in Intellectual Property studies. Mark began working immediately out of law school in civil litigation, intellectual property, and commercial real estate transactions. He later transitioned into workers' compensation law and insurance defense. Since joining Vernis and Bowling, Mark applies his wide experiences in litigation and transactional work to represent condominium and homeowners' associations.

Mr. Erdman has a wide range of legal experience that he brings as an asset to Vernis & Bowling. He is experienced practicing in Administrative, State, and Federal Courts. His practice has involved both appellate and pre-appellate work. His work has allowed him to succeed in both general trial-court litigation

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practice, and larger more operational state-wide litigation strategy across various offices.

Mark has a business-first mindset that he applies to every case. His focus is on providing the best possible service for his clients in any function they may need. He has a passion for legal research and writing. His goal is to ensure businesses succeed and protect them as they achieve their goals.

In his personal life, Mr. Erdman is involved in a number of charity organizations. Most notably, he is a Chapman Partnership member, helping serve homeless and indigent families in the Miami-Dade community. As a young man, Mark achieved the Eagle Scout Award. He is an avid outdoorsman. He is happy spending his weekends enjoying Florida's natural beauty whenever the weather, sufficient sunscreen, and his wife permit him to do so.