



Christopher J. Blain, Esq.
Managing Attorney

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VERDICTS AND DISPOSITIONS

Coburn, Amy v. Davis, Clifford and Vera
Olivares Garcia, Fatima v. Seminole Towing & Recovery
Galusha, Raymond v. Lowe's-Appeal
Felix Jordan and Marcha Louis as Natural Parents of minor v. Lana Kopec Enterprises et al.
Joseph, Jo-Ann v. All Channel Enterprises, Inc., David Mazure, United Water Restoration Group, Inc., Tyler M. Gilman and USAA
Kelley v. Sun Communities
Savvas v. Wawa
Tonya Oliver v. Foxwood at Trinity Community Association
Rodrigues v. WaWa
Plaintiff v Nativity Catholic Church

AREAS OF PRACTICE

Automobile Liability (PIP/PD/BI/UM)
Bad Faith/Extra Contractual Litigation
Civil Litigation
Commercial Ground Transportation Litigation
Condominium and Homeowners' Association Litigation
Construction and Construction Defect Litigation
Coverage & Declaratory Judgment Actions
Cyber Security
Director & Officer Liability (D&O)
Employment Law/Employment Litigation
Errors & Omissions Liability (E&O)
First and Third Party Property and Casualty Claims
General Liability Defense Litigation

Nationally Board Certified Trial Advocate
Florida Bar Board Certified Civil Trial Lawyer
Florida Supreme Court Certified Circuit Court Mediator

Christopher Blain is the managing attorney of the Tampa, Florida office. He has worked all aspects of the insurance industry. He is an expert in Civil Trial and is Board Certified by the Florida Bar and Nationally Board Certified by the National Board of Trial Advocacy. He was born in Addison, Illinois which is a suburb outside of Chicago. He attended college at Lake Forest College where he graduated in 1996. He continued his education at Barry University, School of Law where he received his *Juris Doctor* in 2002. While in law school, Chris worked under the Honorable Judge Walter Komanski at the Ninth Judicial Circuit, where he researched complex civil litigation issues.

Chris has tried numerous matters to jury verdicts in both State and Federal Courts. He has litigated general liability defense work ranging from handling lawsuits involving claims of wrongful death, premises liability, insurance coverage, auto negligence, negligent security and property claims. Chris has also represented Homeowner/Condominium Associations and their Board Members before HUD, State and Federal Courts regarding disputes arising over deed restrictions, enforcement of those restrictions and alleged discrimination. In addition, Chris has also lectured extensively in these fields where he has been a featured speaker at continuing education seminars around the United States on a variety of insurance defense and litigation topics.

Chris is admitted to practice law in all State Courts in Florida as well as all Federal Courts which include the Northern, Southern and Middle Districts of Florida. He is admitted to practice in the Eleventh Circuit of the United States Court of Appeals. Further, he is admitted to practice in all courts in the State of Illinois.

In his free time, Chris enjoys being active in the Tampa area. He is an assistant soccer coach for his son's team and can also be found cheering on his daughter at her drama class performances.

Government Law
Liability Defense
Medical Malpractice
Negligent Security
PIP/Personal Injury Protection Litigation
Product Liability
SIU/Suspicious & Fraudulent Claims
Subrogation Claims
Trucking
Uninsured/Underinsured Motorist Liability
Wrongful Death

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U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit
U.S. District Court of the Central District of Illinois
U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois
U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Illinois

EDUCATION

Graduate:

Barry University School of Law, Juris Doctorate, 2002

Undergraduate:

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First and Third Party Property and Casualty Claims

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Medical Malpractice

Negligent Security

PIP/Personal Injury Protection Litigation

Product Liability

Chelsey M. Edgerly was raised in Birmingham, Alabama. She graduated *summa cum laude* with Honors from the University of Alabama in 2007, with a Bachelor of Science in Business Management. In 2010, Chelsey earned her J.D. from Cumberland School of Law in Birmingham, Alabama, where she was awarded a presidential merit scholarship. She was admitted to the Alabama Bar in 2010 and is licensed to practice before all state and federal courts in Alabama.

SIU/Suspicious & Fraudulent Claims
Subrogation Claims
Trucking
Uninsured/Underinsured Motorist Liability
Wrongful Death

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During law school, Chelsey served as Research and Writing Editor of the American Journal of Trial Advocacy and the President of Defense Research Institute. She participated in a number of school competitions and became a member of the Cumberland Trial Advocacy Board.

Chelsey's areas of practice primarily include general insurance defense, automobile defense, commercial vehicle liability, and premises liability. She is a member of the Alabama Bar Association as well as the Birmingham Bar Association. Her outside interests include running outdoors and playing piano.

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Michelle was born and raised in Quincy, Illinois. In 1996, she graduated, with honors, from the University of Southern Mississippi with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English. She attended Tulane University School of Law and received her *Juris Doctor* degree in 1999. She began her legal career with the Office of the Public Defender, First Judicial Circuit, in Pensacola, Florida, in 1999, where she practiced until joining Vernis & Bowling in 2001. Michelle was awarded an AV® Preeminent™ Peer Review Rated by Martindale-Hubbell, which identifies attorneys with preeminent legal ability and is a reflection of expertise, experience, integrity and overall professional excellence. She is recognized in Martindale-Hubbell's Bar Registry of Preeminent Lawyers in America. Michelle has also been awarded an AV Preeminent Peer Review Rating by the Judiciary.

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U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Florida

Michelle is the Managing Attorney for Vernis & Bowling of Northwest, Florida, P.A. She has over two decades of trial experience and handles a variety of cases, including automobile liability, trucking and transportation, hurricane, first and third property claims, premises liability (including negligent security and slip and fall), labor and employment, construction defect, director and officer liability, product liability, and wrongful death. Michelle has tried over 50 jury trials in both federal and state court and has conducted countless depositions and argued a wide range of motions. Michelle's most talked about trial continues to be a lawsuit where she successfully defended Hanes regarding a claim of defective manufacturing of a package of men's briefs. The plaintiff claimed that the briefs gaped open during normal wear and caused personal injury, ruining his dream Hawaiian vacation.

Michelle is a member of the Florida Bar, the Alabama Bar, and the Escambia/Santa Rosa Bar Association. She is admitted to practice in all Florida and Alabama State Courts, the Northern and Middle Districts of Florida, the Southern and Middle Districts of Alabama, and the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals.

Outside of the office, Michelle enjoys traveling, boating, scuba diving, and snow skiing with her husband of over 30 years.

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William F. (Bill) Smith, II was born in Winfield, Alabama in 1962. Raised in the Birmingham area, he was valedictorian at Shades Valley High School in 1980, where he played basketball and baseball. He received a B.S. in Mineral Engineering, Petroleum specialization, from the University of Alabama in 1984. During college, Bill worked as an engineering intern for Alabama Power Company at the E. C. Gaston Steam Plant. In 1987, he earned a J.D. from the University of Alabama School of Law. Bill has been married to Suzann Sherer Smith since 1984. They have two adult children, Kathleen, an ICU nurse, and Parker, an insurance agent.

Bill is admitted to practice in Alabama (1987), U.S. District Court, Northern (1988), Middle (1997) and Southern (2004) Districts of Alabama, and the U.S. Court of Appeals, Eleventh Circuit (1999). Bill is a member of the Birmingham Bar Association and the National Retail & Restaurant Defense Association.

Bill has practiced exclusively in insurance defense litigation for more than 30 years, having successfully tried, as first chair, a diverse range of cases in state and federal courts, including automobile & commercial trucking, insurance & bad faith claims, wrongful death, premises liability, product liability, employment cases (race and pregnancy discrimination, sexual harassment, and workers compensation), and disputes between business entities.

From 2014 - 2020, Bill tried more than 30 cases to verdict.

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He has previously served in-house as senior litigation counsel for a major property & casualty insurer.

Bill is a frequent speaker at seminars on a variety of civil litigation topics. He is active in his church and outside interests include gardening, hiking, backpacking basketball and all youth sports.



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Ian Neil Matthes was born and raised in Atlanta, Georgia. He graduated *magna cum laude* from Georgia State University with a Bachelor of Arts degree Political Science in 1994 and earned his J.D. from The University of Georgia School of Law in 1997. Ian serves as the Regional Managing Attorney and General Counsel for Vernis & Bowling. Ian provides operation management, support and services to all of the firm's offices throughout the Southeast.

Ian was admitted to the Georgia Bar in 1997, and is licensed to practice law before all state courts in Georgia. He is also licensed to practice before the U.S. District Courts for the Middle and Northern Districts of Georgia. For over 20 years, Ian has represented defendants in general liability, premises liability, automobile liability, bad faith/extra-contractual liability, commercial vehicle liability, insurance coverage, SIU/fraud (including first party arson/property claims and medical provider fraud), and UM/UIM liability matters. He also provides claims/litigation file audit services, and litigation management operations and process improvement consulting.

Ian previously served in-house with P&C insurance companies as a National Litigation Manager and Director of Litigation Management (AIG), managing litigation staff and procedures, as well as class actions and "Bad Faith" claims nationwide. With over 10,000 litigation matters under management, he was also responsible for final trial approval decisions in hundreds of cases per year. He regularly and proudly wears his "litigation management" and "home office insurance guy" hats while encouraging efficiency, communication, and delivery of timely results at the firm. This experience has also led to Ian serving as a speaker at numerous seminars throughout the nation, including at national insurance, litigation management and SIU conventions on topics including Premises Liability, Good Faith Claims Handling, Ethical Adjusting Practices, Personal Lines Litigation, SIU/Fraud Best Practices, Negotiation and Settlement Strategies, and Legislative and Case Law Updates.

Ian is a Founding Board Member and Past-President of the National Retail & Restaurant Defense Association (NRRDA), was the Charter Board President of the Georgia Chapter of the National Society of Professional Insurance Investigators (NSPII),

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and is a member of GDLA, DRI, CLM, ACA and numerous other litigation, claims, insurance and bar related organizations.

Ian and his wife, Stephanie, have two wonderful children, Charlotte (Charlie) and Harrison. Ian is an advocate for special needs children, raises money for Autism-related causes, and is a proud #AutismDad. His other interests include gardening, baking the best sourdough bread in the Southeast, cooking, and watching the UGA Bulldogs. He is always ready to share photos of his kids, plants, his 110+ varieties of fig trees, or why his hydroponic lettuce is better than anything you can buy.