



Joseph Bellissimo, Esq.
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AREAS OF PRACTICE

Automobile Liability (PIP/PD/BI/UM)
Cyber Security
Data Privacy
First and Third Party Property and Casualty Claims
General Liability Defense Litigation
Premises Liability

BAR & COURT ADMISSION

Florida Bar

EDUCATION

Graduate:
Barry University, Dwayne O. Andreas School of Law, *Juris*
Doctorate
Undergraduate:
Florida State University, B.S. in Computer Science

Joseph (Joe) was born and raised in a small town outside of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Joe was born to Joseph S. Bellissimo Jr., Esq., and Edythe Bellissimo. He is the oldest of 5 children. In 2014, he moved to New Smyrna Beach, Florida, and has called Central Florida home ever since. He graduated from New Smyrna Beach High School as a member of the engineering academy, where he held the state record for almost a decade in the Autodesk Inventor Certification Exam. He is a proud graduate of Florida State University, earning his B.S. in Computer Science. After graduating from FSU, Joe, a devout Roman Catholic, attended Barry University Dwayne O. Andreas School of Law, acquiring his *Juris Doctorate*.

Following his passion for streetwear and limited-edition collectors' pieces, Joe created automation software for securing exclusive, hard-to-find items. With this precise and innovative software, Joe has been able to broker deals between high profile clients and retailers. Joe's proficiency with technology was apparent in his early childhood, when at just 4 years old, he was the IT technician for his elementary school. Joe's upbringing in the legal profession started with him playing action figures beside his father amid meetings and admiring the hard, but gratifying work his father did.

Since joining Vernis & Bowling, Joe handles claims involving general liability, automobile liability, property and casualty, and cyber security.

Outside of the office, you can spot Joe hiding in the crowd at a theme park or taking the spotlight announcing a basketball game. Joe is an avid supporter of both Tottenham Hotspur Football Club and the Florida State Seminoles. A lover of space and exploration, Joe is thrilled with the possibility of colonizing Mars and has personally volunteered himself and his family to be the first to go. He has gone as far as to name his dog after Saturn's smallest moon, Atlas. Joe advocates for renewable energy and has an unnatural affection for McDonald's Coca-Cola.



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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. 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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Hunter is a Florida native born and raised in the Florida Keys. Following his graduation from the University of Central Florida, he returned to Key Largo to attend law school at St. Thomas University in Miami Gardens, graduating in 2020. After admission to the Florida Bar, Mr. O'Connor began practicing with Vernis & Bowling of the Florida Keys.

As an associate with Vernis & Bowling of the Florida Keys, Mr. O'Connor has practiced in a wide variety of areas with a focus towards local government law.

Mr. O'Connor handles various legal matters for The School Board of Monroe County, the City of Key Colony Beach, City of Layton, Florida Keys Mosquito Control District and Key Largo Fire & EMS District, North Fort Myers Fire District, and Monroe County. Some of the legal areas Mr. O'Connor handles include, but are not limited to, contracts, ordinances, procurement, affordable housing, public records, and sunshine law. Mr. O'Connor looks forward to continuing to expand his skills and expertise alongside

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the excellent attorneys at Vernis & Bowling of the Florida Keys.

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Jennifer Whitworth is an experienced insurance defense attorney representing insurers, insureds, and businesses in complex civil litigation. Licensed since 2011, her practice focuses on personal injury, personal and commercial auto and trucking liability, wrongful death, industrial accidents, products liability, strict liability, premises liability, construction defect, accounting malpractice, FLSA disputes, and first-party claims involving bad faith, UIM, and breach of contract. Jennifer also provides coverage opinions, drafts reservation of rights and denial letters for insurers, and handles declaratory judgment actions on behalf of insurers disputing coverage.

Jennifer delivers strategic, cost-effective legal representation with an emphasis on early evaluation, coverage analysis, strategic motion practice, and litigation efficiency. She has a strong record of securing favorable jury verdicts and summary judgments in high-exposure cases. Known for her responsiveness and practical insight, Jennifer is a valued partner to claims professionals across the insurance industry.

Outside of work, Jennifer enjoys hiking, traveling, cooking, and

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spending time with her husband, Bryan, their three sons—Logan, Ben, and Jake—and their pets, Annie and Whiskey.

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Jeff Gill was born in Suffern, New York in 1962. He grew up in Waldwick, New Jersey and graduated from Waldwick High School in 1980. He graduated from Haverford College with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in 1984. Following his graduation from college, Jeff coached high school basketball for a year. He then enrolled in the Vanderbilt University School of Law from which he graduated with a *Juris Doctorate* in 1988. Upon graduation from law school, Jeff began his legal career in the Pensacola office of Carlton, Fields, et al. He founded the firm of Bridgers, Gill & Holman in 1991 and acted as managing partner there until joining Vernis & Bowling in 2002.

Jeff has tried more than 150 civil jury trials. He has tried and won cases in most Florida jurisdictions including Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa, Walton, Bay, Washington, Gadsden, Lee, Jefferson, Taylor, Madison, Suwannee, Dixie, Columbia, Alachua, Nassau, Duval, Clay, St. Johns, Flagler, Putnam, Marion, Volusia, Lake, Seminole, Orange, Pasco, Brevard, Indian River, St. Lucie, Martin, Hillsborough, Palm Beach, Broward, Dade and Collier counties as well as in the Federal Courts of the Northern and Southern Districts of Florida.

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Jeff has served as national trial counsel for several large corporations in defense of their Mass Tort Litigation. He has also served as statewide trial counsel in Florida for several fortune five hundred companies. He has obtained defense verdicts for his clients in wrongful death cases in both State and Federal Courts and has prevailed in trials against some of the most high-profile lawyers in Florida including, but not limited to, Fred Levin, Bob Montgomery, Chris Searcy, Mike Papantonio and Joel Wolpe.

Jeff has been the head basketball coach at Pensacola Catholic High School since 2015 and lead the Crusaders to the final four in 2018.