VICTORIOUS VICTORIA

Victoria Mesa-Estrada ’08 Obtains Record $17.42 Million Verdict for Mistreated Migrant Farmworkers
A Message from the Dean

Dear Alumni and Friends,

On August 10th, we welcomed 235 new students to St. Thomas Law—the Class of 2019. The Cordero breezeway is once again filled with the sounds of students and faculty debating the latest legal rulings, and the year promises to be filled with learning, camaraderie, and community service.

This issue of The St. Thomas Lawyer highlights the incredible accomplishments of alumni, students and faculty over the course of the 2015-2016 school year. We have much to be proud of at St. Thomas Law. The law school was recently recognized as number one in the nation for Hispanic students, and in the top ten in the nation for environment for minority students and faculty diversity. In addition to publishing scholarly articles of influence, our faculty have been featured in national media outlets, testified before Congress, and made significant impacts on state and federal legislation.

Our alumni, a constant source of pride, continue to use their talents to improve the lives of those most in need. In this issue of The St. Thomas Lawyer, you will read about alumna Victoria Mesa-Estrada, whose unrelenting dedication to her migrant worker clients ultimately led to an unlikely multi-million dollar win in court; and fellow graduate Judge Michaelle Gonzalez-Paulson, whose decisions in her domestic violence division courtroom help families every day.

This fall our dream for a solo/small practice incubator comes to fruition under the leadership of Judge David Gersten, a former adjunct professor and friend of the law school for many years. The first participants of the EDGE Program have been selected, and their work begins this month. On page 12, you can read about how Judge Gersten will guide and support these new, entrepreneurial attorneys in building their own successful firms.

Throughout these pages, you will see the impact our alumni have on the success of the law school—whether through assisting current students through events such as speed networking or professionalism day, hiring recent graduates, or financially supporting the law school’s programs as recognized in our annual Honor Roll of Donors. I invite you to support St. Thomas Law with your time, your talents, and your treasure.

With warmest regards,

Alfredo Garcia
Dean
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May 2016 Commencement (page 6)
St. Thomas Law Ranked #1 Law School in the U.S. for Hispanic Students

St. Thomas University School of Law has long been nationally recognized for its students’ quality of life and the diversity among its student body. Now, the law school has been ranked the number one law school in the United States for Hispanics by Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education magazine.

The Top 25 rankings, released in December 2015, are based on enrollment and completion surveys submitted to the National Center for Education Statistics in Washington D.C., an arm of the U.S. Department of Education.

"The ranking is consistent with our school’s mission of access for students from groups that have been underrepresented in the profession," stated St. Thomas Law Dean Alfredo Garcia. "We are proud of our students and alumni who have fulfilled our mission and aspirations."

St. Thomas Law, where 67% of the students are Hispanic, was also featured for the innovative programs created to support our students from pre-admission to post-graduation. The Summer Conditional Program, which prepares newly-admitted students for the academic rigors of law school, and the Active Learning Instructor (ALI) Program which involves, among other things, upper-level students serving as mentors to first-year students, were highlighted. The learning process is further enhanced through workshops on exam-taking, essay skill-building, and bar exam preparation.

Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education is a national monthly magazine rooted in serving the unique needs of the Hispanic community in higher education. It is notable for its annual Top 100 list of colleges and universities awarding degrees to Hispanic students.

Florida Bar Presidents Past and Present at St. Thomas Law Day

St. Thomas University School of Law celebrated student achievements at its annual Law Day luncheon this past spring. The event’s keynote speaker was Ramón A. Abadin, President of The Florida Bar and a partner at Sedgwick Law LLP in Miami. Pictured with President Abadin are (L-R): Professor Leonard Pertnoy; Herman J. Russomanno, Past President of The Florida Bar (2000) and Chairman Emeritus of the St. Thomas University School of Law Board of Advisors; Dean Alfredo Garcia; Abadin; and Dr. Irma Becerra, Provost of St. Thomas University.
Pro Bono Praise

Dade Legal Aid/Put Something Back recently honored St. Thomas Law, along with other South Florida-based legal professionals, for outstanding pro bono service to the community during the Dade County Bar Association’s 2016 Recognition Luncheon held in downtown Miami.

The Outstanding Law School Award was presented to St. Thomas University School of Law and Dean Alfredo Garcia for providing ongoing support to Dade Legal Aid’s worthy projects.

“Dean Garcia and St. Thomas Law have provided vision and expertise to Dade Legal Aid’s Venture Law Project,” stated Diana Acevedo, a 2015 graduate of St. Thomas Law and coordinator of the Venture Law Project.

Dade Legal Aid’s Venture Law Project counsels local entrepreneurs and startups in need of legal services and pairs qualifying entrepreneurs with knowledgeable pro bono attorneys. The project continues to support the Miami entrepreneurial ecosystem with the support of St. Thomas Law and Dean Garcia. The Project has served over 450 entrepreneurs since its inception and hosted dozens of clinics tailored to the arts community and nonprofit organizations.

St. Thomas Law is driven by a mission to serve. Leading the way is our nationally-recognized pro bono program that instills a lasting pro bono ethic among our students that serves them well beyond graduation.

Alumni Sharpen Students’ Skills

At the Third Annual Speed Networking Event, alumni met with students in Convocation Hall to help students develop and refine their networking skills. To participate in the next speed networking event, please contact Assistant Dean Peter Kelly at pkelly@stu.edu or 305-623-2316.
Career Counsel

ALUMNA APPOINTED ASSISTANT DEAN FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT

In June 2016, Dean Garcia appointed Lourdes B. Fernandez ’02 as the law school’s first Assistant Dean for Career Development. Having previously served as the law school’s Outreach Coordinator and Career Counselor since September of 2014, Assistant Dean Fernandez will lead and oversee all events and programs within the Office for Career Development. She will strengthen the relationships between the law school and the private and public sectors, as well as the judiciary.

Already a familiar face to many students and recent graduates, Fernandez was elected by the student body as “Staff Member of the Year” in March 2016. A *cum laude* graduate of St. Thomas Law, Fernandez received her B.S. in political science with a major in Legal Studies from Barry University. Upon graduation from law school, she clerked in the United States District Court for the Southern District of Florida for over a decade.

Judge Levy Retires

St. Thomas University’s President, Msgr. Franklyn Casale, and Dean Alfredo Garcia recently hosted a reception in honor of Judge David Levy, who retired this past semester after 34 years of inspirational teaching and leadership to the St. Thomas community.

Attending the reception in the Cordero Breezeway were hundreds of students, faculty, alumni, judges and dignitaries, including Rev. Dr. Patrick O’Neill, the former president of St. Thomas University and founder of the law school, and Honorable Bob Butterworth (Dean from 2003-2006). Joining the guest of honor was Judge Levy’s wife of 47 years, Betty.

We salute Judge Levy for his decades of service, and we thank him for his unwavering support of our law school and our students. He is a dedicated teacher and a loyal friend, and we look forward to welcoming him back during his visits to South Florida!
A New Partnership with Lynn University

Seated (L-R): Dr. Gregg Cox, Lynn University’s Vice President for Academic Affairs; Msgr. Franklyn Casale, President of St. Thomas University; Dr. Kevin Ross, President of Lynn University; and Dean Alfredo Garcia.

Standing (L-R): Anthony Marino ’17; Assistant Dean Peter Kelly; Assistant Dean Jessica Fonseca Nader ’97; Associate Dean Cece Dykas; Karline Lee, Esq. ’09; Bill Smith, Jr., former Mayor of Boca Raton; and Professor Mark Wolff.

St. Thomas University School of Law and Lynn University have signed an agreement that will allow qualified students to earn their combined undergraduate and law degrees in six years. Students will complete three undergraduate years at Lynn University before matriculating into St. Thomas Law for a three-year juris doctor program.

Lynn University hosted the signing ceremony at its campus in Boca Raton. Attendees included President of St. Thomas University, Monsignor Franklyn Casale; President of Lynn University, Dr. Kevin Ross; Dean Alfredo Garcia; Dr. Gregg Cox, Vice President for Academic Affairs at Lynn University.

“We are happy to partner with our friends at Lynn in establishing this 3+3 program,” stated Monsignor Casale. “We recognize and value the global experience that Lynn students receive as undergraduates and, through this partnership, give Lynn students the opportunity to continue that global experience at St. Thomas University School of Law, which is consistently recognized each year as one of the most diverse law schools in the country. Upon graduation from St. Thomas Law, the 3+3 students will join our thousands of graduates around the world who are leaders in their respective communities.”

The accelerated law degree will result in significant savings for students who are faced with ever-increasing education costs. “Our partnership with St. Thomas Law provides access to a legal education at a more affordable price,” said President Ross. “Lynn students enrolled in the program can save up to one year of tuition—approximately $46,000—and will have access to scholarships.”

St. Thomas Law will automatically award a $5,000 scholarship annually to any Lynn student who is part of the program. Additionally, a student who completes his or her first year at St. Thomas Law and is ranked in the top 25 percent of the class is eligible to receive a merit scholarship ranging from $5,000 to $33,000.

“We are delighted to forge this partnership with Lynn University and look forward to its growth and development in the future,” stated St. Thomas Law’s Dean Garcia.

Prior to the Lynn University partnership, a 3+3 articulation agreement was signed between St. Thomas Law and Miami Dade College. Through partnerships such as these, St. Thomas Law continues to expand opportunities for students to earn law degrees, advance economically, and be part of successful academic and legal communities.
Graduation 2016

The Honorable Marcia G. Cooke of the United States District Court for the Southern District of Florida delivered the commencement address to 165 J.D. and 23 LL.M. graduates on May 14, 2016. After being presented with an honorary degree, Judge Cooke implored the graduates to be engaged in their communities, and she compared the law degree to an airplane or winning lottery ticket which now granted them access to a new world. “You cannot advance to anything or become something more than you want,” Judge Cooke remarked, “unless you engage – and that means: buy a ticket!”

Speaking on behalf of her classmates was the Class of 2016 valedictorian, Erica Behm, who noted that her fellow graduates and she were well prepared for the legal arena because of St. Thomas Law’s emphasis on leadership and the development of engaged and caring attorneys: “It is because of the leadership exhibited by those in our law school community that we pushed ourselves to excel, to learn more, to be more engaged, and always to do good for those around us.”

Serving as the ceremony’s grand marshals were three members of the Class of 1991: Bill Dickey, Carol Strickland, and Dr. Peter Barone. These graduates represented their classmates in celebrating the 25th anniversary of their own graduation.

Top of the Class

In February 2016, Dean Garcia and Assistant Dean Peter Kelly hosted the 10th Annual Dean’s Luncheon for first-year students who excelled academically in their first semester. Alumni attending this special event are pictured (L. R.): Tom Graham ’10, Judge Stacy Glick ’97, Judge Diana Vizcaino ’00, Dean Alfredo Garcia, Judge Michaelle Gonzalez Paulson ’01, Judge Victoria Ferrer ’05, Msgr. Franklyn Casale, Guy Noa ’13, Nick Chotos ’14, and Jennifer Edgley ’14.
Professionalism Priorities

In the Fall of 2015, St. Thomas Law held its fourth annual Professionalism Day for its first year law students at the beginning of the 2016 academic year.

The law school now devotes an entire day to the important topics of civility and professionalism, providing students with practical lessons from the real world, and guidance from attorneys and judges.

The panel of guests included the following alumni: Honorable John Bowman of the Seventeenth Judicial Circuit in Broward County, Florida (a member of St. Thomas Law’s inaugural Class of 1987); Armando G. Hernandez, an associate at Rumberger, Kirk & Caldwell’s Miami office (Class of 2010); and Desiree Staefller-Marchbanks, an Assistant State Attorney in the Miami-Dade State’s Attorney’s Office (Class of 2013).

Kelsey Geary ’16, former President of the St. Thomas Law Moot Court Team, served as moderator of the discussion. “St. Thomas strives to produce ethical and professional attorneys,” stated Ms. Geary. “The law school shows this dedication each year through this important event.”


The Princeton Review (2016) ranks St. Thomas Law:

#8 Best Environment for Minority Students

#8 Most Diverse Faculty
New Faces in Advancement Office

Dorit Matthews, Major Gifts Officer for the Law School and Biscayne College, joined St. Thomas’ staff in April 2016 to work on the Blueprint for Leadership capital campaign. This campaign will allow St. Thomas Law to add additional world-class faculty, new clinical programs, and an endowed scholarship fund for students.

Dorit has been working in development for the last 18 years, most recently as the Director of Development for Family Resource Center of South Florida, a leading child welfare organization in the State. Previously, she served as the Development Director at Teach for America Miami-Dade and the Executive Director at the Association of Community Programs for the Homeless in New York City. She holds a B.A. from Northeastern University and an M.B.A. from Columbia Business School.

DeAnna Arana joined St. Thomas University in September of 2015. She is responsible for promoting the message of the Annual Fund by executing a coordinated mix of communication and solicitation strategies involving e-mail, direct mail, social and digital media, and personal visitations, all focused on growing sustainable annual support for both the Law School and the main university.

DeAnna previously worked in development for various nonprofits in New York City, and, more recently, as Director of Development at Florida International University. She holds a bachelor’s degree in English from the University at Albany and a Master’s in Public Administration from Long Island University C.W. Post.

Florida Bar Annual Convention

St. Thomas Law alumni gathered with faculty and administrators in Orlando in June 2016 for The Florida Bar’s annual meetings. Pictured L-R are Dr. Peter Barone ’91, Dean Garcia, Professor Carol Zeiner, Patrick Delaney ‘10, Nick Romanello ’93 and Assistant Dean Peter Kelly.
Doing things the way everyone else does is just not Victoria Mesa-Estrada’s style. Earning her LL.M. before her J.D.—check. Working on cases *pro bono* after being laid off from her job due to budget constraints—check. Winning one of the largest judgments ever for abuse and mistreatment of farmworkers—check. While her path may be unconventional, Victoria Mesa-Estrada’s results are stunning; and while her work is difficult and the pay modest, her commitment is unfailing.
"I truly enjoy what I do," says Victoria Mesa-Estrada, J.D. '08, LL.M. '04. "To me, it always comes back to my clients. I feel good knowing that I am doing something good for someone else, that I can give someone hope."

To a group of five frightened women, migrant farmworkers who were victims of rape and sexual harassment at the hands of their bosses at Moreno Farms in Felda, Florida, Victoria gave more than hope. She gave them victory. She gave them justice.

The case of the migrant farmworkers at Moreno Farms landed on Victoria’s desk while she was a staff attorney at the Migrant Farmworker Justice Project at Florida Legal Services. "These women were victims and nobody would help them," says Victoria. "They went to the police. They went to the state attorney. They were turned away." She adds, "These women needed representation and they could not get it."

Victoria worked tirelessly to convince the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to file a federal complaint, in spite of the fact that prosecutors in Hendry County had determined there was insufficient evidence to proceed with a case. For two years, Victoria worked diligently on the case until the funding for her position at Florida Legal Services ran out and she was laid off. When the funding ran out, Victoria decided she could not abandon the case and her clients. "I had a personal relationship with these women, I was the only one who knew the case," remembers Victoria. "I was their hope."

She handled the case pro bono to its conclusion.

"The whole circumstance with this case was surreal," notes Mesa-Estrada. "By the time the case went to court, Moreno Farms was out of the business and the men could not be located." She adds, "The women knew there was no money; but they wanted to stop this from happening in the future, and to let others in the same situation know that they could find help."

Years after these women were victimized in their workplace, the judge in the case entered a default judgment against Moreno Farms and held a jury trial to determine damages. After each woman described the torture she had endured at the hands of her employers, the jury deliberated for six hours, and awarded the victims $15 million in punitive damages and another roughly $2.5 million in compensatory damages for a total award of $17.42 million.

"It is sad that these women will never see the money," says Victoria, "but it was important for them to be heard,
Victoria Mesa-Estrada accepts the Leadership, Unity, Professional and Excellence (L.U.P.E.) Award from MAFO, a national partnership of Farmworker and Rural Organizations in April 2016 in Austin, Texas.

to have their day in court. I also think that others will benefit from their bravery. This case has garnered national attention. Hopefully it will empower other victims to come forward, and other agencies to support and represent them.

With this case behind her, Victoria Mesa is focused on building her business, Mesa-Estrada Law, P.A., a civil practice law firm in South Florida providing affordable legal and consulting services to individuals and businesses in the areas of employment law, immigration law, and contract law. The firm also represents individuals in divorce and child support proceedings. “I am a firm believer that every person, no matter their economic status, should have access to good legal counsel at an affordable fee,” says Victoria. “It can be difficult with today’s legal business model to pay the bills while defending the weak and most vulnerable in our society,” she notes. “But I will continue to follow my passion.”

Mesa-Estrada, a Colombian native who immigrated to the U.S. in 1992, has followed her passion throughout her professional life. Prior to law school, she spent over ten years in the not-for-profit sector working for human rights, international development and civil rights organizations including Colombian-American Service Organization, People for the American Way Foundation, and Oxfam America.

With all of her social justice experience, Victoria decided to pursue an LL.M. in Intercultural Human Rights at St. Thomas. “I am so thankful that I had the opportunity to earn my LL.M. at St. Thomas,” says Victoria. “The experience was so impactful. I studied with internationally-recognized attorneys. It was such a rich environment for the exchange of ideas.”

After her LL.M., she continued her social justice work, but found that it was difficult to affect change through policy work. “I decided to return to St. Thomas to earn my J.D. so that I could create positive jurisprudence for those in need.” She adds, “I realized as an attorney, I could make a significant impact on people’s lives by listening to them, advising them, and fighting for them in the legal system.”

Despite the significant challenges of operating a law practice dedicated to helping low-income wage earners and non-profits, Victoria has no intention of changing course. She says, “I have found my place in the world and it is to create change, bring hope, and make a difference. It is in my blood.”

Plaintiffs from the Moreno Farms case: Ana Francisco, Sandra Lopez and Ligia Martinez, with Victoria Mesa-Estrada, and plaintiff Maria del Carmen Aguilar.

“Victoria Mesa-Estrada’s unstinting devotion to her clients and their cries for vindication in a court of law exemplifies the social justice mission of our law school. Our mission is rooted in the dignity of every human being and Victoria’s undaunted courage while representing the marginalized of our society is a testament to her character and values.”

Alfredo Garcia, Dean of St. Thomas Law
program update

The Cutting EDGE

Judge David Gersten on the launch of St. Thomas Law’s innovative solo/small practice incubator, EDGE.

“It’s official,” exclaims Judge Gersten, the EDGE (Entrepreneurs Dedicated to Giving Back Excellence) Program’s director. “After an extremely rigorous and in-depth application and interview process, we have selected the inaugural participants in St. Thomas Law’s revolutionary EDGE Program.”
The EDGE team, which includes Jesmany Jomarron '09, who serves as Associate Director, selected four outstanding graduates as the first class admitted into the EDGE Program. “I can personally say they are the best of the best,” adds Gersten.

“The program is designed to enable the participants to spend a year to eighteen months establishing and growing a law practice without the immense overhead that is one of the biggest roadblocks to successful solo and small practices,” says Gersten. “We anticipate that each and every participant will have a fully-functioning, up-and-running solo practice upon completion of the program.” He adds, “this is our primary goal that they will be able to meet their overhead and generate income for themselves and their families.”

Upon receiving notice that they have passed the Florida Bar, the EDGE participants will get to work. “Although they will pay minimal overhead, they will be in beautiful offices in downtown Miami, with a view,” quips Gersten. A typical day will involve networking to generate business, pro bono work, and becoming involved in the community.

“I will take these rising stars under my wing and provide mentoring, reviews of business plans and current cases, BigLaw-type roundtables and strategy conferences, as well as networking guidance to make sure they are in the right places with the right people to generate business.”

Judge David Gersten
Brokered Conventions and the Paradox of Trump as a Symbol of Democracy

By Professor Jay Silver

While there were fleeting moments of drama at this summer’s national political conventions – like Ted Cruz’ vengeful non-endorsement speech – what very nearly happened at the Republican convention, but didn’t, is of greater significance. Despite months of intensive talk about a brokered convention leading up the quadrennial gathering, in the end, Donald Trump’s nomination was uncontested.

Our system, however, has a long and checkered history of brokered conventions. And as much as the internecine warfare spices up the event, in a two-party system, brokered conventions strike at the essence – if not the letter – of the sacred “one person, one vote” principle enunciated in Reynolds v. Sims. Party elites grumble when, as in 2000, their party’s candidate wins the popular vote but loses the election, yet see no problem in substituting their own judgment regarding their party’s nominee for that of the rank-and-file party members.

Brokered conventions are by no means just a Republican affliction. Despite all the dump-Trump talk within the GOP establishment even after the enfant terrible secured a majority of his party’s delegates, the Democratic establishment put a Machiavellian twist on brokered conventions this time around.

But wait, despite Bernie’s surprising showing, wasn’t Hillary’s nomination in the cards this time?

Which is exactly the point. Today’s old guard Democrats – wisened by their temporary loss of control over convention process following post-1968 rule changes – left nothing to chance. By creating an army of pre-programmed superdelegates, they ensured their ability to prevail against a popular uprising in favor of an outsider like Sanders. Rigging the outcome well before a convention is gavelled to order is a dependable form of what could be called pre-convention brokering. An ounce of prevention, after all, is worth a pound of cure.

As with a rockslide set off by a pebble, brokered conventions have periodically altered history. The direction of the country immediately following World War I, for example, was indelibly influenced by the kingmakers at the 1920 Republican convention who, in the proverbial
smoke-filled room, anointed compromise candidate Warren Harding as their party’s standard-bearer. Harding, whose principal qualification for national office was a presidential visage, underperformed meager expectations.

Other dark-horse candidates, including Presidents Polk (after whom the term “dark horse” was coined) and Garfield, had not sought the presidency prior to the conventions at which they were nominated.

On more than one occasion, contention for the nomination spilled onto the convention floor, as it did at the 1924 Democratic convention, which required 103 ballots over more than two weeks to break the deadlock, with the governors of Colorado and Kentucky engaging at one point in fisticuffs before the bewildered delegates. Hostilities have spilled into the streets, as well, as anyone around during the 1968 Democratic convention in Chicago recalls.

On occasion, however, as with other mutant processes, the results of brokered conventions have been fortuitous. The 1860 Democratic convention serves as an example, where southern delegates reacted to the adoption of an insufficiently supportive plank on slavery by nominating their own alternative candidate who siphoned off just enough votes from the majority’s nominee Stephen Douglas in the general election to vault the Republican candidate into office. The Republican candidate was Abraham Lincoln.

Another example is the 1932 Democratic convention in Chicago, where Joseph Kennedy, the power behind the Democratic throne, successfully prevailed upon one of Franklin Roosevelt’s two rivals to withdraw from the closely contested race for the nomination and throw his support to FDR. Absent the Kennedy patriarch’s arm-twisting, the course of the war and the world today may have been radically different.

We haven’t seen a brokered convention in a while. The last ones were the Democrat convention of 1952 and the Republican convention of 1948, and it almost happened again with the Democrats in 1976 and the GOP in 1984 and, of course, this time around.

Ultimately, democracy requires more than the right of the people to vote in a general election. The citizenry has that right in many totalitarian regimes. Particularly in a two-party system, the candidates must be selected by the people, as well. And in that sense, the unbrokered nomination of Donald Trump — whose near-daily paroxysms of bigotry are decidedly undemocratic — paradoxically represents a symbol of democracy.

Unsurprisingly, of course, the elites within the Democratic and Republican parties seek to maintain their grip on the nomination process, be it through large campaign donations, PACs, rule changes, or loyal superdelegates; and if those don’t work, then through backroom wheeling and dealing at the convention itself.

This much can be said for brokered conventions, however: while they remain a scourge to democracy, Donald Trump makes Warren Harding look pretty darn good.
faculty publications

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John Makdisi (co-author)

Roza Pati & Siegfried Wiessner

Amy D. Ronner

Siegfried Wiessner
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Tamara F. Lawson

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Alfred R. Light
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Anthony C. Musto

Marcia Narine

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Siegfried Wiessner

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Jay Silver

Carol L. Zeiner
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ASSOCIATE DEAN TAMARA LAWSON AND PROFESSOR MARCIA NARINE traveled to Cuba earlier this summer to participate in the 2016 National Bar Association’s (NBA) Annual International Affiliates Meeting. Over 120 NBA delegates traveled to Cuba for the conference. Associate Dean Lawson (top, left) currently serves as chair of the Law Professors Division of the NBA, and she is a member of its Board of Governors. Professor Narine, who teaches civil procedure, business associations and employment law (among other topics) and also blogs every week on the “Business Law Professor Blog,” delivered a lecture at the NBA conference on business as it relates to human rights and corporate social responsibility.

PROFESSOR PATRICIA MOORE was quoted in a March 2016 Wall Street Journal article entitled “Businesses Win Lawsuit Curb With New Rules.” The article addresses Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts’s power to appoint the lawyers, professors, and judges who craft the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure (FRCP).

The article explains that “this little-known power...he serves as head of the Judicial Conference—gives [Chief Justice Roberts] the ability to shape the law in ways that can be more influential than a Supreme Court opinion.”

She was quoted with reference to her recent article on the rule-making system that was published in the Cincinnati Law Review. The article explored the new FRCP amendments and the troubling nature of the rule-making process.

PROFESSOR KEITH RIZZARDI testified before the Florida House of Representatives government operations subcommittee in January 2016 to discuss proposed legislation to amend the Florida public records laws. After asking Professor Rizzardi questions related to his article, “Sunburned: How Misuse of the Public Records Laws Creates an Overburdened, More Expensive, and Less Transparent Government,” 44 Stetson L. Rev. 425 (2015), the members of the subcommittee unanimously passed the proposed bill, HB 1021.

The bill seeks to make an award of attorney’s fees from mandatory to discretionary, and creates a notice of intent to sue requirement. According to Michael Sittig, Executive Director of the Florida League of Cities, legislators “were swayed by Professor Rizzardi’s insight and extensive knowledge of how unscrupulous individuals are gaming the system.”

“The need to reform our public records laws is unfortunate yet unsurprising,” Rizzardi stated. “Reforms empowered judges to stop abuses of civil procedure, and ethics rules constantly evolve to address lawyer misconduct.”

PROFESSOR CAROL ZEINER received a “Champions Beyond the Game” award from her alma mater, Florida State University. As a member of FSU’s first women’s swim team, Zeiner competed in the NCAA women’s nationals in 1970 making it to the finals. As a 3-year Tarpon synchronized swimmer, she competed in events in which the team won first and second place international awards. She graduated magna cum laude from FSU, and magna cum laude from the University of Miami School of Law. After a successful private law practice, Zeiner became the first in-house counsel of Miami-Dade Community College, the largest college in the U.S. She is now a tenured professor at St. Thomas Law.
Alumni Spotlight:
Judge Michælle Gonzalez-Paulson ’01
County Court Judge, Domestic Violence Division

“When I first began my legal career, I had not really considered becoming a judge,” says Judge Michælle Gonzalez-Paulson, a 2001 St. Thomas Law graduate. “But the more I appeared before judges, the more I saw the direct impact judges had on the people in their courtrooms—I saw how judges affected and shaped families futures and lives through their decisions.” She thought, “This is what I want to do. I want to make a difference.”

Gonzalez-Paulson’s law school experiences and career path prepared her well for her role as Judge in the Domestic Violence Division. “I worked with Brenda Rivera-Lopez in the family law clinic while a student at St. Thomas Law,” she says. “This was an incredible opportunity for practical, hands-on experience working with victims of domestic violence.” She adds, “Gaining real-world experience while still in law school was tremendously important.”

Upon graduation from St. Thomas, Gonzalez-Paulson worked for Dade Legal Aid handling family and domestic violence cases. After a few years as a staff attorney, she moved to the Law Office of Markowitz, Davis, Ringel & Trusty, where she started a family practice. She opened her own firm in 2006, handling mostly family and immigration cases. Elected to the bench in 2010, she was re-elected unopposed in 2016.

Gonzalez-Paulson enjoys her role as judge where she “is trying to help people, to resolve issues and to make their lives better.” The hardest part of her job, she says, “is when I want to help someone but I cannot. As a judge, it seems like you can do anything, but you cannot. You have to have jurisdiction, and it is frustrating when you just can’t help.”

More often than not, however, Judge Gonzalez-Paulson can and does help. “It is so rewarding for me to see families who have come through my courtroom who have gone through hard times but now are on the right path.” She adds that while families’ journeys to a better life are usually difficult, the families are “thankful that their lives are better in the end.”

Judge Gonzalez-Paulson’s contributions are not limited strictly to her courtroom. Her commitment to the community and service runs throughout her life. She is an adjunct faculty member at Miami-Dade, she is a mentor, and she competes in Spartan obstacle races. “It is important,” she says, “to give back and be involved in the community, both through my professional interests and through my personal interests.”

ALL RISE! Calling All Judges!
St. Thomas Law is in the process of updating all of its alumni records, including all graduates who were or are members of the judiciary. If you currently serve on the bench or have served in the past, we want to make sure you’re included in our records.

Please e-mail: JUDICIARY@STU.EDU and let us know where and when you serve(d). Also let us know the year you were initially appointed or elected.

We look forward to sharing the complete list with all alumni in a future issue of the St. Thomas Lawyer!
alumni receptions

Toys for Tots: Miami
alumni receptions

Delray Beach

[Images of people at an event]
alumni receptions

Tampa
alumni receptions

Fort Lauderdale

Orlando
1990

MARIA T. SALLATO received her re-certification in 2015 as a Board Certified Specialist in Marital and Family Law. Based in South Miami, Maria dedicates her practice to matrimonial law and complex international custody cases and is recognized as a specialist in matrimonial law.

1992

GLORIA M. VELAZQUEZ recently joined Holland & Knight's Miami office as senior counsel in the firm's Governmental Advocacy and Development practice group where her focus will be on land acquisition due diligence, land use, zoning, permitting and governmental affairs. Previously, Ms. Velazquez was senior land acquisition manager with Lennar Homes, where her primary focus was on land acquisition, due diligence and entitlements for the Fortune 500 real estate company.

1993

NICHOLAS W. ROMANELLO is the General Counsel and Chief Legal Officer for the Health Care District of Palm Beach County in Florida. Nick served as the District's interim C.E.O. from the summer of 2015 to earlier this year.

1994

JULIE HARRIS NELSON, a senior associate at Roig Lawyers in Miami, was appointed as Liaison to the State Board of Directors of the Florida Association for Women Lawyers (FAWL).

2001

MONIKA H. ENTIN was promoted to Partner at Bercow Radell & Fernandez, one of South Florida’s premier boutique law firms specializing in land use, zoning.

2000

JENELLE La CHUISA opened her own practice in Miami. La Chuisa Law is located at 1001 Brickell Bay Drive. Jenelle’s specialties include arbitration, business law, start-up services, commercial litigation, and appeals.

2001

ALEX A. HANNA was quoted in a 2015 New York Times article about Senator Marco Rubio’s affinity for driving above the speed limit on Florida’s roads and highways. Mr. Hanna has represented the Senator and his wife on several driving infractions.
and environmental matters. Entin’s practice covers land use and zoning matters throughout Miami-Dade County, with a primary concentration in Miami Beach.

OLIVER A. RUIZ, a partner at Malloy & Malloy P.L. in Miami, is the President of the Federal Bar Association’s South Florida Chapter. Oliver concentrates his practice in intellectual property litigation and trademark prosecution.

2002

LANI CESPEDES is an associate at the Miami office of Roig Lawyers, concentrating her practice on Personal Injury Protection (PIP)/No-Fault litigation.

2003

MICHELE A. VARGAS, an associate in the Coral Gables office of Hinshaw & Culbertson LLP, has been appointed as the Hispanic National Bar Association’s (HNBA) Deputy Regional President for Region VIII. The HNBA is a nonprofit, national membership organization that represents the interests of Hispanic legal professionals in the United States and advocates for Hispanics in the U.S.

2004

MICHAEL A. ROSENBERG was selected as a 2016 “Power Leader in Law & Accounting” by the South Florida Business Journal. Michael is managing partner at Roig Lawyers in Deerfield Beach, Florida.

2006

WALTER BENENATI was recently honored as a “Rising Star” by Super Lawyers magazine. Walter ranks third in the State of Florida for highest number of bankruptcy filings and in the top twenty in the country. From his Orlando and Kissimmee offices, Walter handles personal injury, foreclosure defense, civil litigation defense, in addition to bankruptcy.

MARCELLA ROUKAS is listed as a “Rising Star” in personal injury plaintiff. As a law student, she created an animal law program and was the president of the student animal legal defense fund. Recently, Marcella experienced a medical issue; please visit https://www.gofundme.com/jvw5gwb8 to learn more and help her.

2007

JUDD ROY BEAN, II enrolled in an online health law LL.M. program at Loyola University Chicago. Based in Tampa, he is on track to graduate in the summer of 2016.

DANIELLE BOAZ, LL.M., is an assistant professor in the Department of Africana Studies at the University of North Carolina-Charlotte.

NICHOLAS C. JOHNSON, an associate at Cohen Milstein in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, was selected by The Florida Bar as a 2015-2016 Academy Fellow in its Wm. Reece Smith, Jr. Leadership Academy. Nick is a member of the firm’s catastrophic injury & wrongful death practice area.

ROBERT KERR, an attorney at Glover, Blount & Kerr in Augusta, Georgia, and a staunch advocate for the welfare of children, was appointed as the special assistant to the Attorney General of the State of Georgia. In this position, Mr. Kerr will represent the Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS) in Richmond, Columbia and Burke counties during legal dependency proceedings.

ISIS PACHECO VELASCO was named vice president of Interamerican Bank. Isis, who received her LL.M. in real property development from the University of Miami, leads the bank’s corporate governance department.

2008

KANSAS R. GOODEN was named Partner at Boyd & Jenerette, PA,
in Jacksonville, Florida. Focusing primarily on civil appeals, insurance coverage and bad faith/extra-contractual liability litigation, Ms. Gooden also recently earned her board certification in appellate practice.

KARLINE (ALTEMAR) LEE was selected by The Florida Bar as a 2015-2016 Academy Fellow in its Wm. Reece Smith, Jr. Leadership Academy.

RICKY K. PATEL was appointed in January 2016 to the Miami Children’s Health Foundation’s Board of Directors. Mr. Patel, founder and senior partner of Farrell & Patel Attorneys at Law in Miami, is also a member of the Board of Advisors at St. Thomas University School of Law.

2010

VIVIANA ARANGO LOSHAK was recently elevated as a shareholder at Fowler White Burnett in Fort Lauderdale. Viviana is in the firm’s insurance practice group, handling a wide variety of coverage and defense issues related to commercial, directors and officers, errors and omissions, automobile and professional liability policies.

ANDREAS J. CORREA was sworn in as the 2015-2016 President of the Coral Gables Bar Association in September 2015. A founding partner of Jaramillo, Correa & Martinez, Mr. Correa is a trial attorney who focuses on first party property damage claims against insurance companies, personal injury, premises liability, wrongful death claims and motor vehicle accidents.

2009

DANE M. GARLAND is a partner at Swindle Law Group, P.C., a criminal defense firm in Carrollton, GA. Mr. Garland lives in Atlanta with his wife and two children.

ANDREW M. GORDON, an attorney at Hinshaw & Culbertson LLP in Fort Lauderdale, was appointed by the Mayor of Fort Lauderdale, Jack Seiler, to the city’s Board of Adjustment for a three-year term. Mr. Gordon was also recently appointed as an Advisory Board Member of Riverwalk Fort Lauderdale. The nonprofit organization is responsible for the programming, preservation and promotion of Riverwalk Park and the downtown Riverwalk District.

Patrick M. Delaney is an associate at Rumberger, Kirk & Caldwell in Orlando, Florida. Having previously served as both an Assistant Public Defender and an Assistant Attorney General, Patrick now focuses his practice in the areas of warranty, lemon law and products liability defense.

ADAM GELLER focuses his practice on traffic ticket and DUI defense, and also defends clients in all areas of criminal law. Based in Hollywood, Adam is a member of The Lawyers’ Collective, a coalition of solo practitioners engaged in various practice areas who assist in building one another’s firm brands.

ARMANDO G. HERNANDEZ, an associate at Rumberger, Kirk & Caldwell in Miami, has served as President of the Honorable Peter T. Fay American Inn of Court since September 2015; he will continue as president going forward. In November 2015, Armando was selected by the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation as one of its “40 Under 40 Outstanding Lawyers” in South Florida. In April 2016, the Honorable Bertila Soto presented Armando with the Eleventh Judicial Circuit Court Professionalism Award.
Committee’s first “Excellence in Professionalism Award” during a special luncheon in his honor. The award recognizes Armando’s work as a productive member of the circuit’s professionalism panel, which reviews complaints of unprofessional conduct by attorneys within the Circuit.

TARLIKA NUNEZ NAVARRO, a partner at Haddad & Navarro, a criminal defense law firm in Fort Lauderdale, was recently named by the National Trial Lawyers to its list of “Top 40 Under 40 Trial Lawyers,” an honor given to only a select group of lawyers for their superior skills and qualifications in the field. Ms. Navarro was also selected as “Client's Choice” by Avvo.com, and was designated as one of the “10 Best” in client satisfaction by the American Institute of Criminal Law Attorneys.

2012

LAUREN N. (KEARNEY) VRIESINGA is an associate at Clawson and Staubes LLC in Charleston, SC, where her practice focuses on construction defect litigation. Prior to joining Clawson and Staubes, Lauren worked as an Honors Attorney at the South Carolina Department of Revenue and as Assistant Disciplinary Counsel at the South Carolina Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation. Lauren married 2011 alumnus Richard Vriesinga in October 2015 in Charleston.

Congratulations to St. Thomas Law graduates Ricky Patel ’09 and Joey McCall ’11, who made national headlines after successfully defending their client, Florida State running back Dalvin Cook, who was found not guilty of misdemeanor battery by a jury after being involved in an incident in Tallahassee. Along with fellow alumnus Wesley Farrell ’09, Mr. Patel is a founding partner at Farrell & Patel in Miami, and Mr. McCall is a junior partner at the firm.
DOMENICK G. LAZZARA, an associate with Dogali Law Group, P.A. in Tampa, Florida, accepted a position as the American Bar Association, Young Lawyers Division’s 2015-2016 Vice-Chair of the Tort Trial and Insurance Practice Committee. Mr. Lazzara’s one-year term runs until August 2016.

MICHELLE YONG, based in New York City for the past few years, has been working since March 2015 in the Legal & Compliance Department of the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China.

2013

RACHEL LYONS FORMAN is an associate at Shook, Hardy & Bacon in Miami in its global product liability department. Rachel began working at the firm in May 2016, upon the completion of her two-year clerkship with the Honorable Melanie G. May at the Florida Fourth District Court of Appeal.

ISABELLA M. POSCHL, an associate at Saleh & Associates, P.A., in Coral Gables, was elected Treasurer of the Young Lawyers Section of the Dade County Bar Association.

2014

JAMIE GOLDMAN is the Associate Legal Counsel & Corporate Sales Manager for the New Britain Bees, a professional baseball team in New Britain, Connecticut. The Bees organization is a member of the Atlantic League of Professional Baseball.

MICHELLE REVELT was recently sworn in as an Assistant State Attorney for the 12th Circuit in Sarasota.

2015

FRANK GARRISON received his LL.M. in Law & Government from American University in May 2016, and has been selected for a post-graduate clerkship with The Cato Institute in Washington, D.C. The Cato Institute is a public policy research organization dedicated to the principles of individual liberty, limited government, free markets, and peace.

Share Your Good News!

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Please send your update to Assistant Dean Peter Kelly at pkelley@stu.edu so that we can share your good news with students and fellow alumni.

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