

Speaker Biographies

**Long Island
Program Faculty**

Tate J. Kunkle, Esq.

Traub Lieberman Straus & Shrewsberry LLP



Tate J. Kunkle is an associate in the Environmental Litigation Department of the firm. His practice in state and federal courts focuses on plaintiff's mass tort litigation, concentrating on helping people harmed by exposure to hazardous water and air contaminants. He has represented clients throughout the country harmed by a multitude of environmental pollutants and toxins such as petroleum, dioxin, PERC, PFOA and the gasoline additive MTBE in public water supply wells.

Joseph J. Ortego, Esq.

Nixon Peabody LLP



Joseph Ortego is the practice group co-leader of Nixon Peabody's Commercial Litigation practice, chair of NP Trial®, an international team of the firm's most successful and experienced trial lawyers, and chair of the firm's Aviation practice. He represents major private and publicly traded companies and their executives, having tried over 100 cases to verdict in both federal and state courts throughout the country and has successfully represented clients before arbitration tribunals around the world.

Joanna M. Roberto, Esq.

Goldberg Segalla, LLP



Joanna Roberto concentrates her practice in complex insurance coverage, product liability, and commercial litigation. She serves as counsel for multi-national insurance carriers in numerous matters pending throughout the country. Joanna has litigated all phases of declaratory judgment actions and arbitrations. She has counseled large insurers on risk management, underwriting procedures, and policy rewriting and claims practices.

She also focuses her practice on professional liability claims, including errors and omissions; property claims; life, health, and disability; construction liability coverage; Coverage B litigation; and products liability.

Joanna is multi-lingual and has attained a degree in linguistics in Florence, Italy. She has a familiarity with and appreciation for international claims handling practices as a result of her experience handling claims arising in Mexico, Italy, the United Kingdom, Spain and France.

Joanna is currently the editor of the TICL Insurance Coverage eNews, published by the New York State Bar Association's Torts, Insurance, and Compensation Law Section, and an editor of Goldberg Segalla's Environmental Coverage Report newsletter. She is also a commentator for Mealey's Litigation Report: Insurance Bad Faith.

Carol G. Snider, Esq.

Barclay Damon, LLP



Carol Snider concentrates her practice in the areas of environmental exposure litigation, environmental coverage, product liability and general negligence. She also serves as Chair of the firm's Mass & Toxic Torts Practice Area.

Her experience in the area of environmental law began in 1981 when she became involved in over 600 actions involving Love Canal litigation. Carol possesses extensive experience in massive tort actions. Carol has successfully defended a state-wide municipal power entity in connection with multiple mass tort proceedings alleging various claims including property damage and personal injury. In various Federal and State Court cases, she represented individuals and businesses against allegations of personal injury and property damage arising out of claims of chemical contamination of property.

As counsel for numerous defendants, she has litigated thousands of claims for damages involving alleged asbestos exposure and has successfully tried such cases to conclusion. She has significant experience representing insurance carriers in environmental coverage disputes in actions in both New York State and New Jersey. In addition, Carol's day to day practice involves the defense of companies and individuals in the defense of lead paint matters.

A frequent presenter, Carol recently spoke at a national conference held in Philadelphia and Chicago regarding emerging issues in asbestos litigation and the defense of lung cancer claims. In addition she attended the Upstate New York Asbestos Summit, sponsored by the New York State Office of Court Administration where she had the opportunity to serve as co-moderator of a panel of three distinguished upstate jurists, Justice Richard T. Aulisi, Justice Daniel J. Doyle and Justice Charles C. Merrell, where the topics included voir dire, settlement conferences and evidentiary issues at trial. Carol serves as Defense Coordinating Counsel in the Seventh and Eighth Judicial District asbestos litigation and has been Defense Liaison Counsel in the Eight Judicial District for almost thirty years.

Her publications include articles on indoor air pollution for the New York State Facilities Journal, a New York State Bar Association publication on the admissibility of expert testimony, and an article concerning recent trends in asbestos litigation for a nationally distributed newsletter.

Cheryl Vollweiler, Esq.

Traub Lieberman Straus & Shrewsberry LLP



Cheryl Vollweiler's practice concentrates in all aspects of insurance coverage and defense. Her areas of expertise include complex insurance disputes, reinsurance, bad faith litigation, international arbitration, products liability, general liability, premises and hotel liability, cyber risk, technology and data security, property damage and first-party coverage and toxic torts (including pharmaceutical and herbal/homeopathic products, chemical exposure, latent injuries, environmental, lead and mold). She has acted as coverage counsel, defense counsel to U.S. and foreign insurers in U.S. litigation nationwide and international arbitrations, and has supervised defense counsel on a nationwide basis on diverse books of business. Ms. Vollweiler also has extensive experience drafting insurance policies.

Ms. Vollweiler, a frequent lecturer on insurance coverage-related issues, punitive damages, e-discovery, toxic torts, pharmaceutical products liability, cyber law and other topics, was admitted to the bar in 1989 and is admitted to practice before the U.S. District Courts for the Eastern and Southern Districts of New York and the 2nd Circuit Court of Appeals. She received her Juris Doctor degree from Hofstra University School of Law in 1988. In 1985, Ms. Vollweiler received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Politics from Brandeis University. She is proud to join Traub Lieberman after many years as a partner at a prominent, large insurance defense firm.

Syracuse
Program Faculty

John P. Comerford, Esq.

Lipsitz & Ponterio, LLC



John P. Comerford is a Partner at Lipsitz & Ponterio, LLC. He grew up in Lewiston, New York, a small historic town near the Canadian border. As a young child, Mr. Comerford grew up in the shadows of Love Canal and personally observed the consequences of environmental pollution. After graduating from high school, he attended Cornell University and studied Environmental Science. Mr. Comerford devotes the majority of his time to asbestos personal injury matters. He has litigated cases throughout Upstate New York in cities which include Buffalo, Niagara Falls, Rochester, Syracuse, Albany and Binghamton. Over the course of his career, he has helped hundreds of people recover financial awards for injuries. In June 2009, Mr. Comerford became an accredited attorney for the preparation, presentation and prosecution of claims for veterans' benefits before the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

Elizabeth J. Grogan, Esq.

Wilson Elser



Elizabeth Grogan practices in the area of general civil defense, primarily in cases involving toxic tort and medical/dental malpractice, with significant experience in labor law, professional malpractice and product liability. She has also defended motor vehicle and slip-and-fall cases. Her clients range from individual practitioners to multimillion-dollar companies, and she has handled matters for local municipalities, government contractors and local businesses. Elizabeth specializes in complex matters where her ability to process and organize large quantities of information provides her clients with an efficient and effective path to resolution.

Elizabeth takes a personal interest in her clients' backgrounds and takes the time to understand how and to what extent the legal issues that they face affect them in real-world terms. Armed with that knowledge, she is able to establish a route to resolution of those issues that achieves the best result while addressing her clients' individual needs and concerns. Elizabeth began her career as a clerk with the Appellate Division Third Department, where she gained a unique perspective on the inner workings of the court, which gives her clients a distinct advantage.

Bruce S. Huttner, Esq.

Donohue, Sabo, Varley & Huttner LLP

Areas of Practice

- Complex Litigation
- Toxic Torts
- Environmental Litigation
- Products Liability
- Municipal Law
- Architects and Engineers Malpractice
- Asbestos Defense
- Representation of Professionals in front of State Licensing Boards

Litigation Percentage

- 90% of Practice Devoted to Litigation

Bar Admissions

- New York, 1986
- U.S. District Court Northern District of New York, 1986

Education

- Albany Law School Union University, Albany, New York
- State University of New York at Stony Brook
 - B.A. – 1981
 - Honors: With Highest Honors

Honors and Awards

- Recipient, Community Service Award
- Selected as a Hudson Valley Super Lawyer

Professional Associations and Memberships

- Albany County Bar Association
- Rensselaer County Bar Association
- New York State Bar Association
- American Bar Association
- Defense Research Institute of Northeastern New York
- Capital District Trial Lawyers Association

V. Christopher Potenza, Esq.

Hurwitz & Fine, P.C.



Mr. Potenza leads the firm's state wide Toxic Tort and Environmental litigation team, including asbestos and lead-based paint defense. His practice is also focused on general liability, tort defense, product liability, construction negligence/New York Labor Law, and commercial litigation including business and contract disputes. Mr. Potenza has substantial experience handling cases throughout New York State at the federal, state, and appellate levels. He has taken numerous cases to verdict and regularly represents clients in arbitration and mediation proceedings. He is a columnist and Associate Editor of Labor Law Pointers, the firm's monthly electronic newsletter reporting on current New York State Labor Law cases. Mr. Potenza is a regular presenter and has authored numerous articles for industry publications on litigation practice.

Mr. Potenza is Vice-Chair of the Toxic Tort Committee of the Torts, Insurance and Compensation Law Section of the New York State Bar Association. He is a member of the Erie County Bar Association where he is a volunteer in the annual High School Mock Trial Tournament, and the Western New York Trial Lawyers Association. Mr. Potenza has been named to the Buffalo Business First and Buffalo Law Journal's lists of Who's Who in Law and is named to the list of New York Super Lawyers.

Mr. Potenza is a nominated member of the Claims and Litigation Management Alliance (CLM), a national alliance of corporations, insurance companies, law firms and service providers committed to furthering the highest standards of litigation management, and serves on the CLM's Construction Law and Toxic Tort Committees. He is also a member of the nationally renowned Defense Research Institute.

Mr. Potenza graduated from Cornell University with a Bachelor of Science in Resource and Managerial Economics, and obtained his Juris Doctor from the University at Buffalo Law School. He is a Mentor in the University at Buffalo Law School Alumni Mentoring Program and also serves as an Alumni Admissions Ambassador for Cornell University.

Richard L. Weber, Esq.

Bond, Schoeneck & King PLLC



Rick is a trial attorney who represents businesses and individuals in complex civil litigation and alternative dispute resolution proceedings throughout upstate New York. His practice is focused in the areas of commercial litigation, premises liability (including defense of lead paint exposure and Labor Law § 240 claims), trust and estate litigation, toxic tort litigation, creditor's rights and construction law. Rick has extensive experience in securing pre- and post-judgment remedies for clients, including temporary restraining orders, specific enforcement of contract remedies (including non-compete and non-solicitation clauses) and disclosure of judgment debtor assets.

Rick represents clients facing potential liability for discharges or releases of toxic substances, such as discharges of petroleum products and exposure of lead-based paint and for the failure to abate or remediate such substances.

Rick frequently counsels print and internet news publishers and editors regarding libel issues. He frequently appears in Surrogates' Courts throughout New York State, representing fiduciaries and beneficiaries in will disputes, objections to probate, contested accountings, trust fiduciary litigation and guardianship proceedings.

New York City
Program Faculty

George H. Buermann, Esq.

Goldberg Segalla, LLP



George Buermann defends clients across the country in complex environmental and toxic tort matters. George's experience handling environmental disputes is extensive, and he offers clients in-depth knowledge of the state and federal regulations governing such disputes, including the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA), the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA), Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, and others. He also litigates matters involving exposure to chemicals and substances such as lead, asbestos, mold, and benzene. In addition to handling adversarial matters, George helps clients avoid litigation by providing strategic advice regarding environmental compliance and strategy. His experience also includes handling first-party property insurance coverage disputes involving losses to commercial and residential property; construction losses and construction defects; insurance fraud; and torts involving commercial property.

Kate Chetta, Esq.

McElroy, Deutsch, Mulvaney & Carpenter, LLP



Kate Chetta is an associate in the Firm's Toxic Tort litigation group. She graduated from Canisius College in 2006 with a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science. Prior to attending law school, she worked for the United States House of Representatives in Washington, D.C.

Ms. Chetta received her Juris Doctorate from State University of New York (SUNY) at Buffalo in 2011. Prior to joining the Firm, Ms. Chetta litigated complex Toxic Torts, Products Liability and Insurance Defense matters with a firm in Western New York.

Ms. Chetta is admitted to practice law in the State of New York, the State of New Jersey, and the United States District Court – Western District of New York. She is a member of the New York State Bar Association Torts, Insurance and Compensation Law Board of Directors and is the young lawyer liaison to the DRI Asbestos Medicine Seminar.

Tate J. Kunkle, Esq.

Traub Lieberman Straus & Shrewsberry LLP



Tate J. Kunkle is an associate in the Environmental Litigation Department of the firm. His practice in state and federal courts focuses on plaintiff's mass tort litigation, concentrating on helping people harmed by exposure to hazardous water and air contaminants. He has represented clients throughout the country harmed by a multitude of environmental pollutants and toxins such as petroleum, dioxin, PERC, PFOA and the gasoline additive MTBE in public water supply wells.

William A. Ruskin, Esq.

Law Office of William A. Ruskin, PLLC

William A. Ruskin brings more than 35 years of experience defending major industrial companies and manufacturers nationally in toxic tort, environmental, products liability, and drug and medical device actions. Over the course of his career, he has litigated major CERCLA cost-recovery cases across the United States. In the toxic tort arena, Ruskin has spearheaded the implementation of creative solutions to address mass tort diminution-of-property-value claims arising from environmental events.

He is a frequent speaker on products liability, toxic tort, and litigation management issues, and he has been a guest lecturer on environmental issues at Syracuse Law School, New York Law School, Columbia University, and Cornell University. Ruskin also is an editor for Gordon & Rees's Environmental & Toxic Tort Defense Insight blog.

Ruskin's accomplishments have led to a Martindale-Hubbell peer review rating of AV Preeminent and the honor of inclusion on The American Lawyer and Martindale-Hubbell's 2013 Top Rated Lawyers list for Energy, Environmental & Natural Resources Law. In 2010 and 2011, Avenue magazine and Martindale-Hubbell included Ruskin on their "Legal Elite" list of top New York City litigators.

He is a member of the Defense Research Institute and the International Association of Defense Counsel. Ruskin serves on the boards of the New York League of Conservation Voters Education Fund and the Connecticut League of Conservation Voters Education Fund. He also is a certified mediator for the Southern District of New York, having mediated disputes in that court on a pro bono basis for 20 years. Ruskin is admitted to practice in New York, Connecticut, and Washington, D.C.

David E. Rutkowski, Esq.

Goldberg Segalla, LLP



David E. Rutkowski defends clients against personal injury and wrongful death claims as a result of alleged asbestos exposure in the state and federal courts of New York and New Jersey. He also litigates insurance coverage matters and those involving environmental law.

Dave is well-versed in key asbestos-litigation defenses and theories, including each and every exposure, the statute of repose, and the independent contractor defense, among others. He has participated in multiple, multimillion-dollar asbestos trials and has given oral argument for discovery motions in asbestos litigation. He has also successfully resolved high-value cases through extensive, complex settlement negotiations. Dave is a key contributing writer on asbestos litigation for Goldberg Segalla's award-winning Asbestos Case Tracker, which was recently named to the ABA Journal's prestigious Blawg 100 and named the Best Litigation Blog for 2016 by the Expert Institute in its annual legal blog contest. He also has experience defending premises owners and lessees against Legionella-related claims, restaurants in foodborne illness litigation — including salmonella, and manufacturers in various product liability claims.

In 2010, Dave received his J.D. from Rutgers School of Law. During his studies, he was a litigation paralegal to a group of attorneys defending New York City in World Trade Center litigation.

Andrew J. Scholz, Esq.

Goldberg Segalla, LLP



Andrew Scholz is a partner in the firm's New York City office. He is a trial lawyer with over 15 years of experience defending companies and individuals in mass tort, toxic tort, and environmental litigation in state and federal trial and appellate courts. His toxic tort experience includes defending cases involving exposure to asbestos, Legionella bacteria, adulterated food, spray foam, mold, benzene, barium, and other chemicals.

Andrew has played a leading role in the discovery phases of multi-defendant, complex tort litigations, and has experience handling complex cases involving Daubert challenges to expert witness testimony. He previously defended certain property owners and commercial lessees of the World Trade Center against thousands of catastrophic injury, property damage, and death claims arising out of the terrorist-related aircraft crashes of September 11, 2001. Andrew has also tried and arbitrated cases in New York and Washington, D.C.

