

## February 2025 Legal News: Law Firm News and Mergers, Industry Awards and Recognition, DEI and Women in Law

Article By:

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Thank you for reading the National Law Review's legal news roundup, highlighting the latest law firm news! As the country settles into the new year, law firm news has no signs of slowing down. Please read below for the latest in law firm news and industry expansion, legal industry awards and recognition, and DEI and women in the legal field.

### Law Firm News and Mergers

[Varnum LLP](#) announced that [Sarah Weston](#) joined the firm's [Banking and Finance Practice Team](#) as a partner in the [Birmingham](#) office.

"We are excited to welcome Sarah to the firm," said Jon Bylsma, Chair of Varnum. "Her addition to our growing Birmingham office further strengthens our Banking and Finance Team, particularly with deep experience representing borrowers in complex commercial real estate and other financings. Sarah's expertise will be a tremendous asset to our clients."

Ms. Weston focuses her practice on counseling property managers, developers, senior housing owners and others through [real estate](#) finance transactions. This includes [acquisitions](#), dispositions, construction and real estate mortgage loans and development agreements. Ms. Westons has been recognized as a Rising Star in Securities and Finance by *Michigan Super Lawyers*.

[Rachael G. Pontikes](#), [Emily L. Hussey](#) and [Shannon E. McClure](#) joined [Blank Rome LLP](#) as partners in the [Business Litigation](#) group and [Life Sciences](#) industry team. Ms. McClure joined the firm's [Philadelphia](#) office while Ms. Pontikes and Ms. Hussey joined the [Chicago](#) office.

Ms. McClure handles disputes in the life sciences and healthcare industries including health systems, distributors, pharmaceutical and medical device manufacturers. In addition, she serves as strategic national counsel for large matters in the coordination of company resolution strategies.

Ms. Pontikes and Ms. Hussey counsel clients on critical issues in the life sciences and healthcare industries, including due diligence in healthcare transactions, regulatory compliance, licensing matters, industry advocacy and administrative actions.

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“We are thrilled to welcome Rachael, Emily, and Shannon to Blank Rome,” said Grant S. Palmer, Blank Rome’s Chair and Managing Partner. “They are exceptional attorneys whose multi-faceted practices align with the needs of our clients and will enable us to provide outstanding client service to those operating in the healthcare and life sciences industries and beyond.”

[Gunderson Dettmer Stough Villeneuve Franklin & Hachigian, LLP](#) announced the addition of three new corporate partners in Atlanta as well as the official opening of its 12th global office.

[John Yates](#), a pioneer in technology law, has been involved in helping hundreds of tech companies in raising and closing financing. In addition, he launched Morris, Manning & Martin’s technology practice over 35 years ago.

[Joe Berklund](#) focuses his practice on representing companies and funds in M&A transactions as well as financing; he was previously co-chair of MMM’s emerging companies/venture capital practice and the firm’s Florida practice leader.

[Zach Crowe](#) represents technology startups, private equity and venture capital firms in strategic investments, general corporate matters, financing transactions, and mergers and acquisitions.

“After more than a decade in the region, this expansion marks a significant milestone in our growth strategy. We are doubling down on the region’s thriving venture capital and emerging companies ecosystem,” says Jeff Higgins, Gunderson Dettmer’s managing partner. “The addition of corporate partners John Yates, Joe Berklund, and Zach Crowe will provide clients with the best-in-class corporate and securities support they expect from us.”

## Legal Industry Awards and Recognition

[Ward and Smith, P.A.](#), as well as four of its attorneys, was recognized in the 2025 edition of [World Trademark Review 1000](#) for excellence in [intellectual property](#) law. The firm received a Silver Band ranking for providing "pragmatic and easy-to-understand advice" and for being "commercially astute and laser-focused on helping clients make the most of their intellectual property."

[Angela Doughty](#), [Erica Rogers](#) and [Joe Schouten](#) received Silver Band rankings while [Art DeBaugh](#) received a Gold Band ranking.

[Anne Lapierre](#) and [Simon Cudennec](#) from [Bracewell LLP](#) were ranked in the inaugural edition of *Chambers France*.

Ms. Lapierre, managing partner of the firm’s [Paris](#) office, was ranked in the Projects & Energy: Domestic-France category. She focuses her practice on being a voice in renewable energy procurement as well as ground-breaking energy projects.

Mr. Cudennec, ranked in Projects & Energy: International, focuses his practice on natural resources, energy and infrastructure. With over 15 years of experience, he has a deep understanding of the unique challenges and legal intricacies in French-speaking African project development..

[Sidley Austin LLP](#) was recognized by *The M&A Advisor* at the 19th Annual Turnaround Awards for two deals. The awards honor “trailblazers in the fields of distressed investing and restructuring.”

The restructuring of Rite Aid Corporation was named the winning matter in the “Healthcare/Life

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Sciences Deal of the Year (Over \$1B)” category. The Sidley team represented the corporation’s largest pharmaceutical product supplier, McKesson Corp., in Rite Aid’s bankruptcy, negotiating a deal to reduce McKesson’s credit exposure.

A team from the firm also represented ICON Aircraft, Inc. in the sale of its assets to an affiliate of Dürkopp Adler GmbH. The team successfully secured approval of the sale of ICON Aircraft to SG Investment America from the U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the District of Delaware. They were recognized in the “Industrials Deal of the Year (Under \$1B)” category.

## **DEI and Women in Law**

[Tiffany Presley](#), [Bryan Castro](#) and [Charity Seaborn](#), attorneys from [Barnes & Thornburg LLP](#), were selected for innovative professional development programs with the Leadership Council on Legal Diversity. The programs are designed to cultivate influential leaders and propel attorneys toward the next stage of their careers.

Ms. Presley will participate in a year-long program focused on relationship building and leadership as a member of the 2025 class of Fellows. She will connect with the leading council for career guidance and mentoring. Mr. Castro and Ms. Seaborn will participate in the Pathfinder program to learn from top leaders and experts in executive coaching.

“As a firm, we are committed to fostering an environment where all of our teammates can thrive and lead,” said [Dawn R. Rosemond](#), partner and firm diversity partner at Barnes & Thornburg. “Tiffany, Bryan and Charity’s selection for these prestigious LCLD programs is a testament to their talent and dedication. We are proud to support their continued growth as they build relationships and develop skills that will shape the future of the legal profession.”

[Chuhak & Tecson, P.C.](#) announced that [Christine A. Barone](#), principal in the Estate Planning & Asset Protection and Estate & Trust Administration & Litigation practice groups, was honored by Law Bulletin Media as one of the “40 Under 40 Illinois Attorneys to Watch.”

“Christine has been a wonderful addition to our Elder Law Practice and our Private Wealth Services Team,” said [Lindsey Paige Markus](#), principal and leader of the Estate and Trusts practices. “ Her professional designation as a CELA underscores her knowledge in this unique area of practice. And her innate ability to make clients feel comforted and at ease allows Christine to seamlessly guide families through guardianship, probate, trust administration and elder care planning. We are thrilled that Christine has been recognized for her extraordinary contributions and feel privileged we have the opportunity to collaborate with her every day.”

Ms. Barone is a Certified Elder Law Attorney by the National Elder Law Foundation. She is one of only 13 attorneys in the state of Illinois to have this honor. Her practice is focused on wills, trusts, estate planning and powers of attorney.

[Shumaker, Loop & Kendrick, LLP](#) announced that three of its attorneys have been selected for Leadership Council on Legal Diversity (LCLD) 2025 programs. Partner [Christina Nethero](#) was selected as a Fellow of the Fellows Program while Associate [Michelina Carbone](#) and Staff Attorney [Lauren Diaz](#) were named to the Pathfinders Program.

“Shumaker is deeply committed to advancing a culture of excellence and diversity, and our attorneys’ selection for these prestigious programs reflects not only this commitment, but our

dedication to fostering leadership and innovation within the legal community as well.,” said [Kate Decker](#), Partner Chair of Shumaker’s Council on Diversity and Inclusion.

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