

Christa L. Dommers, JD '97

# A Study in Determination

DC attorney structures complex real estate deals

**A**s a law student, Christa L. Dommers, JD '97, dealt with several physical challenges on the road to a successful law career, challenges that may have discouraged others.

Chronic tendonitis required her to wear braces on both hands and use a voice-activated computer to type notes and exams. After suffering vision loss, Dommers also was diagnosed with a tumor near her optic nerve in the first semester of her second year. She regained her vision but lives with the mass to this day, despite having had surgery.

In spite of those obstacles, Dommers finished the program in three years and passed the New York and Connecticut bars. She is a partner at the Washington, D.C., law firm of Seyfarth Shaw, where she specializes in real estate law with an emphasis on economic development cases. She joined the firm in 2008 and became an equity partner in 2011.

In law school, Dommers trained herself to enunciate each word for the early-version Dragon software (and pause at least one-tenth of a second between words). It could be clunky, she recalls, but she says it was significantly faster than trying to write things out. Today's version is considerably easier, she notes.

Dommers handles everything from simple real estate leases to complex, nationwide corporate relocations, negotiating with state and local entities for relocation incentives, sales tax credits, property abatements, grants for road construction and more.

"Frankly, it's a lot of fun. I have to be creative in structuring and negotiating deals," she says.

Her work is more demanding than writing a lease or negotiating a loan. "When you're working on a deal, keeping it under wraps is a challenge," she says, explaining that moving a corporation to



a new location involves obtaining land, facilities, infrastructure and personnel; other cities and counties also court new businesses, so these types of deals are considered top secret.

The last deal she worked on, Northrop Grumman's Project Magellan, generated more than 60 newspaper stories. The corporation is expanding its facilities at Melbourne International Airport in Florida, creating about 1,800 jobs in the aerospace and defense industries.

Recognized as a best lawyer in 2013 and 2014 in the "Washington, D.C., and Baltimore: Best Lawyers for Real Estate" guide, Dommers enjoys the win-win nature of her work pairing sellers with buyers, landlords with tenants.

"While there are always issues to negotiate, the parties are typically happy at the end of a transaction as each has achieved its goal... And if lawyers for both sides are evenly matched, then

neither client is entirely happy at the end, but it is still "win-win," she says.

Dommers is a mentor to the firm's junior partners and associates and is pursuing certification as a professional coach. She chairs the Hispanic Affinity Group within the firm, participates in the Hispanic National Bar Association and chairs the D.C. office of the Lawyers' Development Committee. She lives with her husband and four children in Darnestown, Maryland, on an acre of land that borders a state park.

"Quinnipiac was a wonderful, supportive environment," she remembers. "Most law schools don't prepare you to practice, but we were more prepared than others. It was a challenging community, but not cutthroat.

"Most of my professors were fabulous, top-notch teachers, and I felt well-prepared to take the bar," she recalls.  
—Cathi Douglas

Board in the Department of Veterans Affairs, and he served as chief legal counsel for the American Legion Veterans Housing organization.

**Erik Gray** of New York, NY, is a trial attorney at Weiss & Rosenbloom, PC, a personal injury law firm in New York City. He recently settled a civil rights/police misconduct case in which the \$2 million settlement was among the largest paid by the city in such a case in the past five years.

**Sara (Clinton) Lowenstine** of Ridgefield, CT, is a partner at Maya Murphy, working in the litigation and commercial law group. She focuses her practice in commercial litigation at the trial level, including general litigation, securities cases and corporate law matters. She is active with pro bono work in organizations including Connecticut Women's Legal and Education Fund and the Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders.

**Lisa Valentovich** of Stonington, CT, joined the law office of Morgan Lewis in Tokyo, Japan. Her practice areas include bankruptcy and reorganization, banking and finance and international and cross-border law.

2001

**Jay Hershman** of Cheshire, CT, is a partner at Baillie & Hershman, which was recognized by The Commercial Record as a Best of 2014 winner in two categories: commercial real estate attorney (gold award) and general law offices (silver award).

**Diane Iglesias** of Guilford, CT, retired from AT&T after 36 years. She looks forward to continuing her pro bono work, playing golf and traveling with her spouse, Susan, and their dog, Sandy.

2002

**Jared Dwyer** joined the international law firm of Greenberg Traurig in Miami, where he lives. He will focus on white collar criminal matters, criminal and civil tax litigation, complex civil litigation and violations of the Bank Secrecy Act. Prior to joining the firm, he served for 10 years as a federal prosecutor, first as a trial attorney with the criminal enforcement sector and then as assistant U.S. attorney in the Southern District of Florida.

**Lisa Mitchell** of Naugatuck, CT, has partnered with **Shari (Debidin) Madho, JD '10**, of Hamden, to form the law offices of Mitchell & Madho in Cheshire, CT. They handle personal injury, real estate, probate, family law, workers' compensation and Social Security disability cases.

**Andrew Zeltner** of Atlanta, is a senior associate at Klasko Immigration Law Partners. He focuses on corporate immigration matters, including those involving the processing of permanent resident applications on behalf of multinational corporate and individual clients. While at Quinnipiac, he served as opinions editor of the Quinnipiac Probate Law Journal.

2003

**Jeremiah Cottle** and his wife, Denise, welcomed their second child, Lillian Hanna, on April 29, 2014. The family lives in Columbia, MD. (See photo p. 47.)

**Andrea Donovan Napp** of Portland, CT, was named partner at Robinson & Cole. Her practice areas include complex commercial litigation, business torts and market conduct cases. She also chairs the firm's electronic discovery and information governance practice team and has experience in all aspects of

e-discovery and data management. Prior to joining the firm, she clerked for the Honorable Christine S. Vertefeuille of the Connecticut Supreme Court. Andrea was recognized by Connecticut Super Lawyers in the area of Business Litigation in 2013 and 2014.

**Elizabeth (Hobler) Smith** and her husband, Kevin, announce the birth of a son, Kyle Windsor, on March 4, 2014. Kyle was welcomed home by his big brothers, Connor Jude, 5, and Luke Thaddeus, 3. The family lives in Yonkers, NY. (See photo p. 47.)

2004

**Agata Raszczyk-Lawska** of Stratford, CT, is the managing attorney of the Connecticut Legal Services children at risk unit, which specializes in education law and child protection law. Connecticut Legal Services is a private, nonprofit corporation and is the largest provider of free civil legal services in the state.

**Michael Menapace**, counsel at Wiggin and Dana and adjunct professor of insurance law at the QU School of Law, testified



1 & 2. At the PILP auction that helps to fund public interest law project summer jobs, second-year law students Angelica Barskansky and Caroline Watson get ready to bid; behind bars are Professor Robert Farrell and Kathy Kuhar, JD '02, associate dean of students.

3. Thurgood Marshall Award recipient Victor A. Bolden with Jennifer Rawlings, JD '15.

4. Donald J. Mastrony, JD '80, Wendy Kergaravat, JD '95; Jeanet Figueroa Laskos, JD '99; Dave DeRosa, JD '99; and Peter Laskos.



before the U.S. Senate Commerce Committee during a March hearing by its Subcommittee on Consumer Protection, Product Safety, Insurance, and Data Security. The hearing, titled "Examining the Evolving Cyber Insurance Marketplace," explored the growing cybersecurity risk insurance market.

**Brian Wheelin** of Stamford, CT, was named counsel at Robinson & Cole. His primary focus is in business litigation, including privacy and cybersecurity matters. He also serves on the firm's electronic discovery committee and is a Connecticut Super Lawyers' Rising Star in the area of business litigation for 2012–14.

2006

**Katharine Gillespie, BA '03, JD '06**, became a partner at

the law firm Dzialo, Pickett & Allen in Middletown, CT. She was named to Connecticut Super Lawyers' 2013 and 2014 Rising Stars lists. She lives in Kensington, CT.

2007

**Steven Allinson** of Wallingford, CT, is a managing partner at Allinson & Associates, and was named to the Super Lawyers' 2014 Connecticut Rising Stars list. He received the Excellence in Clinical Work Award and attributes his career success to his experience and training at the law school and its legal clinic.

**Kristen (Andersen) McClain, JD '07, MBA '13**, of Branford, CT, is the senior director of compliance and business development for Qualidigm, a national health care consulting company in Wethersfield, CT.

IN MEMORIAM

2012

Thomas Flynn '68  
John Marini '57

2013

Armando "Ernie" Rossi '47

2014

Alan Breitman '79  
Shirley (Robins) Briggs '45  
Keith Burse '07  
Matthew Corcoran, JD '02  
John Curran '53  
Paul DeStefano '62  
Christopher Di Sesa, JD '87  
Ida (Goldstein) Fidler '35  
Kenneth Gere '65  
Michael Goldstone '61  
Ranald Hansen '70  
Frederick Heffernan, JD '80  
William James, former dean of Quinnipiac College  
Ursula (Kroger) Lapeza '41  
Frances (Collier Tower) Maroni '48

Lucia Tovar Moreno '79  
James Pagnam '62  
Margaret "Peg" (Maloney) Porter '60  
Edna (Geier) Rutenberg '41  
Justin Smith '03  
Clare Toth '46  
Louis Urso Jr. '68  
Barbara (D'Onofrio) Vieira '56  
Mary Jo (Gans) Weeks '42

2015

Kathleen Cadden '92  
John Cooney '61  
Nancy (Morrell) Daughan '58  
Mark DeCapua '78  
Amy (Zimmerman) Duggan '99  
Barbara (Smith) Hollon '42  
Martha Hyland '89  
John Muir Gardner, MHS '75  
Lydia (Ascari) Gouveia '70  
Granville Michael Magee, JD '95  
Warren Mickle '74  
Richard Rawlins '52

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2009

**Frank Ganz** of Ormond Beach, FL, is practicing at Smith, Stout, Bigman & Brock in Daytona Beach, FL. His practice includes commercial and general civil litigation.

2011

**Robert Shepherd, JD/MBA**, of Austin, TX, recently obtained his CPA license in Texas and serves as senior adviser at Durbin Bennett Tax Advisors in Austin, TX, where he focuses on estate, gift and income-tax planning for high net worth individuals. He is involved with international tax issues, is a licensed CPA in New Hampshire and licensed to practice law in Massachusetts, Connecticut and before the U.S. Supreme Court.

2012

**Stella Szantova Giordano** of Ridgefield, CT, was elected as the vice-chair of the Hartford Young Professionals and Entrepreneurs community involvement committee. She is an associate in Murtha Cullina's

litigation department, where she handles contract disputes and commercial litigation.

2013

**Samuel Greenberg** of Wallingford, CT, recently joined the Division of Public Defender Services, which provides counsel in accordance with both the U.S. and Connecticut Constitutions to any indigent person charged with the commission of a crime that carries a risk of incarceration.

**Desmond Ryan** of Florence, MA, is an associate at the law firm of Reid and Riege in the litigation practice area. His focus will include general commercial and complex civil litigation matters. Previously he served as law clerk for the Honorable Dennis G. Eveleigh of the Connecticut Supreme Court.

2014

**Anthony Monelli** of Bethany, CT, started his own law practice and is associated with the law firm of Andrew D. Cretella in Trumbull, CT, as attorney of counsel.



## ALUMNI CONNECT

AT VARIETY OF RECENT EVENTS

1. **XX, Ivy LaPlante '12** and **XX** at the March men's ice hockey game watch in Boston when the team played the University of North Dakota in the opening round of the NCAA Tournament.

2. **Janet Heinle '75** and Quinnipiac trustee **Gabriel Ferrucci '65** at the April QU in LA celebration reception in Santa Monica, CA.

3. Socializing at the School of Law's April alumni reception are, from left: **Michael Bivona '10, JD '13**, and **Elissa Weinbach, Elizabeth Grimm, Maura Crossin** and **Marissa Vicario**, all class of 2013 School of Law alumni.

4. Getting together after the annual women's ice hockey alumnae game in February were, from left: **Erin Sweet '06, Kelly Rider '07, Jayne Riley '05, Caitlin Peters '05, Elizabeth Jankowski '03, JD '08**.

5. Alumni and parents gathered for a tasting and tour of the Two Roads Brewing Co. in Stratford in March. From left: **Alyssa Gilbert '12, Dustin Huguenin, Jill (Jacovino) Bohn '84, Rachel and Robert Bohn**.

