



2025 BENCH BAR CONFERENCE AGENDA

Thursday – November 6, 2025

10:00 A.M. - 11:00 A.M. REGISTRATION (Convention Atrium).

Vendor Review Time and Raffle Baskets
Review Time & Purchasing Tickets for the
Baskets Drawing. (Salon CDEF).

11:00 A.M. - 12:00 P.M. LUNCH & LUNCH PROGRAM (Salon CDEF).

Welcome by
Cheryl Sobeski-Reedy, Esquire,
President, Wilkes-Barre Law & Library Association.

Remarks by
Hon. Correale F. Stevens,
*President Judge Emeritus, Superior Court of Pennsylvania,
Former Justice, Pennsylvania Supreme Court.*

Presentation
of the
2025 President's Award
to
John A. Donovan Jr., Esquire
With Brief Remarks.

See his photo & biography included on Pages 3-4 of the agenda.

**Recognition
of Retiring Judges:**

Hon. William H. Amesbury

Judge of the Court of Common Pleas of Luzerne County.

Hon. Joseph J. Carmody

Magisterial District Judge of Luzerne County.

[No CLE Credit is provided for this portion of the Conference.]

Congratulations to
This Year's President's Award Recipient:



John A. Donovan Jr., Esquire

BIOGRAPHY OF JOHN A. DONOVAN JR., ESQ.

John was born on April 7, 1961, the son of the late John and Anna Donovan. He was the oldest of three children. He has a sister Janet who resides in Avoca and a brother, Thomas, who passed away from cancer in 2004 at the age of 36. He was raised in Avoca and attended St. Mary's Parochial School where he was educated in the Roman Catholic faith. He is a member of Queen of the Apostles Church in Avoca.

He attended Pittston Area High School graduating with the class of 1979. He was a member of the National Honor Society, and he ran for the track team as well as the cross-country team. This led him to his life-long pursuit of physical fitness. During high school, he had to deal with the daily challenge of his father being his high school principal.

John attended and graduated from the University of Scranton in 1983. While at college, John majored in history and was also in the Special Jesuit Liberal Arts Program mentored by the late father Edward Gannon S.J. During college, John spent summers at the Marine Corps base in Quantico Virginia going through the Marine Corps demanding Officer Candidate School Programs.

In 1983 upon graduation from college, John was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant in the Marines, he returned to Quantico to attend The Basic School for all newly Commissioned Officers and the Infantry Officer Course.

He was assigned to the 1st Marine Division at Camp Pendleton in California as an Infantry Officer and he participated in numerous large scale training exercises including desert training at Twenty-Nine Palms, CA. He also deployed to Okinawa. In 1985 he was promoted to 1st Lieutenant.

After the Marines, John attended Widener University School of Law in Wilmington Delaware, graduating in 1990. It was there that he took a class on Trial Advocacy, and he decided to pursue criminal law.

From 1990-1994 John was an Assistant District Attorney in Lackawanna County followed by being an Assistant District Attorney in Luzerne County.

In 1995, he joined the Luzerne County Public Defender's Office as an Assistant Public Defender. John suffered a heart attack in October of 2019. After some time off to recuperate, he returned to work in January 2020. He will be celebrating his 30th anniversary at the Luzerne County Public Defender's Office on November 10, 2025.

John has handled thousands of criminal cases over the last several decades. He has tried over 130 criminal trials. Those trials have involved misdemeanor cases such as DUIs to felony assault cases and sex offenses also including several homicide trials. He has also been death penalty certified. He is most proud of working with the late Attorney William Ruzzo in 2004 and 2005 in the case of Commonwealth vs. John Michaels who was charged with arson and murder, where they were able to secure a full acquittal on all charges after a jury trial.

12:00 P.M. - 1:00 P.M. **PLENARY SESSION** (Salon CDEF).

Jamie Anzalone, Esquire,
Chairperson, Bench Bar Committee
(Worth 1 Hour of Substantive CLE Credit).

The Year in True Crime 2025 and its Lessons for Lawyers –

Jarrett J. Ferentino, Esquire
Pugliese, Finnegan Shaffer & Ferentino LLC

1:00 P.M. - 1:15 P.M. **BREAK.**

1:15 P.M. - 2:15 P.M. **CONCURRENT WORKSHOPS:**

In Various Rooms as Indicated in **Red.**
(Workshops are worth 1 Hour of Substantive CLE Credit).

(I). CIVIL LITIGATION – (Salon A).

Chairperson: **Jamie Anzalone, Esquire.**

Presenters and Topics Include the Following:

Bread and Butter Trial Skills with a Focus on Openings and Closing –
Jamie Anzalone, Esquire and Patrick J. Doyle Jr., Esquire.

(II). CRIMINAL LITIGATION – (Salon CDEF).

Chairpersons: **Frank W. Nocito, Esquire and Michael I. Butera, Esquire.**

Presenters and Topics Include the Following:

Appellate Law Update, Case Law & Statutory Law - **James L. McMonagle Jr., Esquire,** Assistant District Attorney of Luzerne County, with **Joseph J. Yeager, Esquire,** Chief Public Defender of Luzerne County.

(III). BANKRUPTCY – (Anthracite Meeting Room).

Chairpersons: **David E. Schwager, Esquire** and **James T. Shoemaker, Esquire**.
Presenters and Topics Include the Following:

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Bankruptcy Basics - **Hon. Henry W. Van Eck**, Chief Judge of the United States Bankruptcy Court for the Middle District of Pennsylvania – Moderated by **David E. Schwager, Esquire**.

(IV). DOMESTIC RELATIONS AND CUSTODY – (Salon B).

Chairperson: **Ruth S. Borland, Esquire**.
Presenters and Topics Include the Following:

Mastering Evidence in Family Law – Michael Shotto, Esquire.

(V). ELDER LAW, ESTATE PLANNING, SETTLEMENT, AND ADMINISTRATION – (Susquehanna & Hemlock Meeting Rooms).

Chairperson: **Brenda D. Colbert, Esquire, LL.M., CELA**.
Presenters and Topics Include the Following:

Estate and Elder Law Update - **Kevin R. Grebas, Esquire, CELA**, and **Brenda D. Colbert, Esquire, LL.M., CELA**. Also, **C. David Pedri, Esquire**, President & CEO of The Luzerne Foundation will speak briefly on *Charitable Giving to the Trust and Estates* – either in this workshop hour or the next one.

2:15 P.M. - 2:30 P.M. **BREAK** (Refreshments/ Convention Corridor and Vendor time/ Salon CDEF).

2:30P.M.-3:30P.M. CONCURRENT WORKSHOPS CONTINUE

In Various Rooms as Indicated in Red.

(Workshops are worth 1 Hour of Substantive CLE Credit).

(I). CIVIL LITIGATION – (Salon A).

Chairperson: **Jamie Anzalone, Esquire.**

Presenters and Topics Include the Following:

A View from the Bench – **Hon. Tina Polachek Gartley, Hon. Lesa S. Gelb, and Hon. Fred A. Pierantoni III**, Judges of the Court of Common Pleas of Luzerne County, Moderated by **Kelly M. Ciravolo, Esquire.**

(II). CRIMINAL LITIGATION – (Salon CDEF).

Chairpersons: **Frank W. Nocito, Esquire and Michael I. Butera, Esquire.**

Presenters and Topics Include the Following:

A Panel Discussion Regarding the Criminal Judicial System - **Hon. David W. Lupas, Hon. Joseph F. Sklarosky Jr., Hon. Michael T. Vough**, Judges of the Court of Common Pleas of Luzerne County and **Hon. Joseph J. Carmody, Hon. Alexandra Kokura- Kravitz and Hon. Ferris P. Webby Sr.**, Magisterial District Judges of Luzerne County.

(III). REAL ESTATE – (Anthracite Meeting Room).

Chairpersons: **James T. Shoemaker, Esquire and David E. Schwager, Esquire.**

Presenters and Topics Include the Following:

Data Center Development and Community Impact – **Jack Sordoni, JD.**

(IV). DOMESTIC RELATIONS AND CUSTODY – (Salon B).

Chairperson: **Ruth S. Borland, Esquire.**

Presenters and Topics Include the Following:

Family Law Procedure & Case Law Update - **Hon. Stefanie J. Salavantis**, President Judge of the Court of Common Pleas of Luzerne County; **Hon. Tara C. Toohil** and **Hon. Jennifer L. Rogers**, Judges of the Court of Common Pleas of Luzerne County; **Andrew F. Lazar, Esquire**, Custody Master, and **Tricia Watters, Esquire**, Custody Master.

(IV). ELDER LAW, ESTATE PLANNING, SETTLEMENT, AND ADMINISTRATION – (Susquehanna & Hemlock Meeting Rooms).

Chairperson: **Brenda D. Colbert, Esquire, LL.M., CELA.**

Presenter and Topics Include the Following:

Estate and Elder Law Update - **Kevin R. Grebas, Esquire, CELA**, and **Brenda D. Colbert, Esquire, LL.M., CELA.**

3:30 P.M. - 3:45 P.M. BREAK (Refreshments/ Convention Corridor and Vendor time/ Salon CDEF).

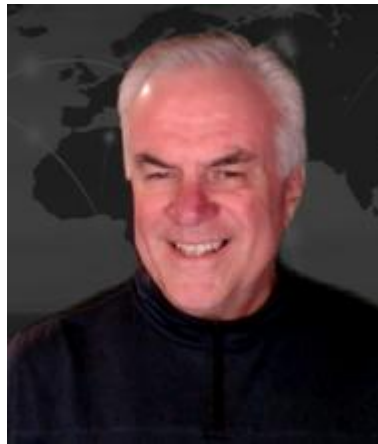
3:45 P.M. - 4:00 P.M. GENERAL SESSION – (Salon CDEF).

A Report on the Courts –
Hon. Stefanie J. Salavantis,
President Judge,
Court of Common Pleas of Luzerne County.

4:00 P.M. - 5:00 P.M. **KEYNOTE SPEAKER** – (Salon CDEF)
(Worth 1 Hour of Ethics CLE Credit).

[Please Note: This is the Ethics hour of the conference. If you want to receive the Ethics credit you must be present for this hour.]

The Role of Motivation in Discipline –



Douglas Leonard,
Douglas Leonard Consulting,
LLC, 206 Lakevue Drive,
Cranberry Township, PA 16066

[This concludes the CLE portion of the Conference.
No CLE Credit is provided for the Cocktail Reception.]

For lawyers staying the full day, the bench Bar Conference provides three (3)
Substantive CLE Credits and one (1) Ethics Credit.



Business Experience

Behavioral Consultant/Executive Team Coach/Speaker

- 28+ years of consulting experience
- Evaluated thousands of behavioral profiles
- Certified in iMap and co-architect of the iMapMyTeam Dashboard
- Certified and SME in The Birkman Method®
- Certified in Birkman Mindsets®
- Certified in Conversational Intelligence®
- Certified in Psychological Safety
- Domestic and International business experience
- Engagements in a wide range of industries
- Public, non-profit, and private sector experience
- Worked with clients with 10 to over 100,000 employees
- Frequent speaker and presenter at national and regional conferences

Legal Experience

Law Firm, Trial Court, Mediation, Disciplinary Board

- Current faculty member of Lawline.com
- 3 years law firm administrator
- 6+ years trial court administrator
- Past President of the PA Court Administrators Assn.
- Mediated child custody cases for 2+ years
- 8+ years as a member, deputy chair, and chair of the Pennsylvania Disciplinary Board
- 4-year Member of IWIL (Institute for Well-Being in the Law), formerly the National Task Force on Lawyer Well-Being; and Member of Governance Committee
- Founder of the PA Task Force for Well-Being in Law (no longer active)

Defense & Space Clients and Experience

- Northrup Grumman
 - Lockheed Martin
 - Boeing
 - NASA
 - United Launch Alliance
 - Rocketdyne
 - SAIC
 - Cobham Defense Systems
 - L-3Harris
 - Rockwell Collins
 - BAE Systems
 - Teledyne
 - Leidos
 - Air Force, Army, and Navy
- **Honorary Commander of the USAF** (*171st Air Refueling Wing*)

**PLEASE REMEMBER TO TURN IN YOUR
ATTORNEY CLE ATTENDANCE SHEETS to JOE,
GAIL, OR KRISTIN, SO THAT YOU MAY
RECEIVE CLE CREDIT.**

5:00 P.M. - 7:00 P.M. Cocktails & Hors D'oeuvres
(Convention Atrium Corridor).

The reception will be located in the **Atrium Corridor**
where everyone first checked in at the start of the day.

Please Note: Last year people found it difficult to talk over the
live entertainment, so this year there will be only very low piped-in music
by Mohegan, so members may find it easier to have conversations.

Thank You to
Everyone for attending.

And Thank You to this year's vendors.

REMEMBER TO BUY BASKET RAFFLE TICKETS.



PROCEEDS BENEFIT OUR FOUNDATION.