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A professional portrait of Christian D. Searcy, a middle-aged man with light brown hair, wearing a dark navy blue suit jacket, a light blue dress shirt, and a blue patterned tie. He is leaning forward with his hands resting on a reflective surface, looking directly at the camera with a serious expression.

CHRISTIAN D. SEARCY

INAUGURAL LEGATE AWARD RECIPIENT

»INSIDE: FJA's John Romano Workhorse Seminar[®] • March 16-20
JW Marriott Orlando Bonnet Creek Resort & Spa

»Photo Credit Josh Ritchie

LEGATE: LEADING A LEGACY OF JUSTICE

by Helen Smith and Allison North Jones

During last year's Masters of Justice®, the Florida Justice Association® (FJA) honored Christian D. “Chris” Searcy as the inaugural recipient of the Endowment for Association Giving to Law and Education (EAGLE®) Legate Award, an award that represents more than just a financial milestone. The Legate Award is presented to an individual who has contributed more than \$1 million in financial resources toward the protection of civil justice. But the award is not simply about dollars. It recognizes something deeper: legacy.

And Searcy's legacy is nothing short of enduring.

As a past president of the FJA, Searcy has not only led the organization but has also consistently shown up. He has been a constant presence across legislative sessions, advocacy campaigns, and legal education, championing the rights of consumers and injured individuals. He has spoken at nearly all of the FJA's major continuing learning education (CLE) events.

His commitment to education and excellence in trial advocacy led to the creation of the Christian D. Searcy Voir Dire Institute, a program designed to support novice and experienced trial attorneys alike. This Institute is an immersive training experience that challenges participants, both seasoned and new, to elevate their mindset and methodology in trial preparation and jury selection. It is a testament to Searcy's belief that strong advocacy begins with informed preparation.

Chris is one of the FJA's many leaders who define what it means to leave a legacy of justice.



A ‘Workhorse’ of Justice

John Romano, also a past president of the FJA, has an impact so enduring that the FJA's premier educational seminar now bears his name: the *FJA John Romano Workhorse Seminar*. That seminar is now in its 40th consecutive year, including transitioning the event for two consecutive years into a 56-hour webinar. Today, FJA's

Workhorse Seminar is regarded as the single most extraordinary seminar and educational event for lawyer training in America. Each year, Workhorse equips attorneys with the tools they need to succeed in the courtroom, giving attorneys the opportunity to earn 50-plus CLE credits in just one week.



Inaugural Legate Award Recipient, Christian D. “Chris” Searcy, who received his award at the 2025 FJA Masters of Justice in Orlando.



Christian D. “Chris” Searcy at FJA's Christian D. Searcy Voir Dire Institute

“The seminar came to life because John felt that most seminars had too much ‘fluff’ and lacked true substance for attendees. He aimed to create a high-energy, hard-charging CLE program packed with substance from open to close,” said FJA’s former Executive Director Paul Jess. “John’s vision for Workhorse filled a hole that law schools left in their preparation of students to succeed as advocates for clients. Workhorse provides a rare opportunity for attorneys to learn at the feet of the greats in our field.”

Romano’s influence extends well beyond his own practice. His mentorship and dedication have left an indelible mark on the legal community in Florida and beyond.



A Legacy of Preparing Future Leaders

Wayne Hogan, a respected past president of the FJA, has shaped the future of trial advocacy through education. Hogan established the Honorable E. Earle Zehmer Memorial Mock Trial Competition, an event designed to introduce aspiring attorneys to the rigors and ethics of civil trial practice. For

many law students, this competition is the first step toward a career dedicated to fighting for justice and protecting the rights of injured people.

Established nearly three decades ago by FJA Past President and Distinguished Fellow Wayne Hogan, the Honorable E. Earle Zehmer Memorial Mock Trial Competition has become a cornerstone of legal education and training for law students across the Southeast. From its beginnings, it has grown into a revered competition that prepares future trial lawyers while reinforcing the importance of protecting and preserving Florida’s civil justice system.

As one of nine Florida trial lawyers hired by the state to fight Big Tobacco in the 1990s, Wayne Hogan emerged as a unifying force within the elite team. He bridged disparate legal approaches and personalities, leading collaborative efforts that resulted in a landmark \$13 billion-plus judgment against the tobacco industry — the largest of its time. Wayne also pioneered consumer protection litigation in Florida, bringing the state’s first asbestos case involving punitive damages to trial and earning an early designation in Consumer Law. His leadership extended to the Florida Justice Association, where he served as president and became the organization’s most decorated member, winning all four of its major awards — the Victor Tipton, Al J. Cone, B.J. Masterson, and Perry Nichols Award — the FJA’s highest honor.

These names — Searcy, Romano, Hogan — are more than historical footnotes in the FJA story. These are pillars of leadership who aim to inspire the next generation of trial lawyers. Their work demonstrates that the legacy of justice is built well beyond the courtroom.





These leaders are the embodiment of “legatus.” In ancient Rome, a *legatus* wasn’t just a title; it was a responsibility. Emperors trusted legates to lead legions into battle and serve as senior commanders, men of unmatched integrity and dedication to the cause.

The Legate Award has been established to honor leaders in our organization whose lifelong contributions have exceeded \$1 million through the EAGLE program to protect the right to trial by jury and preserve access to justice for all Floridians. The leadership ranks of the FJA run deep.

From these Distinguished Fellows of the FJA to our current slate of officers, who set the tone for advocacy and member engagement, ensuring the challenges faced in Florida’s civil justice system are met with strategy and purpose, to the young attorneys who are emerging leaders in their field and who we hope to bolster with the Florida Justice Association Research and Education Foundation’s Leadership Academy, we find leadership throughout FJA.

Emerging leaders like Medical Malpractice Committee Chairs Eric Tinstman and Carter Scott continue to show up in

Tallahassee to support FJA’s legislative and political teams, meeting with lawmakers, reviewing legislation and testifying in committees. Leadership Academy Class I graduate Taylor Hill, along with the rest of her class, brings an emerging energy into our organization. Executive Committee Member Alex Artega-Gomez, HB 837 Committee Co-Chair Brent Steinberg, and others are stepping forward. Their involvement during legislative sessions and their growing influence within the FJA shows that the legacy of this organization is in good hands.

Our Women’s Caucus is a bastion of some of the best trial lawyers in the country and a testament to the growing ranks of women leaders within the FJA. We now count three women as past presidents of the FJA — Karen Gievers (1990-1991), Leslie Kroeger (2019-2020), and Tiffany M. Faddis (2021-2022). FJA’s Executive Committee includes Maryann Furman and Janeen Mira, who could soon be positioned to increase the number of past female presidents.

However, leadership within the FJA has always been about more than holding a title or sitting on a committee. It’s about showing up — whether that’s in Tallahassee, in the courtroom, or in community spaces where public trust in the justice system

is built. True leaders give not just financially, but with their time and treasure. These mentors prepare younger lawyers for the challenges ahead, to stand as the pillars protecting justice for generations to come and to continue building the legacy of the FJA. They advocate in the halls of the Capitol. They teach at CLEs. They fight their clients' cases in the courtroom.

This organization continues to be shaped by those who understand that the fight for justice is never over. Each member plays an equally important role in protecting clients' rights and preserving the integrity of Florida's civil justice system.

As the Florida Justice Association looks toward the future, the legacy of justice will be defined not only by courtroom victories but also by those willing to step forward and fight in pivotal moments, when it matters most and when our enemies advance efforts to limit justice. This happens in the courtroom, in the Capitol, in elections, and beyond.

As with any army, there is always a succession of leadership. A time, when the sword and shield must be passed to the next generation of leaders — leaders who have stood shoulder-to-shoulder on the frontlines with legates like Searcy, Romano, and Hogan, but who now must take up the sword and shield, as the battle to protect and preserve justice will never end.

Now is their time to show up, testify, and stand with the FJA, as bills are debated that could reshape the civil justice system. Will they lend their voices and influence where it counts the most, face-to-face with lawmakers who need to hear the real-world impact of their clients and their verdicts? If the history given above is any guide, the answer from the FJA is a resounding *yes*.

Time and again, FJA members have shown up, not just in courtrooms, but in committee hearings, on the Capitol steps, and in the offices of decision-makers. They are committed to defending Floridians' rights.

Because every legislative session brings with it new threats and opportunities. And this 2026 legislative session is no different. The ability to preserve access to the courts, protect the rights of the injured, and push back against corporate Goliaths depends on members' willingness to engage, their willingness to be present in Tallahassee, and their willingness to lead this organization.

The legacy of justice is not static. The pillars of justice are built and fortified each year by attorneys who choose to act, not just when it's convenient, but when it's mission-critical. This is the time. This is the moment. And this is the type of legacy that must continue. For your clients. For Florida's civil justice system. For the next generation of trial attorneys. ■



HELEN SMITH

serves as the FJA's Deputy Director of Marketing & Communications, supporting daily marketing efforts and assisting with legislative communications and member advocacy during session. Before joining FJA, Smith worked in both state government and agency settings, managing marketing and communications efforts across multiple state agencies, political campaigns, and nonprofits.



ALLISON NORTH JONES

is the Communications Director at the FJA. She began her career as a journalist covering politics for national news organizations in Washington, D.C., and then Florida. Since 2006, she has been a public relations consultant, executive and now director.

