

TABLE OF EXPERTS HELD DECEMBER 3, 2024

WOMEN ATTORNEYS MAKING PROGRESS IN THE FIELD



PHOTOS BY: MARK MULVILLE

From left to right; Rosanna Berardi from Berardi Immigration Law, Lisa Coppola from The Coppola Firm, Kimberly Nason from Phillips Lytle LLP, Jamie Batt from Rupp Pfalzgraf LLC, and Lauren Mendolera from Harter Secrest & Emery LLP, at the Buffalo Business First Table of Experts Women in Law at the Hilton Garden Inn in Buffalo.

Things continue to improve for women in the law in the United States.

There are more female students than males in law schools, practicing women lawyers are narrowing the gap between them and male lawyers, and more women are entering leadership positions in the law. This, while older, mostly male lawyers are retiring.

With every advancement, women are making an impact on the profession, and yet, there are many more challenges

before them before they can be considered truly equal to their male counterparts.

Buffalo Business First Publisher John Tebeau recently gathered top women attorneys for a conversation on issues of the practice of law as they affect the growing number of women in the industry.

Joining Tebeau were:

- Jamie Batt, partner, Rupp Pfalzgraf LLC,

- Rosanna Berardi, managing partner, Berardi Immigration Law,
- Lisa Coppola, managing partner, The Coppola Firm,
- Lauren Mendolera, partner, Harter Secrest & Emery LLP and
- Kimberly Nason, partner, Phillips Lytle LLP

POSITIVE CHANGE, PERSISTENT CHALLENGES

Women are 41% of all U.S. lawyers

and just outnumber male students in law school, according to the American Bar Association. Despite the impressive gains, female lawyers are not considered as men are in their field.

It is not enough that women have made it into the law, they need to do more than men to rise among their peers, Batt said.

"Women have to make themselves known," she said. "They have to be really great or really do something that stands out. You have to prove yourself and become known, whereas it doesn't seem

THE EXPERTS:



ROSANNA BERARDI
CEO

Berardi Immigration Law

Rosanna Berardi is a lawyer, mother, and entrepreneur. She built her immigration law firm, Berardi Immigration Law, from her home apartment to a multi-million-dollar company in 17 short years.

Rosanna is a sought-after speaker and has been featured in Forbes, The Los Angeles Times, Politico and The National Post. She is an Adjunct Professor at SUNY Buffalo School of Law. Rosanna is also the CEO of High Wire Woman, a consulting firm that provides systems and solutions to working women.

Berardi Immigration Law is certified both federally and by New York State as a woman-owned business enterprise, making it one of the few immigration law firms in the country to hold these coveted certifications.

Today, as Managing Partner of Berardi Immigration Law, Rosanna continues to identify emerging trends in immigration and adjudication procedures and leverages that knowledge for her clients and the public.



LISA A. COPPOLA, ESQ.
CEO

The Coppola Firm

Lisa Coppola leads The Coppola Firm, which helps injured people recover the money they deserve, helps companies enforce their rights, and counsels businesses, organizations, entrepreneurs, and charter schools on legal issues.

The Coppola Firm offers New York-mandated annual sexual harassment prevention training through an online website, coppolatraining.com.

In addition to advocating for her clients, Lisa is a certified mediator for the New York Courts and Federal Court for the Western District of New York. She serves on the U.S. Small Business Association's Regulatory Fairness Board, on the board of the SPCA Serving Erie County, and she is the immediate past chair of the National Association of Women Business Owners board where she chairs its national nominating committee. NAWBO represents over 13 million women entrepreneurs across the United States and is celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2025.

Lisa is peer-rated AV Preeminent by Martindale-Hubbell, has been recognized by The Best Lawyers in America and Upstate New York Super Lawyers, and was named to this year's Business First Power 200 Women List.



LAUREN MENDOLERA
Partner

Harter Secrest & Emery LLP

Partner Lauren Mendolera is a seasoned attorney specializing in complex commercial litigation nationwide. Her diverse experience includes clerking for Senator Charles Schumer and the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee and holding various state and federal government roles. Lauren has represented major corporations and high-profile individuals in numerous legal matters.

As a zealous advocate dedicated to her community, Lauren serves on the Erie County Bar Association Volunteer Lawyers Project board. She focuses her pro bono work on assisting members of the transgender community with name changes and advocating for children with disabilities in school proceedings.

Lauren is also an active volunteer with the Massachusetts Avenue Project and founded a networking group for women-insurance professionals. Despite her busy schedule, she is a dedicated mother and role model to her children. Not surprisingly, Lauren was honored this year as a recipient of Buffalo Business First "40 Under 40."



KIMBERLY NASON
Partner

Phillips Lytle LLP

Kimberly is a partner at Phillips Lytle where she focuses her practice on land use and zoning, environmental law and energy matters. Kimberly is adept at navigating interagency dynamics and spearheading collaboration between federal, state and local officials. She has significant experience counseling clients on regulatory compliance issues and compliance with the State Environmental Quality Review Act. She is involved with several marquee projects in Western New York, including leading a group of consultants engaged to assist with the environmental impact review process for the new Buffalo Bills stadium, and continuing oversight in connection with construction compliance and permit issuance for the project. Kimberly is integral in spearheading efforts for the firm's Women's Resource Group. This group seeks to develop and promote women lawyers and maximize their opportunities for business development and leadership. She currently serves on the Boards of Directors for the Buffalo & Erie County Botanical Gardens and Frank Lloyd Wright's Martin House. Kimberly is also involved in a number of professional organizations that facilitate connections within her areas of expertise. Those organizations include the Urban Land Institute, Women in Communications and Energy, and the Women's Wireless Leadership Forum.



JAMIE BATT
Partner

Rupp Pfalzgraf LLC

Jamie Batt is a Partner at Rupp Pfalzgraf practicing in business law. A former Division I tennis player, Jamie brings the same competitive spirit and teamwork mentality to complex business transactions, mergers and acquisitions, and succession planning. Her people-first approach and ability to unite diverse stakeholders has established her as a trusted advisor for transformative corporate transactions.

Named a 2023 Women of Influence Award recipient and Athena Award finalist, Jamie has been consistently recognized by Upstate New York Super Lawyers. She holds both a J.D. from the University at Buffalo School of Law and an M.B.A. from UB's School of Management. Jamie serves on multiple boards including the WNY Women's Foundation and is a member of the United Way of Buffalo & Erie County's Women United Advisory Board. Her leadership extends beyond her practice through active involvement in community organizations and mentoring the next generation of attorneys.

like men have to in order to get their reputation.”

Others have had a similarly frustrating experience of making inroads in the law.

“Something that is out there, that I still experience as a female, is people being surprised when you’re really good,” Nason said. “It’s not that anyone’s directly saying something negative or insulting to you, but your male counterparts don’t necessarily get that reaction. I don’t know if that’s specific to the Western New York community or the legal profession as a whole.”

Nason said women are confronted with having to exhibit strengths, experiences and gains while men are not asked to prove themselves to be seen as having potential to be a rainmaker.

Coppola believes she generally gets more respect now as a seasoned litigator than she did when she entered the field in 1989, but not completely.

“I still run into situations where for me as a litigator I’m in front of the judge and the judge is calling my male counterpart Mr. Smith and calling me Lisa,” she said.

Mendolera said she is encouraged by the approach young women attorneys have to their careers. They are upfront about their needs and their boundaries, what they’re willing to do and not willing to do. Work is not the end-all and be-all. It’s a part of their



“We have all different types of people sitting at the table making decisions and that helps to appeal to clients.”

LAUREN MENDOLERA

Harter Secrest & Emery LLP

life but it’s not their life, which protects them against burnout, she said.

Even so, women tend to assume more roles than men, Berardi said.

“Women do it all,” she said. “We are supposed to be professionals and then have this whole other job. It’s hard enough to have a career, but then there’s this expectation of cooking and buying the gifts and walking 10,000 steps and making the plant-based meals, going on date nights and decorating for Christmas, and it’s just impossible. This is year 27 for me as a lawyer, and it’s not really changing.”

If there is improvement, it is the development of services that can help lighten the load for women, such as laundry and grocery shopping services. Still, there are those who judge others who outsource these traditional female roles, she said.

Nason sees both types of women in the field.

More and more, female attorneys, especially in the younger generation, are saying out loud, they want to have these roles, and here’s how they are going to prioritize them. It is a positive

development in the profession, she said.

Women who ascend to leadership positions in law firms will continue to have a greater understanding of the need to prioritize and the respect of someone’s choices of how they want to prioritize their work and their family.

“I spent the last two years running our firm’s second largest practice group and that was something I always focused on was making sure that female attorneys and all of our newer attorneys, especially, felt seen and heard and were able to be their true selves and that goes along with prioritization and what you can handle from a capacity perspective,” Nason said. “People really surprise you and excel when you pay attention to those things.”

PARADIGM SHIFT

Law firms, particularly those with women in leadership, have been putting policies in place to ensure women have an increasing role.

“One of the things that we as leaders at law firms need to continually challenge ourselves with is how do we shift the paradigm, and how do we as institutions do it as opposed to individuals,” Coppola said.

Her firm these days has a nearly equal number of male and female lawyers and a support staff that is fully female. One



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KIMBERLY NASON

Phillips Lytle LLP

of the things that had frustrated her when she started the firm was losing the women when they started families.

"I started what I call the of-council program to attract women, amazing women whom we have lost who had been infused with all of the support and knowledge of a firm but then said 'I'm opting out. I'm not working 70 hours a week or 80 hours a week'."

While she did gain back some of those women, Coppola's program interestingly attracted a largely older population of attorneys who had been working at law firms with mandatory retirement ages.

"I am incredibly fortunate to have an older generation of attorneys working with me who come to the practice with all of the wisdom, all of the enthusiasm not only for their clients and the work but for mentoring newer people," she said. "It really opened my eyes. I had this plan with what I thought was the goal, and I have been absolutely delighted that it's shown up a little bit differently."



"I'm always putting my ear to the ground about what people want and then giving it to them because to me it's a great financial deal to keep people happy. It takes a lot of time to build loyalty and trust, and I don't want anyone going anywhere."

ROSANNA BERARDI

Berardi Immigration Law

Some of the employment benefits Berardi said she has incorporated into her firm include an offer of part-time hours, 529 plan contributions to children's college funds and even home cleaning services on occasion.

LEADERSHIP ADVICE

The practice of law is getting increasingly demanding with cell phones, messaging, emails and the rest of the possible real-time connections that create the expectation of immediate response, Batt said.

It is the nature of the job and while lawyers accept it, many are often juggling the work with equally demanding personal situations such as raising young children and tending to aging parents.

The stress might be too much for some lawyers. Firm leadership should realize that personal situations are often temporary and policies including flexible hours or remote work ultimately could retain talent.

"Partners don't always understand your personal situation and how they can help make this work because you are an important part of the team and you have the potential," Batt said. "Situations will change every few years and you don't want to lose that person who has potential."

Firms need to be intentional about retaining talent, Nason said. They need to have people who are fully engaged, want to be there and enjoy what they're doing despite all the stresses of the practice. Incorporating newer attorneys into firm leadership early on can help. It will serve as a pathway or a connection between people of different backgrounds and age

groups at the firm, she said.

"The more a newer attorney feels immediately incorporated into that scene, is heard and has a voice, makes a difference. If you have a sense of belonging early on, it makes you want to work hard. It makes you want to dedicate yourself to the practice even more than you already would," Nason said. "Otherwise we're not going to retain people. The law firm structure and associate life is evolving, and we need to evolve with it and be aware of those things a little bit more than maybe the Western New York region has been in the past."

FIRM CULTURE

Culture can attract employees and culture can keep them, so it is important for leadership to understand that a focus on something intangible such as culture can pay off.

The culture at the Berardi firm is founded on a team approach to the work. Everyone has an equal role, there is no hierarchy, Berardi said. Additionally, every micro-win, such as a hard case getting approval or the recent social media success, is cause for celebration because people deserve validation for what they accomplish.

Otherwise, she simply asks what her employees want.

Rupp Pflzgraf
People at law

WE ARE PEOPLE AT LAW

At Rupp Pflzgraf, we are dedicated to advancing equality in the legal profession, fostering leadership opportunities for women attorneys, and championing justice in our community. We're proud to be part of the discussion exploring the unique challenges and triumphs of women in our field. Together, we are shaping a more inclusive future for the legal profession in Western New York



"What I think is a great benefit people may not care about it at all," Berardi said. "I'm always putting my ear to the ground about what people want and then giving it to them because to me it's a great financial deal to keep people happy. It takes a lot of time to build loyalty and trust, and I don't want anyone going anywhere," Berardi said.

Harter Secrest has lockstep partner compensation, which means that partners are paid a predictable amount based on seniority and years with the firm. That lends itself to less hoarding of opportunities, work or clients, and contributes tremendously to firm culture, Mendolera said.

The firm also prides itself in trying to get everyone involved in client pitches.

"We have internal systems that monitor and encourage women participating in client pitches because historically that's been very difficult for women, to be able to sit at the table and be part of those with confidence," Mendolera said. "We have all different types of people sitting at



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LISA COPPOLA

The Coppola Firm

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WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Overall, the women said work-life

balance is a misnomer, and they said it as a notice to new lawyers. If you want your name on the door, they said, plan on working well past 9 and 5.

Berardi is firm in her belief that there

is no such thing of work-life balance for women in the law, accounting, medicine, or any profession.

"If you want to make a certain level of income, there is no balance. It is just



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A Thought Leadership Panel

Lauren Mendolera, a Partner at HSE, joined this dynamic panel to share experiences, insights, and perspectives on the ever-evolving legal landscape.



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“Women have to make themselves known. They have to be really great or really do something that stands out. You have to prove yourself and become known, whereas it doesn’t seem like men have to in order to get their reputation.”

JAMIE BATT

Rupp Pfalzgraf LLC



doing of them. For example, she took classes with Buffalo Improv House for 18 months and became a member of an improv comedy troupe. She intended to improve her public speaking skills but learned so much more.

“You have to be just listening so intently because every word you can play off of,” Mendolera said. “I felt like it really helped hone my attention skills, my public speaking skills, my collaboration skills, presentation skills, body language skills, all of it.”

There is a definite change in the mindset of new associates over the years. Those she works with today are driven, motivated hard workers who understand the firm’s expectations but are equally vocal about other non-work priorities in their life.

“There are new trends we’re seeing with newer attorneys and associates, but I don’t think it’s a lack of motivation or work ethic,” Nason said. “Those who are going to excel and progress and be promoted have to figure out how to be clear with their needs but to work to a level that’s expected.”

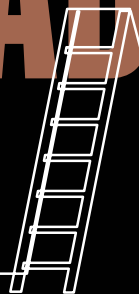
figuring out how to put that puzzle together. I see it in the new lawyers coming up that that is not very clear to them,” she said. “I’m sure all of us in this room have not been off in decades in terms of our monitoring emails or responding to

something quickly. There is no work-life balance. You can do it all different ways, you can do it a million different ways, but at end of the day if you want that level of compensation you’re going to have to sacrifice some things.”

Lawyers new to the practice might follow Mendolera’s lead.

She has used breaks in her schedule to engage in activities that can help her develop work skills that are fun in the

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Helping women leaders in law reach new heights. That’s The Phillips Lytle Way.

Phillips Lytle is proud to honor all women in law. Their outstanding contributions to their co-workers, clients and community should be celebrated. Our firm is proud to lead the way in championing equity and inclusion in Western New York and beyond.

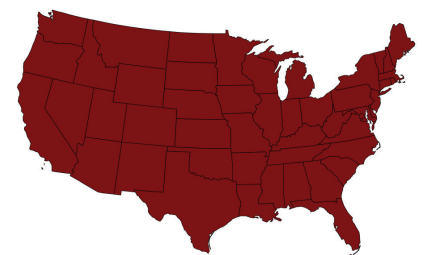


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Berardi Immigration Law is a certified MWBE law firm and is committed to helping individuals from around the globe achieve their American dreams.

Our award-winning team brings experience and knowledge to your immigration case with a personal touch.

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