

Greater Hartford's **Top Attorneys**

Profiles by Carol Latter | Photographs by Studio 970



We will all need a lawyer at some point in our lives, whether it involves buying a house, setting up a business, getting a divorce or drawing up a will.

In good times and bad, attorneys can help us to see the big picture and attend to details, sort out past mistakes and plan ahead to prevent problems in the future.

But not every attorney is equally skilled or experienced. That's why it's helpful to know which lawyers are among Hartford County's best.

We asked Lexis Nexis Martindale-Hubbell, a highly respected global firm that has been compiling information on lawyers for more than 140 years, to create a list of the most effective and competent attorneys in our region.

To do so, the firm tapped its database to identify lawyers who have been rated by their peers to be AC Preeminent – the highest Peer Review Rating available.

We hope that you will find this information useful the next time you're in need of some sound legal advice.

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■ Health law is an exciting challenge for Boyle, who operates a regulatory and transactional practice in this “incredibly diverse” area. “On any given day, I may be working on the acquisition of a hospital or a physician practice; advising clients on compliance with the Stark law and Anti-kickback statute; drafting and negotiating contracts between hospitals and anesthesiologists, radiologists or pathologists; advising hospitals and medical staffs on medical staff and peer review issues; advising clients on electronic medical records; or counseling clients on patient care and risk management issues.”

The most challenging aspect of her job is the fact that health care is constantly in flux. “Our clients and their management teams... need to stay ahead of the curve and require fast turnaround. There is an expectation that I either have the answer or can find it very quickly. I have to be on top of all the latest changes in the laws and regulations. The incredible breadth of regulations affecting health care entities makes my work challenging, [but] this makes me love what I do.”

She expects to see dramatic changes in the field over the next five years. Hospitals and physicians will initially receive incentives for using electronic medical records, “but will eventually be penalized by Medicare and Medicaid if they don’t.” In addition, “groups of physicians and hospitals will form entities known as accountable care organizations which will manage a patient’s health care from start to finish, and control the dollars for such care. The expectation is that the quality and utilization of health care will improve through these changes.”

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■ Nobody wants to be embroiled in litigation, but when two parties have a serious disagreement and communication breaks down, it can often lead one person or company to sue another. When that happens, former business partners, friends or even family members can find themselves on opposite sides of a courtroom.

It doesn't always have to go that far, according to Gersten. "Starting a civil suit may be helpful initially to get the attention of the other party, but unless there is a constitutional right or principle to protect, everyone benefits by considering mediation and attempting a dialogue before trial," he said. "It makes economic sense to try to avoid all the costs, time and emotion invested in a trial, as well as the risks." In a court, neither party has control of the outcome, whereas mediation brings both parties together to "work it out."

If mediation or arbitration is not an option or is unsuccessful, going to court may be the only recourse. Gersten said before hiring a litigation attorney, a person "should ask questions to determine whether the prospective litigator understands the goals of the client and whether the lawyer has the experience needed to handle that particular type of dispute. Locally, there are some incredibly talented lawyers who can try a personal injury case very well, but are ducks out of water in a case involving a fraud taking place at a business because the dynamics in presenting the case are very different," he said.

The biggest mistake to avoid when suing or being sued, Gersten said, is "allowing emotion to overcome rationality."

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Robert G. Siegel**MERGERS AND ACQUISITIONS***Day Pitney LLC**Hartford, (860) 275-0100*

■ Siegel began his career as a tax lawyer, offering tax advice on many merger and acquisition (M&A) transactions. "But the real action was on the business side, structuring and negotiating the deal, and I found myself drawn to that."

The most challenging aspect of his practice is bringing an M&A transaction to a successful close. "Even after the purchase and sale agreement has been negotiated, many issues will still need to be resolved," he said. "Entrepreneurs who have never sold a company before can get 'cold feet,' wondering if they're getting the best deal and whether they'll be happy after their company is sold." Lawyers for both sides must ensure they understand the terms of the deal. "The last thing anyone wants is for a deal that has gone through due diligence and the negotiation of documents to collapse."

He said an owner who wants to sell a company must prepare it for sale by tying up loose ends like compliance or financial reporting issues. "For buyers, it is a 'buyer beware' situation, and there is no substitute for doing the necessary legal and business due diligence in connection with any acquisition."

If he could give clients one piece of advice, it would be this: to choose their deal partners carefully, since even the most expertly drafted legal documents can't always protect you. "An untrustworthy person will ignore the commitments made in those documents and you will be forced to spend a lot of time, effort and money trying to get the benefit of the bargain you expected. If you don't have sufficient trust in the other side of a proposed deal, find another deal."

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Phyllis M. DiCara

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■ One of the most common situations DiCara sees involves divorce. “Clients come into the office worried about their futures and filled with questions about what their rights are.” Accepting that their lives are changing is often difficult.

One of the toughest parts is realizing that the state “looks at your marriage as a legal partnership – a contract. The court is not there to punish a spouse for misbehaving, or to ‘make it right.’ It is there to dissolve the partnership in a fair and equitable manner,” she said. “The financial division of assets and liabilities feels unfair to some clients who, understandably, are focused on the emotional aspect of their situation.”

She advises against asking a divorced friend or relative for input, since everyone’s circumstances are unique. “I also think it is a mistake to go through this process without counseling – especially if you have children, or if there is any alcohol and drug abuse, or a history of domestic violence. For most people, this is one of the very worst moments in their life, and yet they are expected to act rationally, and be poised and logical. Individual counseling, as well as co-parenting counseling, can be vital to the client’s future well-being.”

She said having an attorney can help people to see the big picture when they’re ready to abandon their rights, just to get the divorce process over with. Lawyers also have expertise in child support and custody matters, and can help clients see the long-term impact of various decisions. They will also guide clients through a “collaborative law approach,” in which the spouses and their lawyers meet to resolve the issues instead of going to court.

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■ Attorney John Deans practices in a variety of areas, including residential and commercial real estate, secured lending, and small business. But he finds the area of wills, trusts and probate particularly challenging and satisfying. “I’ve seen so many situations where a family is torn apart because of disputes about an estate, and I know that many of those situations could have been prevented if the deceased had done proper estate planning,” he said. “I enjoy helping people plan for the future and achieve the peace of mind that comes with knowing that everything will be taken care of properly.”

Deans says everyone who owns property needs a will. If you pass away without one, the State of Connecticut’s “laws of intestacy” will decide how your assets are divided – and those decisions may not be in keeping with your wishes. While you might prefer for your spouse to inherit your estate, for example, intestacy laws will ensure that your children will get a share, even if they’re minors. He said any major life change – a birth, marriage, divorce, or the death of someone named in your will – should prompt you to update your will.

A trust “is a way of providing money for someone without actually giving them control of it. Instead, the money is given to a trustee to manage, and to give out to the beneficiary or beneficiaries as directed in the trust. If you leave money to a trust for the benefit of young children, the trustee can act in your place and provide the money for their needs and education, eventually turning over the balance of the money when they come of age.” Trusts can also be used to provide for older people who may develop Alzheimer’s or other disabilities.

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Photo by Studio 970

Sheila Huddleston

APPELLATE PRACTICE

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■ As an appellate attorney, Sheila Huddleston seldom sees the same issue twice. “I’ve had a wide range of cases – civil, criminal, constitutional, antitrust, employment, personal injury, tax, and trusts, to name a few,” she said. “My clients are as varied as my cases. I’m currently representing a large company in a breach of contract case, a developer in a property dispute, and a disabled veteran who is appealing the denial of veterans’ benefits.” She also takes a lot of pro bono cases.

The most challenging aspect of appellate law “is also the most fun. I come into a case when the trial has ended, and I have to learn everything about it - from the evidence to the law - very quickly. One week, I may be learning about the oil industry so that I can understand the issues in a case; another week, I may be learning about a disease process; in yet another week, I may be learning about a little-used provision of the tax code. Then I have to crystallize the facts and the legal issues and present them in a succinct and interesting brief for the court. It’s never dull!”

Huddleston said the biggest mistake a client can make in the appeals process is to assume that the lawyer who handled the case below is automatically the best lawyer to handle the case on appeal. “Appeals are different from trials in many ways. Different – and very technical – rules apply, and different skills are needed. The client should make sure that the lawyer has appellate experience or, at the very least, has access to experienced appellate lawyers who can help him frame the issues for the appeal and avoid procedural traps.”

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EDITOR'S NOTE

The foregoing list is based on the most up-to-date information available from Lexis Nexis Martindale-Hubbell.

Please note that since this list was compiled by Lexis Nexis, some of the attorneys may have switched to other firms, retired or otherwise left the practice of law.

While we have listed each attorney under his or her primary area of practice, many of them practice in several related areas. **HM**

How this list was compiled

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To create this list of Top Attorneys in Hartford County, LexisNexis® Martindale-Hubbell® tapped its comprehensive database of Martindale-Hubbell® Peer Review Ratings™ to identify lawyers who have been rated by their peers to be AV® Preeminent™ – the highest Peer Review Rating available.

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As seen in



Hartford
MAGAZINE

April 2011

ERRATA

■ In the 2011 Top Attorneys feature in our April issue, several attorneys were listed in the wrong categories. Louise Van Dyck of Chubb Group should have been listed under “Not in Private Practice.”

Daniel Blume of Blume Legal specializes in Commercial Real Estate and Broadcasting.

Pullman & Comley’s Daniel Atkins works in Commercial Litigation. Joshua Hawks-Ladds works in Business Litigation. Michael Kurs works in Health Care and John Stafstrom works in Bond Finance.



HEALTH CARE

JOAN FELDMAN

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■ Joan Feldman trained to be a nurse, but on her first day of work at Mass General in Boston, she attended a lecture by the hospital’s counsel, an experience that turned her career in a different direction.

Today, as a health care attorney, “I represent providers exclusively, and regularly advise them in

More Top Attorneys

■ Also in connection with our Top Attorneys list, two attorneys were added by Lexis Nexis after we went to press.

CORPORATE LAW

TOM FLYNN

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■ Tom Flynn was drawn to corporate law “because it creates so many opportunities to help companies grow, form relationships, develop products, build markets, and create jobs. As an experienced corporate lawyer, you really are given the opportunity to be part of the team, helping to

shape decisions and make things happen,” he said.

In his role as general outside counsel for growing and mid-sized companies, Flynn spends much of his time on general counseling, corporate, contracting, and mergers & acquisitions work. His biggest challenge, he said, is making sure he adds value for the client. While many lawyers are technically competent, “the hard part is understanding the client’s business, the context for everything we do, and how best to achieve an outcome with minimal cost to the client,” he said.

His best advice for clients? To get the most



value and greatest efficiency from your attorneys, provide the background “and don’t be afraid to tell them where the matter falls on the spectrum from ‘This [issue] is really important’ ... to ‘This [part] is not a big deal for us.’ If you explain, you should get what you want. If you don’t, you’ll get what your lawyer wants.”

the area of regulatory and corporate compliance, corporate governance matters, business and other regulatory and administrative matters.” She said health care providers operate in a very heavily regulated industry “and as such, they must constantly respond and conform to [legal and regulatory] changes.”

She said recent changes in health care law require that providers “restructure their health care delivery systems, become more transparent and deliver more for less. ... While my clients are committed to change, because many issues have not been completely fleshed out with respect to health care reform, there remain many questions with respect

to what they can and cannot do under the current law.” She added, “My health care practice team meets twice a week to discuss developing issues for our clients so that we can be sure that we are keeping our clients informed.”

And what does the future hold? “There will be increasing demands for reporting with respect to quality, and this all takes time and people. Yet providers will be getting paid less. It will be an enormous challenge,” she said. **HM**

As seen in
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May 2011