

# Trusts & Estates

The newsletter of the Illinois State Bar Association's Section on Trusts & Estates

## Spotlight on Trusts & Estates Section Council Members: Colleen L. Sahlas & Jennifer Bunker Skerston

BY MIA O. HERNANDEZ

The Trusts & Estates Section Council has members from throughout the state of Illinois with a variety of professional achievements, skills, and practices. In this newsletter, we continue a monthly series of articles in a question and answer format that highlights the backgrounds, interests, and experiences of the members of the Trusts & Estates Section Council as a way to get to know more about them.

**Colleen L. Sahlas**

**The Law Offices of Hoy & Sahlas, LLC,  
Oak Brook, Illinois**



**Q:** What got you into the trusts and estates practice?

**A:** In 2000, I was on track to become

*an assistant state's attorney with the Cook County State's Attorney's Office, having interned with them for 1½ years and conducted trials as a Rule 711 student under supervision. My husband (at that time, my fiancée) encouraged me to consider joining my father's solo, transactional law practice in Oak Park, Illinois. Prior to joining, I assumed probate and estate planning would be tedious and boring. I am so thankful I made the switch. My father and I make a great legal team, and I have the pleasure of being mentored by him and working alongside him every day. I absolutely love following legal procedure and guiding grieving clients through the probate maze. My father and I have been law partners since 2006, and in 2020 we celebrated 35 years in business and 20 years of working together.*

**Q:** What is your favorite part of the practice?

**A:** I am passionate about serving the most vulnerable in our society, including the disabled, the elderly, divorced and widowed persons, and those who have recently lost a loved one. Many people have never hired an attorney before and are reticent to work with one. Compound that with a client who may have lost a trusted loved one, is alone for the first time now, compromised by grief, and overwhelmed by a daunting, complex

*and expensive legal process. Those clients need hand-holding, so to speak, and a trusted guide to gently lead them through the legal maze of probate administration and/or trust administration and even establish or update their own estate plan.*

**Q:** What is the most challenging part of the practice?

**A:** The most challenging part is also the most rewarding part: learning new things. The law and technology are relentlessly developing, causing the practice of law to be a never-ending learning process. On top of that, case matters can be layered with complexities, and clients with difficult or challenging personalities. Your impossible client matters and "war stories" often become the very tool by which you develop your greatest legal skills and expertise.

**Q:** What is the most interesting part of the practice?

**A:** I really enjoy analyzing client matters and problem solving. Being a lawyer is about assimilating facts and analyzing/exploring possibilities, probabilities, risks, strategies, and problem solving. Finding creative, effective ways to meet the client's needs and desires while mitigating their risks and solving legal dilemmas is truly rewarding.

**Q:** What do you like to do when you

are not administering trusts/estates?

**A:** *I am a professional mezzo-soprano with 35 years of professional training. I sang 7 seasons with the Apollo Chorus of Chicago. I am beginning my 4<sup>th</sup> season with the Chicago Choral Artists, a professional choir comprised of vocalists from Chicago's Lyric Opera, Chicago Symphony Chorus, Chicago Opera Theatre and the St. Charles Singers. I also enjoy learning languages: I have studied advanced German, advanced Greek (my husband is half Greek), and French. My husband is a former professional chef. We enjoy traveling and trying various cuisines together. In good weather, you'll find me out running with my Brittany Spaniel.*

### Jennifer Bunker Skerston

**Law Offices of Reilly & Skerston, LLC,  
Streator, Illinois.**



**Q:** What got you into the trusts and estates practice?

**A:** *Shortly after I graduated law school, a position became available near my hometown in rural Illinois. A portion of their practice is estate planning and administration, and I have been growing my practice in those areas ever since.*

**Q:** What is your favorite part of the practice?

**A:** *I really enjoy meeting people, learning about them and their families, and helping them obtain their goals. In the estate planning sector especially, personal information that is shared with me is often not shared by clients with anyone else, and it is important to create bonds and build a good rapport with people. I try to make the process as light-hearted as possible, and*

*there is often much laughter while we resolve serious concerns.*

**Q:** What is the most challenging part of the practice?

**A:** *In addition to estate planning, I also handle disputed estates. Often times, personal emotions that have been escalating over many years come to a front in litigation after a loved one passes. It can be challenging to work past these feelings to get the matter resolved, but often creative solutions can be found to obtain middle ground.*

**Q:** What is the most interesting part of the practice?

**A:** *The people. Every new client brings a new story, new goals, and a new challenge.*

**Q:** What do you like to do when you are not administering trusts/estates?

**A:** *I love travelling throughout the United States and internationally. While travelling, my favorite things to do are taking photographs of architecture and natural landscapes, trying new cuisine and wine, and meeting people and learning their world-perspective. I also enjoy spending time at the family farm, fishing, and playing Euchre.*

Please stay tuned for the next issue when we will feature additional members of the Trusts & Estates Section Council. ■