



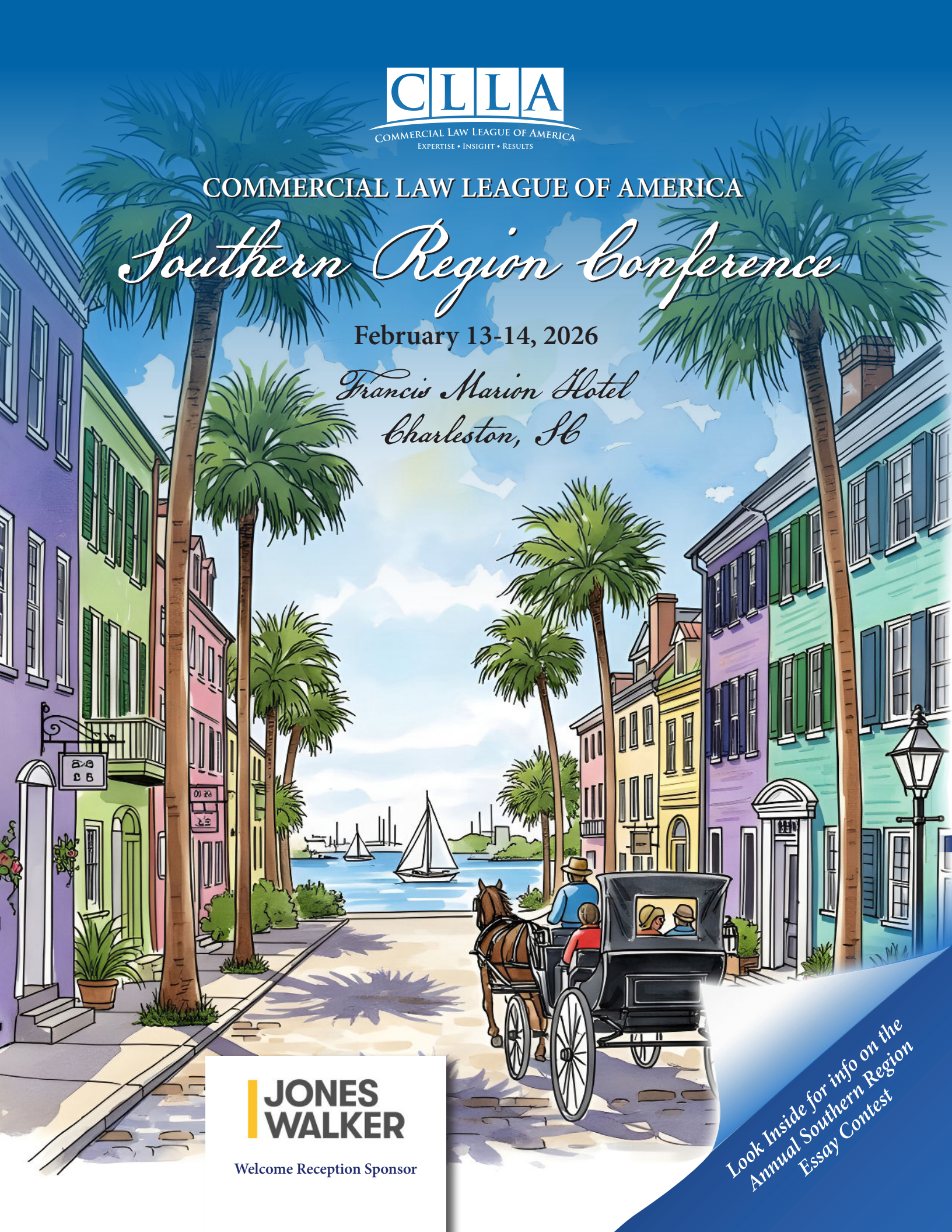
COMMERCIAL LAW LEAGUE OF AMERICA
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COMMERCIAL LAW LEAGUE OF AMERICA

Southern Region Conference

February 13-14, 2026

*Francis Marion Hotel
Charleston, SC*



**JONES
WALKER**

Welcome Reception Sponsor

Look Inside for info on the
Annual Southern Region
Essay Contest

Spend Valentine's Weekend with Colleagues in Historic Charleston



Neeraj Mendiratta

Learning, Networking & Piracy
We are delighted to invite you to join us in beautiful Charleston, South Carolina, for a special program at the Francis Marion Hotel on February 13-14, 2026. The weekend will open with a welcome reception on Friday evening, followed by a full day of thought-provoking sessions on Saturday, including discussions on arbitration, ethics, and the history of justice in America, and even an optional Fort Sumter tour.

As the program falls over Valentine's weekend, it's also the perfect opportunity to enjoy the charm and romance of Charleston while connecting with colleagues.

We look forward to seeing you there!

Southern Region Chair,
Neeraj Mendiratta, KnovaOne, Wellington, FL

Who Should Attend

Professionals who benefit the most are those who attend structured meetings to maximize contact with colleagues from around the US, Canada and abroad. This in-person conference attracts an audience of professionals from various aspects of the commercial law arena interested in forming business connections. The conference site and schedule will allow you to do business and still take advantage of all that Charleston has to offer. Visit www.CLLA.org/events for more details.

Event Location

Francis Marion Hotel

387 King Street, Charleston, SC 29403
Phone: (843) 722-0600

Named for Revolutionary War hero Francis Marion (the "Swamp Fox"), the Francis Marion Hotel became an instant Charleston landmark when it opened in 1924. Rising 12 stories above the Historic District, the hotel offers spectacular views of Charleston's church steeples, historic mansions, and famous harbor, providing easy access to the

Members and Spouse/Guest Registration Fees

Hotel Reservations and Registration Deadline is Wednesday, January 7, 2026.

Registration Fees	Priority* Thru 12/19	Priority Rate Extended Thru 1/7/26
ALL CLLA & IACC Members	\$589	\$739
Spouse/Guest**	\$259	\$259
Non-Members	\$1178	\$1178

Fee Includes:

Friday evening Welcome Reception, Saturday breakfast, educational sessions, breaks, lunch, and networking cocktails.

**Disclaimer: CLE credits ARE available to attendees in qualifying states who register on or before December 19. We cannot guarantee state accreditation after December 19.*

***Please note that business colleagues are not eligible to register under this category.*

Cancellation Policy: Cancellations must be submitted in writing to dawn.federico@clla.org. Registration fee refunds will be granted on the following schedule: Cancellation notices received by Friday, January 16, 2026, will receive 100% refund less \$50 processing fee. Notices received between January 17-31 will receive a 50% refund. No refund will be provided for notices received on or after February 1.

wealth of Charleston's attractions. With continuous restorations throughout the years, the Francis Marion features 235 modern and comfortable guestrooms and suites while preserving their historical architecture. Located downtown on Marion Square, the hotel is within walking distance of the magnificent gardens, house museums, antique shops, local boutiques, restaurants, and nightlife that has made Charleston one of the south's premier cities. With such on-site amenities as The Spa of Charleston, the Swamp Fox Restaurant and Bar, and Starbucks, no one will fault you if you end up staying inside the Francis Marion Hotel for the duration of your stay.

Hotel Reservations

Hotel Reservations - Room cut-off is Wednesday, January 7, 2026.

Make your hotel reservations early... it's Valentine's Day weekend as well as the Southeastern Wildlife Expo! There is a room block associated with this conference at the Francis Marion Hotel.

Online reservations can be made by visiting the link below:
<https://francismarionhotel.ihotelier.com/book/dates-of-stay?groupID=4914793>

Individual reservations can be made by calling (843) 722-0600 or (877) 756-2121 by Wednesday, January 7, 2026. Be sure to mention our **group code: CLLA** to receive the group rate. If you are trying to book dates outside of Thursday-Sunday, you will need to call the hotel directly.

Room Rate: \$299/night, single/double occupancy, plus applicable taxes (currently 14%).

Click the link below for directions to the hotel, airport transportation, a trolley map, and parking fees.
<https://www.francismarionhotel.com/directions-and-map/>

Friday, February 13, 2026

6:00 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.

Welcome Reception

Bridgeview Suite, Room 1203

Sponsored by

**JONES
WALKER**

Saturday, February 14, 2026

8:00 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.

Registration, Breakfast and Welcome

Poinsette Room, Mezzanine Level

9:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.

CLE CEU

The Benefits and Burdens of Utilizing the Arbitration Process

Speakers: John W. Gardner, *The Gardner Law Firm, Brandon, FL*;
John A. Massalon, Esq., *Wills Massalon & Allen, LLC, Charleston, SC*

Our speakers will discuss the benefits and burdens of arbitration from the standpoint of the vendor. As a dispute resolution tool, any vendor is well advised to include an arbitration clause in any commercial contract. First and foremost, the vendor can avoid the cost and delay of litigation. Think of all the time and cost expended writing discovery requests. Depending on the amount in controversy, there can be no discovery in arbitration. Further, the vendor can avoid the David and Goliath aspects of a jury trial. And, class action litigation is not a threat in arbitration.

10:00 a.m. – 10:15 a.m. **Break**

10:15 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.

CLE CEU

Murdaugh Moxie and Living Life on Your Own Terms

Speaker: Eric S. Bland, *Bland Richter, LLP, Lexington, SC*

Our speaker, along with his partner Ronnie Richter, were the lead attorneys for representing most of Alex Murdaugh's financial crime victims and have recovered more than \$13 million for those victims. He was also one of the voices on many of the nightly news programs, daily newspapers, legal periodicals, and magazines that followed the multiple Murdaugh civil and criminal cases for the last four years, including the double murder trial and the post-verdict hearings. Eric and Ronnie represented six of the twelve jurors who rendered a verdict of guilty in the double murder trial when their verdicts were questioned in hearings that took place almost a year after the verdicts of guilt. His book talks a lot about leadership and the Murdaugh case. Eric will share a few stories about fraud and theft that any business owner should be on guard and vigilant to prevent. There are certain necessary checks and balances that should be in place so that the business is not defrauded. His book is one of the top-rated books on Amazon right now in true crime. His partner Ronnie Richter and he have been involved in some other famous media driven cases such as representing Lee Spence who discovered the Hunley Submarine's location, James Brown estate case, Ric Flair's contract negotiations with the WWE and trademark litigation over his sayings "Wooh" and other famous slogans and the Zachary Hammond shooting case.

11:15 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

Break

11:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

CLE

The Blinding of Isaac Woodard and the Awakening of America

Speaker: Hon. Richard M. Gergel, *US District Court, District of South Carolina*

Our speaker will share the story of the blinding of Sgt. Isaac Woodard, a battlefield decorated African American veteran, on February 12, 1946, on the day of his discharge from the United States Army by the police chief of Batesburg, South Carolina and the impact of this widely publicized incident of racial violence on President Harry Truman and United States District Judge J. Waties Waring. This incident inspired President Truman to issue his executive order desegregating the armed forces of the United States and Judge Waring to issue his legendary dissent in *Briggs v. Elliott* (D.S.C. 1951) that became the model for *Brown v. Board of Education* three years later.

2026 Schedule of Events

12:30 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.

GROUP LUNCH AND PRESENTATION

Sponsored by



Pirates and Prosperity: The Impact of Piracy on Charlestowne's Early Economy and Culture

Speaker: Eric Lavender, *Charleston Pirate Tours, Charleston, SC*

Our speaker will discuss the early days of the Charlestowne colony, established in 1670, when piracy played a crucial role in shaping its economy and societal structure. Initially, the colony benefited from its strategic location along the Atlantic coast, which made it a prime target for both legitimate trade and piracy. The bustling port attracted various merchants and traders, and the influx of goods—often acquired through dubious means—stimulated economic growth. Our speaker will talk about one of the most infamous pirates associated with Charleston, Blackbeard.

Charleston Pirate Tours offers numerous daily tours (Charleston Pirate History, Charleston History Highlights, an evening Pirate & Ghost Tour, Daytime Ghost & History Tour, Charleston's only children's tour, Charleston Eccentricities, and virtual tours. Customized, private tours are also available.

2:00 p.m.

OPTIONAL ACTIVITIES ON YOUR OWN

Ft. Sumter Tour

To schedule a tour visit <https://www.fortsumtourtours.com/tours/>.

USS Yorktown Walking Tour

To schedule a tour visit <https://www.bulldogtours.com/>.

7:00 p.m.

NETWORKING at The Swamp Fox Bar

Francis Marion Hotel (included in registration fee)

8:00 p.m. – 10:00 p.m.

DINNER on Your Own

Sponsorship Opportunity: \$200

Get your firm's logo placed on the CLLA Events page, conference eblasts, *NewsWire*, *AGENCYAction* and opening slides at all sessions.

Exclusive Opportunity: \$400

2 Multiple Device Charging Stations Sponsor

In addition to the general sponsorship benefits, this exclusive opportunity will prominently display your company logo at the event charging stations.

Register

To register for this event, visit ccla.org/2025-southern-region-conference/



Commercial Law League of America Southern Region Essay Contest

Essay Information:

The Commercial Law League of America (CLLA) is one of the oldest creditors' rights organizations in the country. Founded in 1895, the CLLA is comprised of attorneys, judges and other legal professionals who work in the areas of commercial litigation, bankruptcy and insolvency matters.

The CLLA Southern District Region will be holding its Southern Region Conference on February 13-14, 2026 in Charleston, SC. In conjunction with this meeting the CLLA Southern Region will be sponsoring a writing contest for law students in the geographical area of where the conference is taking place. The **selected winner** will receive a **\$500.00 cash prize** have their **essay published** in CLLA's publication, the *Commercial Law World* and will be invited to the **Southern Region Conference** for presentation of the award along with the 2nd and 3rd place entrants. The **2nd place** entrant will receive a **\$250.00 cash prize** and the **3rd place** entrant will receive a **\$100.00 cash prize**. The top three entrants will also receive a one year subscription to the *Commercial Law World*, and all entrants will receive a one year complimentary admission to the Commercial Law League of America. Current law students from The University of South Carolina Joseph F. Rice School of Law and the Charleston School of Law ("Law Schools") are invited to submit essays. Contest rules are below. We look forward to reading your submission and to meeting you at the Southern Region Conference!

Judging

The essays will be judged by a subcommittee of the CLLA Southern Region Committee.

For further information, please contact:

Dawn Federico
Director
CLLA
3005 Tollview Drive
Rolling Meadows, IL. 60008
Phone & Fax: 312-240-1400
Email: dawn.federico@clla.org
www.clla.org

Essay Rules

Eligibility

This contest is open to any law student currently enrolled in Law Schools listed in the Essay Information. Only one essay may be submitted by each entrant. No co-authored essays are allowed.

Essay Requirements

All submissions must be prepared originally for this contest and must not be previously published in any format. Each entrant is required to assign to the CLLA all rights, title, and interest in the essay submitted. The assigned rights to all submissions with the exception of the winning essay(s) will be released back to the author.

Essay Topic

The topic of this year's essay is:

"The Benefits and Drawbacks of Arbitration Clauses in Commercial Contracts"

- Essays should be between 1,000-1,200 words exclusive of footnotes.
- The essay must be the entrant's original work
- The essay should be typed, double-spaced on 8/12"x11" paper with 1-inch margins on all sides
- The entry should be accompanied with a cover sheet listing the entrant's name, email address, telephone number and name of law school. No identification other than the title of the entry should appear on the essay itself. To ensure objectivity in the judging process an entry number will be assigned on receipt of the entry and the assigned number will be provided to the entrant
- The essay should be submitted electronically in PDF format with "CLLA Southern Region Essay Competition Submission" on the Subject Line and be sent to **Dawn Federico, Director, CLLA at dawn.federico@clla.org** no later than **January 9, 2026**. No submissions will be accepted after 11:59 pm on that date.



Speaker Bios



Eric Bland

Eric Bland is one of the most recognized legal voices in the country, with a career that spans high-stakes litigation, national media appearances, and the success of his #1 bestselling book, *Anything But Bland: Moxie, Murdaugh, and Making Life Happen on Your Own Terms*. His legal expertise and relentless pursuit of justice have made him a sought-after commentator on networks like *Dateline*, *20/20*, *The Today Show*, *Good Morning America*, *Netflix*, *Court TV*, and *Fox News*. With hundreds of television appearances and more than 3,000 media features in major publications, Eric has cemented his status as a leading voice in law and justice.

Beyond his media presence, Eric is the co-host of *Cup of Justice*, an internationally acclaimed true crime podcast that has captivated audiences since 2022. He also hosts *Good Skill – Don't Wait for Luck, Bet on Yourself*, a high-performance podcast featuring world-class leaders, and *Anything But Bland – Weekly Review of the News*, a hard-hitting legal and media recap series.

A tenacious litigator, Eric and his law partner, Ronnie Richter, have secured over \$235 million in verdicts and settlements for their clients since 1998. His work in the Murdaugh case, one of the most infamous legal scandals in modern history, helped expose the extent of Alex Murdaugh's financial crimes. Eric played a pivotal role in recovering over \$9.4 million for victims, obtaining a \$4.3 million judgment against Murdaugh personally, and securing the largest legal malpractice jury verdict in South Carolina history (\$5.5 million).

Eric's career is built on legal excellence. He is a Super Lawyers honoree (2015–2024) in Professional Liability, one of only two attorneys in South Carolina to receive this recognition. He is also a board-certified diplomat in Legal Malpractice, scoring in the top 2% nationally on the rigorous American Board of Professional Liability Attorneys examination. His expertise has earned him multiple Top Ten Business Litigator rankings and the title of Best Personal Injury Attorney in Lexington County (2025).

A Philadelphia native, Eric graduated summa cum laude from the University of Tampa, ranking #2 in his class. He earned his law degree from the University of South Carolina School of Law, consistently making the Dean's List and graduating Order of the Coif and Wig and Robe, honors reserved for the top 10% of his class. Licensed in South Carolina, Florida, and Pennsylvania, he has successfully practiced at both regional and national levels.

With a career defined by high-profile wins, media dominance, and a commitment to justice, Eric Bland continues to be a force in the legal world. Whether through his books, podcasts, or courtroom victories, his impact is undeniable.



John W. Gardner

John W. Gardner has been licensed to practice law in Florida for more than 35 years. Throughout his career, John has represented several clients in the commercial laundry industry for the enforcement of their service contracts. John has also handled personal injury, workers' compensation, family law, probate and guardianship cases. For fun, John races his sailboat in regattas around Tampa Bay. He has also raced his boat 13 times from St. Petersburg, Florida to Isla Mujeres, Mexico in the Regatta del Sol al Sol. John graduated from Stetson University College of Law in St. Petersburg, Florida and is an alumni of Virginia Tech.



Hon. Richard M. Gergel

Graduate of Duke University and Duke University School of Law. Practiced law in Columbia, South Carolina for 30 years, senior partner in Gergel, Nickles, and Solomon, P.A. Nominated as a federal district judge by President Barack Obama, confirmed by United States Senate by unanimous consent August 2010. Presides in Charleston, South Carolina. Author of multiple books, articles and book chapters on American legal history.



Eric Lavendar

Eric Lavender and his wife, Sabrina own Charleston Pirate Tours. Eric is professional storyteller and certified Charleston Tour Guide. Eric has entertained thousands of adults and children on tours in Charleston and at appearances throughout the country. Captain Bob, the blue & gold macaw often accompanies Eric on tours and at events.

Media appearances include NBC's Today Show, A&E, Lifetime, Travel Channel, USA Today, Hemispheres Magazine, Ghost Adventures, National Public Radio's Performance Today, SCETV, along with local television and newspapers. Eric is currently working on a book about Charles Vane that includes an overview of pirate history in the low country.

Eric has a passion for Lowcountry history and brings that history to life with exciting, historically accurate tours and speaking programs.



John A. Massalon

John A. Massalon, an attorney since 1987, John is a partner with Wills, Massalon and Allen in Charleston. The firm was founded in 1999 and emphasizes civil litigation, mediation and arbitration. His practice includes a focus on commercial litigation pertaining to business disputes, contract matters, land use and preservation issues. John is a certified mediator and arbitrator. He regularly serves as a mediator and arbitrator in matters pending in the State and Federal Courts of South Carolina.

Prior to forming his current firm, he was a partner with Holmes and Thompson and before that John served as law clerk to US District Judge Falcon B. Hawkins and US Magistrate Judge Robert Carr. John earned a BA in History from the College of Charleston in 1984 and J.D. from the University of South Carolina School of Law in 1987. John is a member of numerous legal associations and is also Past President of the Charleston County Bar Association, past Chair of the Dispute Resolution Section of the South Carolina Bar, a former Board member and Vice Chair of the Preservation Society of Charleston. Currently, he is the Vice President of the Mediation and Meeting Center of Charleston Board of Directors and co-teaches a mediation clinic at the Charleston School of Law.

Save-The-Date



The image is a composite of two maps of Charleston, South Carolina. The top map is a detailed street map of downtown Charleston, showing major streets like Calhoun St, George St, and Meeting St. A purple callout bubble with a white pin icon points to the 'Francis Marion Hotel'. A white callout bubble with a black pin icon points to the 'USS Yorktown Walking Tour' location. The bottom map is a map of the Charleston peninsula, showing the harbor and the location of Fort Sumter. A purple callout bubble with a white pin icon points to 'Fort Sumter'. The map also shows the 'Charleston Tour Company' and 'Rainbow Row'.

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