



# Live Legal Opinions

## EX-PROSECUTOR LAYS DOWN THE LAW FOR MSNBC

By Alejandra Navarro ● Photo by Stan Godlewski

The first time Susan Filan '91 delivered an opening statement, she had to convince a jury of not 12, but millions, that Michael Jackson was guilty of child molestation. "The first opening statement I ever gave was on live TV," says Filan, now the senior legal analyst for MSNBC. Dan Abrams had asked Filan, then a prosecutor, to present a mock opening statement on *The Abrams Report*. Connecticut trials, however, don't

incorporate opening statements, so Filan had some homework to do, and less than a day to do it. In preparing the statement, she had to learn the applicable California laws, make it interesting to viewers and whittle it down for a three-minute spot.

"This was television. There was no merciful judge who could give you a few extra minutes," says Filan, who since has perfected clear and concise legal commentary. The hard work paid off with a persuasive opening statement that made her the go-to legal analyst for the 1995 Jackson trial.

Soon after, MSNBC hired her and she's been doling out legal explanations since for high-profile cases that have drawn the public's interest and ire, from the legal battles of Kobe Bryant and Paris Hilton to the murder of JonBenét Ramsey and presumed murder of Natalee Holloway.

Even before *The Abrams Report*, Filan had provided legal commentary for Court TV, now truTV. Producers took notice of her diverse legal expertise during the Michael Skakel trial in Connecticut, when she was a prosecutor in the office of the Chief State's Attorney, who was among the attorneys trying the case. She also had been a criminal defense lawyer in New Haven and Bridgeport, and an assistant state's attorney for the Office of the Chief State's Attorney. Her duties there included prosecuting gang members.

Filan enjoys using her experience to help the public understand the court system, both on TV and in her column at MSNBC.com. "Anytime I can educate viewers, I feel like I'm doing a public service," says Filan, whose father is Connecticut Appellate Judge Frederick A. Freedman. "I'm basically a public servant at heart."

On this day, Filan is on "verdict watch" for the R. Kelly child pornography case. Once the wall of TV screens behind the anchor desk turn red, signaling breaking news, she jumps into her seat in the third-floor studio at 30 Rock in New York City. Facing three monitors that show her, the anchor and footage of Kelly, she recounts the strengths and weaknesses of the case.

"The prosecution couldn't convince the jury that it was R. Kelly and the 13-year-old girl in the tape," she says into the camera. Behind her, staff members work at monitors that snake like

rows of dominoes between the MSNBC and the NBC Nightly News desks on either side of the studio. "It is great to be tried in America, where you are innocent until proven guilty, and the standard of proof is such that it has to be beyond a reasonable doubt," she says.

Filan finds the immediacy of TV intriguing, but also challenging. Limited by time, she focuses her research on what her viewers want and need to know, often talking to reporters or calling sources directly, but admits to being burned by sources on occasion.

"I lost my innocence on the Duke [lacrosse] case," she explains. "I believed at that time that prosecutors did the right thing for the right reasons. I had never encountered, met or heard of one who didn't." She had defended the actions of

head prosecutor Mike Nifong, who eventually was disbarred over his handling of the case, "probably long after I should have. I went on the air and I said so. It stung. I never say I'm always right. I go on the air believing what I know at the time."

Filan tries to stay clear of the gossipy and mean-spirited banter that permeates television, but uses hot topics to shed light on serious legal issues.

It's tragic to see Britney Spears' stumbles as a mother, says Filan, who is raising two adopted children from China. "I like looking at the legal issues presented to a family judge when you have families with these types of problems," she says. "What's the best thing for these children?"

She makes no apologies for the passion she displays for her cases on the air. She says, "It's the fact that I care that makes it interesting to listen to me."

### THE FILAN FILE

- Education – BA, MA in anthropology, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; JD, QU School of Law, 1991.
- Previous jobs – assistant state's attorney (Fairfield-Bridgeport, Conn., Judicial District), 2003-05; assistant state's attorney, Office of the Chief State's Attorney (Rocky Hill, Conn.) 1998-2003; criminal defense attorney, litigation associate 1994-98, private law firms.
- Family – Two daughters, ages 6 and 9

Susan Filan in the MSNBC studio.

# QULAW • ALUMNI

—1981—

**DAVID AVIGDOR** owns his own law firm, the Law Offices of David Avigdor, in New Haven. He is also rabbi of Bikur Cholim Synagogue in New Haven, where he and his wife, Susanne, live.

—1984—

**DAVID DEE** of Avon, CT, is a family support magistrate, appointed by Gov. M. Jodi Rell for a three-year term. He also has a Hartford-based law practice, helping clients with debt relief and family law cases.

**MADONNA SACCO** of Fairfield, CT, is a principal at the law firm of Danaher, Lagnese & Sacco, P.C., which has offices in Hartford and Bridgeport, CT.

—1985—

**LYNNE PANTALENA** is managing director and central division executive for wealth planning at U.S. Trust, Bank of America Private Wealth Management. She lives in Chicago, IL.

—1988—

**SANDRA (PROVORNY) LAX** is a partner in Lax & Truax LLC in Fairfield, CT. She is a member of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers and an adjunct professor at Quinnipiac University School of Law. She and her husband, Martin, live in Fairfield.

—1991—

**CHARLENE (CLAXTON) DIAKITE** is an investigator with the Federal Trade Commission. She lives in Valley Stream, NY.

**EDWARD FOLEY** and **FRANCES (CAPRIO) FOLEY MS '07** celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary in January. They live in East Haven, CT.

**ARTHUR KAFF** is a lieutenant colonel in the Army Reserve. He lives in Bel Air, MD.

—1992—

**ANDREW CAMPANELLI** is a principal at Campanelli & Associates, P.C., in Minola, NY. His practice is in the field of *qui tam*

**PAUL KURZEJA** of Charlotte, NC, is an assistant general counsel for the investment banking group of Bank of America in Charlotte, covering structured products and securitizations.

—1995—

**JAMES BIONDO BA '91, JD '95**, of Fairfield, CT, has been selected by *Connecticut Magazine* as one of the Super Lawyers for 2008. He practices with Rosenblum & Newfield LLC.

**THOMAS ROWE** has entered the 22nd District state Senate race running on the Republican ticket. He is a five-term state representative in Trumbull, CT, where he lives with his wife, Michelle, and children, Joseph, James and Gemma.

—1997—

**CYNTHIA DIPRETA** joined Ryan, Ryan, Johnson & Deluca, LLP's Stamford office as counsel. She practices in the areas of personal injury litigation and general liability. She serves on the litigation committee of the Regional Bar Association, and is president of the Young Lawyers Stamford/Norwalk unit. She lives in Greenwich, CT.

**LOUISE (DICOCO) BEAUTON** and her husband, **GERALD BEAUTON BS '95**, announce the birth of a son, Andrew James, on June 4, 2007. The family lives in Guilford, CT.

**CHRISTA DOMMERS** is a partner in the law firm of Seyfarth Shaw LLP in Washington, DC, practicing in the area of commercial real estate. She is admitted to the state Bars of New York, Connecticut and the District of Columbia. Christa is a member of the American Bar Association and Commercial Real Estate Women. She lives in Germantown, MD.

**Charlene (Claxton) Diakite '91 is an investigator with the Federal Trade Commission.**

—1987—

**DEIRDRE (O'CONNOR) MARTINI**, of Fairfield, CT, joined Wachovia Capital Finance in New York as a managing director focusing on business development for the restructuring sector in the Northeast. She is an adjunct professor of law at St. John's University in Queens, New York.

cases under federal, state and local false claims acts. He lives in Merrick, NY.

**CAROLYN FABBRI** of West Hartford, CT, has been appointed by Gov. M. Jodi Rell to the board of trustees of the Connecticut Community Colleges. She is also the senior vice president for legal affairs and the general counsel at the Eastern Connecticut Health Network Inc. in Manchester, CT.

# Edward Cerasia II '91

Big Apple lawyer has small-town values

By Christine Pakkala

**M**idtown Manhattan is a far cry from Canastota, N.Y., population 5,000, where Edward Cerasia II grew up.

Nevertheless, Cerasia '91 applies the lessons he learned there to the practice of law: work hard and treat your adversaries fairly. It has paid off. His career includes partnerships at three big-name firms: Seyfarth Shaw, Proskauer Rose and now Morgan, Lewis & Bockius.

Cerasia showed his penchant for hard work early in his career. In 1994, as only a third-year associate, Cerasia taught a class as an adjunct professor at the Quinnipiac School of Law on employment discrimination law and wrote what would become an oft-cited 1994 article, "Harris v. Forklift Systems Inc.: An Objective Standard, but Whose Perspective?" The article broke new ground by examining the "reasonable person" standard for determining a hostile environment in a sexual harassment case.

Cerasia drafted the article at night and on weekends, with the support of his wife, Lisa, who also is a lawyer. They have two sons, James, 12 and Patrick, 10.

Cerasia joined Morgan Lewis in February 2007. He was attracted by the firm's nationwide presence because "my work is national in scope, particularly class action suits, and clients want to hire lawyers who have a footprint around the nation."

Cerasia represents corporate clients against claims of discrimination, harassment and retaliation. In December 2004, for example, he had a jury trial in federal court in Maryland. The plaintiff, a financial representative of an insurance company, alleged that an officer of the company had sexually harassed her. The jury returned a verdict for Cerasia's client.

"Here was someone who had had an impeccable career for 25 years. In my view, the corporate officer was falsely accused ... so it was gratifying to clear his and the company's name."

In another memorable case, the Equal Opportunity Employment Commission had sued Cerasia's client, an airline services company. During the discovery portion of that lawsuit, Cerasia and his client learned about a pre-determination letter that the EEOC investigator had prepared during the mandatory agency investigation stage. The letter stated there was no violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act because the job applicant who had filed the EEOC charge against Cerasia's client was asked for medical information after he received a real job offer, as defined by the ADA.

Without explanation, the investigator reversed her initial conclusion, and the EEOC then determined there was reasonable cause to believe that Cerasia's client violated the ADA. Thereafter, the EEOC filed suit against the company. When



Cerasia learned about the investigator's initial and subsequent decisions during discovery, he asked for the deposition of the investigator, but the EEOC refused, citing a government deliberative process privilege.

But Cerasia convinced the judge otherwise. Using knowledge he learned in an evidence class, Cerasia argued that the EEOC's letter and testimony were not protected by privilege because they were deemed to be an admission of a party, and lawyers are entitled to examine parties about admissions.

Not only did the Rhode Island judge order the EEOC investigator to submit to a deposition, but he ordered the deposition of an EEOC trial lawyer who advised the investigator. The deposition was supervised by the judge's law clerks to ensure the EEOC did not obstruct testimony.

Cerasia credits his success in part to his professors' practical approach. "They teach you to think creatively about solutions to problems—to think like a lawyer, not like a law student."

Cerasia has endowed a School of Law scholarship that begins awarding in the fall. The gesture stems from another small-town value, showing gratitude. "I've always believed in giving back. This is my way of saying thanks."

# QU<sup>L</sup>LAW • ALUMNI

**ANDREW GRUMET** has joined Schiff Hardin LLP as counsel in the Private Clients Trusts and Estates Group. He lives in East Brunswick, NJ.

**JOHN MEUSER BA '91, JD '97**, is co-founder and senior vice president/COO of Baby Banquet, LLC located in Houston, TX, where he lives with his wife, Elizabeth, and daughter, Zoe.

## —1998—

**DANIEL ADAMS** of South Setauket, NY, has been named Southampton town attorney. His term began March 31, 2008, and ends Dec. 31, 2009.

**RANDY CRESWELL** is a shareholder and director of Perkins Thompson, in Portland, ME, where he lives. He practices in the area of bankruptcy and creditors' and debtors' rights. He is president of the Cumberland County Bar Association and a member of the American Bankruptcy Institute.

**SUZANNE M. FITZGERALD** is vice president and senior private client adviser with Wilmington Trust, Wilmington, DE, in its wealth advisory services group.

**SUSAN MUNGAVIN** is the senior assistant public defender at Dutchess County in Poughkeepsie, NY. She lives in Wappingers Falls, NY.

**MATTHEW SCONZIANO** of New Canaan, CT, is a partner in the law firm of Heidell, Pittoni, Murphy & Bach LLP in Stamford, CT, where he practices in the area of defense of medical malpractice claims.

## —2000—

**PETER CONNOR** is an associate general counsel with UnitedHealth Group in Falls Church, VA, where he lives.

**MELISSA GILLIS** joined the firm of Bacon Wilson, P.C., in Springfield, MA, practicing real estate and family law. She lives in Feeding Hills, MA, with her family.

**EARL ORMOND** joined Pepe & Hazard LLP's Fairfield office as an associate in commercial litigation. He lives in Trumbull, CT.

**J. STACEY YARBROUGH** and **BRIAN CROUCH BS '96** announce the birth of a daughter, Isabella Yarbrough Crouch, on Nov. 16, 2007. Stacey works for the law

offices of Hersh & Crockett, LLC, in Hartford. The family lives in North Haven, CT.

## —2002—

**ANGELA (RUGGIERO) RUBANO** and her husband, Louis, announce the birth of a son, Samuel Mark, on March 2, 2008. He joins older sister, Lucia. The family lives in Cheshire, CT.

**DAWN VIGUE** owns her own law firm, Acorn Law, in West Warwick, RI, where she lives with her four children:

## JOIN US FOR THESE EVENTS

- **Sept. 24** — School of Law Class of 1988 20th Reunion Alumni Reception, 6:30–8:30 p.m., School of Law Center, featuring cocktail party and tours of the school by current students.\*
- **Sept. 25-27 & Oct. 3-4** — Certificate Mediation Training, 40-hour training course, co-sponsored by the Labor Education Center at the University of Connecticut College of Continuing Studies, led by William Logue and Paddy Moore, experienced mediators and trainers. Registration form in brochure at: <http://law.quinnipiac.edu/x130.xml>
- **Oct. 7** — Moot Court Honor Society Final Bench, 6:30 p.m., Grand Courtroom.
- **Oct. 8** — Hartford Area Law Alumni Reception, 6–8 p.m., The Hartford Club, sponsored by Sinoway, McEnery & Messey P.C.
- **Oct. 13, Nov. 3 & Dec. 3** — Quinnipiac-Yale Dispute Resolution Workshop series begins with Michael Wheeler, Harvard Business School, who will discuss emotions in negotiation. On Nov. 3, Stephen Choi, NYU Law School, and Jill Fisch, University of Pennsylvania Law School, will discuss research on lawyers as arbitrators. On Dec. 3, Lawrence Susskind, MIT, will discuss consensus building in public policy disputes. All workshops held at the Yale Law School, 4 p.m. For more information, call 203-582-3246.
- **Oct. 23** — Alumni Networking Career Night, 5:30 p.m., School of Law lobby.
- **Nov. 19** — Law Alumni Reception and Bar Results Party, 6–8 p.m. Union League Cafe, New Haven, sponsored by Sinoway, McEnery & Messey P.C.

\*Register online at [www.quinnipiac.edu/events.xml](http://www.quinnipiac.edu/events.xml)

Christopher, Jeremy, Sarah and Alexander. The practice areas include bankruptcy and criminal defense work.

## —2003—

**ELIZABETH A. GALLETTA** joined the Michaud-Duffy Group, LLP, as counsel. She practices patent prosecution, trademark prosecution and intellectual property protection. She lives in Middletown, CT.

**KRISTIN KRAIZA** joined Ryan, Ryan, Johnson & Deluca, LLP, practicing in the areas of insurance, risk management, professional malpractice, product liability, medical malpractice, construction, transportation and intellectual property litigation. She lives in Stamford, CT.

## —2004—

**CHRISTINE PLOURDE** of Bristol, CT, is president of the New Britain Bar Association. She is a member of the tort and general litigation practice group at Halloran & Sage, LLP, and practices in the areas of health care professional liability, police defense, municipal law and governmental immunity.

## —2005—

**COURTNEY BARGER** of Meriden, CT, joined Kelly Law Registry in Hartford as placement director.

**DONALD DINSMORE** of Morristown, NJ, is a staff attorney at Covenant House, and partnering with the Community Law Clinic at Rutgers to provide legal services to homeless youth.

**JENNIFER EL-AZHARI** and her husband, Jawed, announce the birth of a daughter, Safiya, on Aug. 20, 2007. She is an assistant city manager in Norwich, CT. The family lives in East Lyme, CT.

**MELANIE HASLAM** married Rob Kolek in September 2007. She is an associate with Gibson & Behman, P.C. in Middletown, CT. **MEGAN (DAMATO) RAMSEY '05** was a bridesmaid. The couple lives in East Haddam, CT.

## DEAR LAW ALUMNI

The 2007-08 school year has come to a close, and it was quite successful. The School of Law has moved up eight spots in the *U.S. News & World Report* rankings, and the current law students continue to represent the law school well in a number of regional and national competitions. This year the students won our first national championship for the Representation in Mediation Competition in Seattle, Wash.



We also had a successful year of alumni support and participation. We had many well-attended events in the fall followed by two spring events in New York City, one of which was held jointly with the School of Business. Alumni enjoyed reconnecting and hearing about the many exciting changes that have taken place at the School of Law as well as the synergies and collaborative efforts that the deans of both schools are working on.

We are busy planning alumni events for the fall in Hartford and New Haven and we'll be sending information to the class of '88 about your reunion Sept. 24 here on campus. I hope to see you at one event or another.

I invite you to contact me or Kristen Mengold, director of law school development & alumni affairs, at 203-582-3403 or [kristen.mengold@quinnipiac.edu](mailto:kristen.mengold@quinnipiac.edu), with your news, suggestions and ideas.

I look forward to seeing you at an event this year! And when Quinnipiac University School of Law calls, please continue to say YES and help in whatever way you can.

Sincerely,  
Michael W. Dunn '93  
President, Executive Board, Quinnipiac University School of Law Alumni Association

## —2006—

**TAMARAH EVANKO** is the owner of Evanko & Associates located in New Haven, where she lives.

**KATHERINE HENRY** is legal counsel at Lafarge North America in Herndon, VA. She handles mergers and acquisitions, corporate procurement, employment and environmental law issues, and managing outside counsel on various litigation.

**MELISSA ANN SCHMEDLIN** married Michael Paul Miller in June 2007. She is a lawyer in New Haven. The couple lives in Stratford, CT.

## —2007—

**DEBBIE ALBRECHT BA '03, JD '07**, is an associate with Murtha Cullina LLP, in the energy and water practice groups in Hartford, CT. She lives in Middletown, CT.

**JENNIFER WALTERS** of Branford, CT joined the Law Office of Charles L. Kurmay in Stratford, CT, as an associate. She practices in the areas of real estate, estate planning, personal injury, probate and criminal defense.

**HUNTER TZOVARRAS** works at the Disability Rights Center of Maine. He lives in Bangor, ME.

# QULAW • ALUMNI

## Need a job? Have a job? Post it with us

By Deborah Daddio

The hiring market for new law graduates is at its highest level in 20 years, approaching 92 percent nationally for all 2007 graduates whose employment status was known. Quinnipiac University School of Law's average was a bit higher.



Top-grossing law firms tracked by *The American Lawyer* delivered five consecutive years of better-than-average growth in both revenue per lawyer and profits per partner, key indicators of law firm financial success. And yet, a certain malaise permeates these gains—a sense of foreboding that this unprecedented economic run may be over. (See “Lessons of the AmLaw: Is the Golden Age Over?” A. Press & J. O’Connor, *The American Lawyer*, May 2008, Vol. 30, No. 5, p. 131).

While the collapse of the subprime mortgage market continues to affect the U.S. economy, the legal economy is not immune from its consequences. Deal making is down, firm mergers and office closures are increasingly prevalent, and law firms were carefully monitoring the size of their summer associate classes to ensure they would have a place for these students the following year.

Not surprisingly, we have seen a number of Quinnipiac School of Law alumni in the Office

of Career Services who have been laid off because of lack of work or are seeking a new line of work because the practice in which they worked was heavily tied to real estate. They run the gamut from newly admitted lawyers practicing for under a year to seasoned lawyers out of law school for more than 20 years.

There are many reasons besides imminent unemployment that motivate QUSL alumni to seek our services. Sometimes they are attempting to rejoin the workforce after a time out, whether it be military service, raising a family, or caring for an elderly parent. Some may have earned a law degree but never practiced, or want to reinvent themselves in a non-traditional career after many years of private practice. Other alumni are looking to expand their full-time staff, or just need a law student to conduct research on a complex case. Career Services has the resources to accommodate both commonplace and unique needs.

Our Career Center web site, <http://law.quinnipiac.edu/careerservices.xml>, is accessible to alumni as well as students. It can be used to post jobs, search for jobs, or access the document library. Personalized services available to alumni include individual career counseling, resume and cover letter review and mock interviews. For those who seek to get involved with students or connect with other alumni, we are in the process of developing a new alumni-student mentor database.

Stacey Wiley, assistant dean for student affairs, has been working on a new, online alumni mentoring program that will enable alumni to register to become mentors to both current students and other alumni (or to be a mentee).

“Many alumni have valuable information to share about their career and job search techniques. Our mentoring program will allow alumni to determine how many mentees contact them per month, and how they prefer to be contacted,” Wiley said.

If your email is in our database, look for an email in August about the mentoring program. If you would like to receive this mentoring email but aren’t sure whether you’re in the law school’s database, please contact Kristen Mengold, director of development and alumni affairs, School of Law, at 203-582-3403.

*Deborah Daddio is director of career services for the School of Law. Contact her at 203-582-3267 or [deborah.daddio@quinnipiac.edu](mailto:deborah.daddio@quinnipiac.edu)*

### WHAT'S NEW WITH YOU?

Send us a class note online at [www.quinnipiac.edu/qulawnet.xml](http://www.quinnipiac.edu/qulawnet.xml) or fill out the form below.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Class year \_\_\_\_\_

Home address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Home phone \_\_\_\_\_

Work phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email address \_\_\_\_\_

News to share with other alumni \_\_\_\_\_

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Please mail or fax this form to:  
Alumni Notes, LW-DEV  
Quinnipiac University School of Law  
275 Mount Carmel Avenue  
Hamden, CT 06518-1908  
Fax: 203-582-4108