

# Women in Real Estate

FEATURING KATHLEEN DEEGAN DICKSON, JUDY SIMONCIC, ANDREA TSOUKALAS AND KATHRYN BURNS

## Four women attorneys of Forchelli, Curto, Deegan, Schwartz, Mineo, & Terrana

Kathleen Deegan Dickson



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### What is your biggest leadership challenge, other than the “glass ceiling”?

My biggest leadership challenge as one of the few woman partners in the largest zoning and real estate law firm on Long Island, is to be a good role model and provide effective mentoring to the young women attorneys in my firm. I believe that it is essential for me to help other women realize their potential and to ensure that there is no glass ceiling here at Forchelli Curto Deegan. Fortunately, I am lucky to have partners who appreciate and reward talent, skill and accomplishment, regardless of gender, and we have been able to attract some real rising stars in the legal profession. I try to lead by example and use the skills I've learned over my twenty-plus years in practice to teach these talented women how to effectively attract new clients and be a rainmaker in a male-dominated profession. Part of the challenge is helping them to recognize that women often approach marketing and networking differently than men do, and teaching them to embrace these differences in order to effectively attract new business. I think it is important to recognize that, by supporting our female colleagues in other fields as well, we can create a strong network of referral sources outside of the traditional sources we tend to rely on for business.

Deegan Dickson concentrates her practice in the areas of real estate development matters, and, in particular, land use and zoning law. She has an extensive track record of success with and before municipal boards and agencies on significant projects throughout Long Island. Perhaps more importantly, she has a reputation for effectiveness and integrity in the pre-hearing meetings and outreach to municipal planning staffs and civic groups that are now a must in Long Island's current development climate. She is former counsel to the city of Glen Cove planning and Zoning Boards, and currently represents many developers, property owners, corporations and private individuals in all types of matters involving real property transactions, zoning and land use.

She is a member of WEDLI (Women Economic Developers of Long Island), the Nassau County Catholic Lawyer's Guild, the New York Democratic Lawyers Council, the Long Island Builders Institute (LIBI) and the Hauppauge Industrial Association (HIA). Deegan Dickson also serves as the chairperson of the board of All Saints Regional School, as well as on the advisory council of the North Shore University Hospital at Glen Cove, and the board of Tomorrow's Hope Foundation.

She was named one of Long Island's 50 Most Influential Women by the Long Island Business News and a New York Super Lawyer.

Judy Lynn Simoncic



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### How do you or your firm use social media?

I have found that using LinkedIn has become a new and successful way to connect with other professionals. Since LinkedIn is real-time, I get up-to-the-minute information on industry news, job updates, and other insights that help me create new business opportunities. In this day and age, I find that more and more clients are researching attorneys Online and LinkedIn gives potential clients an additional tool to find out more about me and my areas of practice beyond the firm's website and other media outlets.

### What project/deal or transaction was the “game changer” in the advancement of your career?

As a young attorney just starting out in the practice of land use and zoning, I think the project that was the “game changer” in the advancement of my career was being fortunate enough to have played a key role in the redevelopment of the former Roosevelt Raceway property in the Town of Hempstead on Long Island. For over 48 years, Roosevelt Raceway was the home of a ½ mile harness racing track. The closure and redevelopment of this property involved complex zoning, environmental and community issues. Ultimately, the Town adopted its first Planned Unit Development District which allowed for the redevelopment of this 175 acre parcel to mixed uses of affordable and senior housing, shopping, restaurants and recreational. As the first PUD District in the Town, it has become one of the central economic hubs in Nassau County and still retains the Roosevelt legacy with its name being “Roosevelt Center.”

Simoncic concentrates her practice in the areas of zoning, land use, environmental, municipal, and real estate law. She represents national franchises, Fortune 500 companies, national corporations, large real estate development companies as well as individual real estate developers in the development of both residential and commercial properties throughout Nassau and Suffolk Counties.

She regularly appears on behalf of her clients before municipal boards on a diversity of zoning applications such as variances, special use permits, change of zones, site plan approval, and major and minor subdivisions. She has secured zoning approvals for senior housing projects, retail and office complexes, multiple dwelling projects, planned unit developments, assisted living facilities, equestrian facilities, public storage facilities, fitness clubs, public utility facilities, restaurant franchises, among others.

Simoncic is a member of the Long Island Real Estate Group (LIREG).

Andrea Tsoukalas



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### What do you consider to be the most successful way to increase referrals?

The most successful way to increase referrals is to talk about what you do to as many people as you can reach. I enjoy explaining what I do as a land use attorney because I can talk about specific projects in a particular community and that usually triggers more questions about the extent of my work. Most people are surprised to hear that I handle a broad scope of cases to include variances and site plan review for single-family residences; special use permits for restaurants, gas stations, religious institutions and other conditional uses; minor and major subdivision applications; variances and site plan approvals for malls and other well known upscale shopping centers, luxury automobile dealerships and first class hotels. What I like best about my job is that I am part of a creative and legal process that positively impacts local businesses and the community at large. That message is conveyed to everyone who can potentially refer me to a new client.

### What is the BEST advice you have ever received?

The best career advice I have received was from my mentor and friend Peter Mineo, Esq. When I first started working for the firm eight years ago, he gave me an artist's eraser set. He explained that no matter how good we are at what we do, we all make mistakes. It was a lesson in humility and perseverance.

Tsoukalas is a partner at the firm and concentrates her practice in zoning, land use, environmental and municipal law matters. Tsoukalas represents a wide variety of clients including national corporate chains, local developers and small business owners in the development of commercial and residential properties. Tsoukalas also has substantial experience in appellate practice and civil litigation. She litigates contract and real estate claims, corporate and partnership disputes, and regulatory claims arising out of building and zoning code violations.

Tsoukalas is general counsel to the Long Island Gasoline Retailers Association, a nationally recognized non-profit trade association with over 600 members. She also serves as counsel to the Village of Kensington Board of Trustees, Zoning Board of Appeals and Architectural Review Board.

Tsoukalas has published articles in *GlobeSt.com*, the online edition of *Real Estate New York* and the *New York Real Estate Journal*. Andrea Tsoukalas was honored by Long Island Business News with its “40 Under 40” award (2012). She was listed by the same publication as a “Who's Who in Women in Professional Service.”

Kathryn Sammon Burns



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### What is the most daring thing you've done for your career? How did it turn out for you?

When I was first hired as an associate at Forchelli, Curto, Deegan, Schwartz, Mineo & Terrana, LLP, it was for their transactional department. However, I decided early on in my career that I wanted to change my area of practice from transactional real estate to foreclosures and real estate/banking litigation. Without a road map, and unsure of how to make that happen (and being cognizant that if it did not work out, I had no back-up plan), I approached the partner in charge of the foreclosure group, expressed my interest in that area of law, and asked for a chance to prove myself. It was a big risk. I was new, I was young, and it could have backfired. However, the risk paid off. Now I am an important part of one of the fastest growing practice areas at a wonderful firm. I love what I do, and I find that every day is exciting and personally rewarding. It could not have worked out better.

Sammon Burns is an associate, concentrating her practice in the areas of real estate and banking litigation, residential and commercial foreclosures, workouts, debtor and creditor rights, bankruptcy and corporate law. Burns primarily counsels institutional and private lenders, mortgage loan servicers, and individuals in the various aspects of foreclosure and collection law, and represents clients in real estate and banking litigation, including foreclosures, lender liability claims, lien priority disputes, title issues, mortgage contract disputes, usury claims, surplus money proceedings, and settlement negotiations.

### NY Spotlight

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P.O. Box 55, Accord, MA 02018  
781-878-4540, Fax 781-871-1853  
[www.nyrej.com](http://www.nyrej.com)



**Publisher**  
Kristine Wolf x245  
[kwolf@nyrej.com](mailto:kwolf@nyrej.com)



**Editor**  
Rachel Rugman x253  
[rugman@nyrej.com](mailto:rugman@nyrej.com)

**Chairman of the Board**  
Roland G. Hopkins, Sr.