



26 Declaration of Candidacy - Second Vice President MARIO DELANO

Formstack Submission For: **2026 DRI Declaration of Candidacy**

Position Sought:

Second Vice President

If you have declared your candidacy for Second Vice President and are not the successful candidate, will you consider the Secretary - Treasurer Officer position?:

Yes

Name:

MARIO DELANO

Firm/Company:

Campbell, Foley, Delano & Adams, Esqs

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Wall Township, NJ 07719

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How long, in years, have you been a member of DRI?:

12

Areas of Practice:

Insurance Litigation, Personal Injury, Employment Discrimination and Worker's Compensation.

Campbell, Foley, Delano and Adams, LLC, Wall, NJ - Managing Partner - 2007 to present;

Campbell, Foley, Lee, Murphy and Cernigliaro, PC, Asbury Park, NJ - Partner 2001 to 2007;

Please provide your employment history in chronological order beginning with the current position.:

Campbell, Foley, Lee, Murphy and Cernigliaro, PC, Asbury Park, NJ- Associate 1992 to 2000;

Peregrine White Corporation, NY, NY - Corporate Controller 1987 to 1989;

Foreston Development Corporation, NY, NY - Assistant Corporate Controller 1986 to 1987;

Amstar Corporation, NY, NY - Staff Accountant 1985 to 1986;

Please describe your previous involvement in DRI, including but not limited to, leadership positions held, projects contributed to, committee memberships, presentations given, and written materials authored. Special accomplishments should also be noted.:

Board Positions

National Director 2023 to present
- Board Liaison to Litigation Skills Committee, 2024 to present
- Board Liaison to Worker's Compensation Committee, 2024 to present
- Board Liaison to Construction Committee, 2023 to 2024
- SLDO Relationship Committee Chair, 2025 to present
- SLDO Relationship Committee Vice-Chair, 2024 to 2025
- SLDO Relationship Committee Member, 2023 to 2024

- Audit Committee Member, 2023 to present
- DRI for Life Committee Member, 2023 to present

Committee Positions/Memberships

- Law Practice Management Chair, 2021 to 2023
- Law Practice Management Vice Chair, 2019 to 2021
- Law Practice Management Publications Chair 2017 to 2019
- Law Practice Management Steering Committee 2014 to present
- Litigation Skills
- Worker's Compensation Committee
- ADR Committee

Other DRI Positions

- New Jersey State Representative, 2016 to 2018

Presentations

- Atlantic/North Central Regional Meeting - The Importance of Leadership Development and Succession Planning (panel member) - February 2024
- Managing Partners and Law Firm Leadership Conference - What Keeps You Up at Night? - November 2023
- Managing Partners and Law Firm Leadership Conference - Nuts and Bolt: What the Heck is Going on Here (panel member) - August 2021
- Annual Meeting (remote) - Protecting Our Professionals; Ethical Tips for Overall Well-Being (panel moderator) October 2020
- Annual Meeting (SLC Session) - Ethics and Law Practice Management: A Primer on Management for Non-Partners (panel member) October 2019
- Annual Meeting (SLC Session) - The Challenges of Managing Multiple Law Firm Locations and Remote Workers

(panel member) October 2016

Articles Written

- For the Defense - Top 10 Lessons from the Lockdown (co-author) - June 2020
- It's Your Business - Small Law Firms. Striking a Balance Between Business and Personal Relationships Within the Office - March 2019
- For the Defense - The Pressure and Stress of Law Firm Leadership and Strategies for Coping (co-author) - October 2018

New Jersey Defense Association 1993 to present; President 2014-2015; Board of Directors 2012 to present
ADTA 2020 to present
Monmouth Bar Association 1993 to present;
Municipal Court Committee Co-Chair 2013 to 2014, Worker's Compensation Committee Co- Chair 2021 to present
New Jersey District IX Ethics Committee - Fee Arbitration Panel Member
New Jersey State Bar Association Member 2023 to present
Middlesex County Bar Association 2010 to present
Certified Mediator 2024 to present
Yearly presentations to multiple insurance carriers on current litigation topics and trends 1995 to present
Instructor at New Jersey Defense Association Trial College various years from 2001 to 2019

List any significant leadership commitment and involvement within the legal field other than DRI, including but not limited to other legal organizations. :

Why do you wish to join the board of directors or become an officer and what skills, abilities and attributes identified in the Board of Director/Officer Competencies can you bring to the role?:

DRI means an incredible amount to me. Not just professionally, but personally. I became active right after the 2014 Leadership Conference which I attended as the President-Elect for our SLDO. While I had previously attended one or two DRI events, ongoing participation was discouraged by my firm when management concluded that participation had not resulted in new referrals. However, at the 2014 Leadership Conference, attending on behalf of the state organization I represented, I learned the magic of connection. I walked into the room and saw a crowd of people celebrating the mere fact that they were together again, even though they had not seen each other for months. I didn't fully understand what was happening, but I liked it. Now I get it. I have had the great fortune of making some amazing friends in this organization. People for whom I would do anything and who would for anything for me. Collaborators, not competitors. I love that I often cannot decide which of my many friends in the room to hug first. I want every DRI member to feel that! Business relationships have value, but DRI relationships surpass mere business: they are personal and lasting. I want to be an officer of DRI because I want to ensure that all our members know that feeling, that all our members find a home which allows them to make meaningful personal connections which allow them to thrive in our very difficult business.

What I bring to the table is pretty simple, but I believe I can make a significant contribution to the organization: (1) I have experienced being part of DRI on both sides, SLC and SLDO. I know where the fault lines

between the two perspectives can appear, and I understand that erasing/minimizing those lines will benefit all; (2) prior to being an attorney, my background was in accounting, which will allow me to assist the Officers in fully understanding DRI finances; and (3) I also spent 20 years running one of the top five outdoor festivals in New Jersey, with the result that I have an ease with organizational issues, am generally unflappable, and I understand the importance of the members who are served by leadership.

As a former chair of an SLC and, for the last three years, the board liaison to multiple SLCs, I have seen firsthand what it takes to keep committees vibrant and to keep committee members involved. As a former state representative, and current chair of the SLDO relationship committee, I have also gained insight into how DRI and the state organizations can work together to assure mutual success. More importantly, I believe that we have to continue to communicate and learn from one another.

As noted above, my experience in running an outdoor festival which draws about 100,000 in annual attendance has provided invaluable lessons about how to treat and work with people from all walks of life. Amazingly, there is not much difference between responding to the complaints of a young person who doesn't have enough tickets to take another ride on the merry-go-round and a corporate executive who had walked a long distance because of the scarcity of parking. Maybe that's a little bit of an exaggeration, but you get the point:

leaders often do not interact with people on their best behavior, and while not all problems can be easily solved, sometimes solutions develop when there is empathy and good will.

Finally, I believe that my accounting experience complements my people skills. Like most other organizations, DRI officers must assure that the numbers work in order to allow for stability and growth. This is part of implementing a long term strategy is in place to keep the organization advancing forward long after individual officers have moved into retirement.

Officer Competencies

Management:

I have been the managing partner at my current firm for about 19 years. This has been quite an experience, learning how to manage both attorneys and support staff. The profession has undergone many changes in that time: reduction in administrative personnel; moving from dictation supported by staff to voice recognition software; adapting to electronic billing; utilizing case management software from a hand-held device. Many of us are creatures of habit. Getting people to buy into something new takes a leader who shows confidence in the new system, shows that they are willing to help and teach people the new way of doing things, who can gently put people back on course when they are struggling and who knows how to give accolades in such a way that the person receiving it feel special without having anyone else feel left out. It has taken me a long time to hone that management style, but it was well worth it.

Leadership/Conflict Resolution/Team Orientation:

I have had many leadership roles over the years aside from those in DRI, and in many of them I have had to use all three of these competencies, often at the same time. Everything from being a Cub Scout leader to the president of an Italian American Association. Through those positions, I have learned how to get people to work together even when they don't really care for one another (I am sorry to say I am not referring to the Cub Scouts). As the chair of a large festival, it was important to make sure that as many volunteers as possible came out to help and that each one of them was assigned an important role. Often volunteers do not get assigned the role that they prefer, and persuading them to continue to work with those who did get the "preferred" position is an art form. I am proud of the fact that I was able to keep conflicts between volunteers to a minimum and to engage them sufficiently to keep them coming back year after year.

Each role I have undertaken in every organization, including DRI, has been a learning experience. But I am not done learning! The most important things I have learned so far? Lead by action, not words. Do not dismiss someone else's opinion/feelings even if you disagree with them.

Public Speaking:

Anyone who knows me knows how much I love to entertain. Not just throwing a dinner party as entertainment (although I do like that as well), but engaging others with humor and empathy in all situations. Whether it be standing in front of a jury

of 8, in front of a room of 100 or on stage at an event with 1000, I feel very comfortable. I firmly believe that if people enjoy themselves, they are more likely to want to be a part of a project or an organization. I want to do my bit to make sure everyone who attends a DRI event not only gets something valuable from it but also has a great time.

What suggestions would you make to move the organization forward?:

Let me start by saying these are only suggestions to make things a little better, not because I believe any part of DRI is broken.

I would like to see strengthening of the relationships between our organization and the SLDOs. This is a delicate balance, because we are all independent of one another, but at the same time working toward a common goal. We do not want to create a situation where it seems that one is trying to take over another. I would like to have more opportunities for our members to interact with members of SLDOs. Just getting together in the same place, live or virtual, can go a long way to forging relationships which would help increase both entities' memberships and participation.

Initiate new programs which will help keep members engaged. We do good job assigning a more seasoned member to show first time attendees around at the annual meeting. We should do a little more, create DRI "ambassadors". I would like to see us try to identify people who are attending the annual meeting, or a seminar, who are going to be there alone. Have someone reach out for them so when they walk into

the room, there will be at least one familiar face. The dine arounds are a fabulous idea and should continue forever (as far as I am concerned), but they are not enough.

I would propose separating the Secretary position from the Treasurer position, and make the Treasurer a multi year appointment. Given that the financial health of the organization is paramount, continuity in the Treasurer position will only help us continue in the same direction, when things are good. Consequently, if things begin to go off course a single person who has been there for multiple years will know something is amiss before anyone else.

Enhance the DRI for Life Committee and add a mental health component to the physical activity portion that we already have. At some portion of the day during annual meeting perhaps we can have a mental health professional who is also known as a dynamic speaker (but not just as a motivational speaker) speak to us about preventing and/or identifying mental health problems before they happen.

Describe one transformational/defining experience in your professional life you have been involved with and what you learned from that experience. :

This is not an easy one to discuss.

Earlier in my career I worked frequently with a court reporter who quickly became one of my favorite people. Henry (not his real name) was not just a good and accurate stenographer, but he was also one of the nicest people in his profession. He was always early for a deposition, and he had a never-ending supply of short sleeve shirts and ties, which never failed to be neatly pressed, as if he had ironed them right before he put them on.

Like me, he had a passion for baseball. He was an avid reader, and each time he finished a new book about baseball, he would pass it on to me. After I finished a deposition, we would talk about baseball (or our other shared passion, food) before I would get into dictating my summary to him. We had worked together for several years, but one day he was a little off. He got into a spat with a witness, and neither I nor the other attorney could identify the problem. After the deposition, we did not have the usual baseball banter. He just wanted to talk about how the witness was intentionally speaking too quickly and suggested that it was done just to bother him. Quite frankly, I didn't think he was right, but given his state of agitation I wasn't going to disagree with him. Initially, I chalked it up to a bad day. Still, it nagged at me.

The court reporting agency for whom Henry worked was frequently used by the attorneys in my office, so everyone knew him. I asked around to learn if the other attorneys had the same kind of experience with him. In fact, one did. As a result, I decided to talk to Henry about it. This predated cell phones, so my options were to either contact the agency or wait until I saw him again. Since he frequently had depositions with our office, I knew that I would run into him at some point even if not for a deposition I had scheduled. When we talked, he seemed fine and dismissed the incident with the witness. Unfortunately, he was not being honest. Some weeks later we received a call from the agency telling us that Henry had taken his own life. It was long ago, so not all the details have remained with me, but I do remember that he had meticulously packed up his

apartment so that it would be easy for his sister to remove his belongings. The other thing I can remember vividly is that the last book he gave me was *The Glory of Their Times* by Lawrence Ritter, a book famously comprised of oral histories of early baseball players who described their lot of personal struggles in a grueling environment.

The thing I learned from this experience is to look at others with a more empathetic eye, to take the time to listen to others and understand their circumstances. While I have always considered empathy to be one of my stronger traits, Henry taught me to take the time to allow that trait to have impact in my life (and the lives of others). Now, I take the time to ask those extra questions and make sure the person knows that I care about the answers.

Empathy has been extremely important in many aspects of my professional life. Notably for about 13 years, I was the municipal prosecutor in the town where I reside. In my state that means essentially prosecuting traffic tickets and non-felony criminal matters. I am sorry to say that I handled cases involving acts of domestic violence because in my state, not all acts of domestic violence are considered to be felonies. As a prosecutor in the town where I also live, I often run into people outside of the courtroom who first met me under difficult circumstances in the courtroom, either as parties or witnesses. Some I remembered, some I didn't but, but almost always they remembered me and would thank me for helping them.

In addition, as a civil trial lawyer

empathy serves to help me make a better connection with a jury. I learned early on in my career that juries don't like it when an attorney leans too hard on a witness. I have had much more success with a softer approach. Juries seem to place more trust in an attorney who is trying to get to the truth, not just win a case.

Empathy for colleagues has also stood me in good stead. I have no problem helping another attorney, even if we are competing for the same clients. I learn as much as my colleague when I communicate with empathy, whether that be assisting less experienced attorneys in file handling/trial work, or talking to more experienced attorneys about an office management issue. It is beneficial to know that you have colleagues upon whom you can rely. On the one hand, it truly is a great feeling to help someone else. On the other, as one of my early mentors told me, one's reputation is the best asset of all.

Describe the greatest challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for DRI over the next five+ years.:

The greatest challenge for DRI, as well as the greatest opportunity, that lies ahead for DRI are one in the same. They can really be summed up in two words: The Unknown. We don't know where either will come from, but we do know how to prepare for them.

The last five to seven years have seen immense changes, not only in our profession, but also in society as a whole and the world economy. These are not isolated changes, but instead are evolving. The challenge is to anticipate what will come next, and the opportunity is to get there before anyone else.

Seminars

It is no secret that our seminar attendance has been down since the beginning of COVID. Different solutions have been tried, for example combining multiple seminars in one location, experimenting with more interesting and robust networking events and scrutinizing locations/dates. All great ideas, but none have moved the needle significantly. That is not to say we should back off on any of these changes, but rather we should continue to innovate until we find the Pixie Dust that makes it all work.

Many law related organizations have taken to significantly reducing, if not completely abandoning, in-person CLE. I believe this is tremendous mistake, but it creates an opportunity for DRI to distinguish itself. Our members are coming to understand that while remote seminars have their place, making them the norm is doing long term damage to the quality and skills of defense lawyers.

It is incumbent upon DRI to encourage the membership (and prospective new members) to embrace the "total package" of excellence in client representation. Lawyers know that when they come to one of our seminars, they will be getting a top-quality presentation and gaining true insights which improve their practice. Many organizations make that claim, but our programming rises above the advertising noise. Perhaps even more importantly, a DRI attendee is encouraged to go to a networking event to spend an evening meeting peers, law firm leaders and board members of this association. It does not take long to figure out that the lawyers who participate in this tremendous

organization are regular people, just like them. Let's not forget that the networking events at most of our seminars are on the same level as other organizations' premier annual networking events. The last part of the "total package" is the accessibility of leadership and committee roles. Members who join committees not only continue to learn but also have the opportunity to become leaders in their own right.

AI

This has been a hot topic for more than a few years now. It is not going away. We are challenged with continuing to keep our members advised of latest advancements in AI. It does not just end with information. We need to continue to educate our members on how this technology can and should be utilized in their practices, all while helping them anticipate how clients will want to see AI used. We cannot be foolhardy enough to think we're going to stop this train, so we have to continue with cutting edge educational programs to help the members to get on board rather than getting run over.

Legislative Issues

We need to continue to monitor proposed changes to the law which will adversely affect our business, not just because they negatively affect us, but because they are not good for the public in general. The challenge is staying ahead of these changes and having the ability to influence the outcome before laws are written and passed. This is not just on a federal level but a state level as well. Fighting issues which would create a detriment to our clients (big and small) will increase our profile as well as the

public's confidence in the rule of law and in defense lawyers who fight for the public good rather than personal wealth. It may well be worthwhile to reinstitute a lobbying arm that is focused on educating our members.

DRI strives to be governed by a diverse board of directors—in terms of race, ethnicity, age, gender, religion, sexual orientation, disability, location, and/or professional level, and other facts that enhance diversity and inclusion --- who can and will help advance DRI's goals through the power of collaboration. In what ways have you demonstrated a commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in your work, and how will your DE&I experience inform your contributions as a Board member?:

I could repeat what wrote when I was running for the position of National Director, but I believe members need to learn more about a person as they try to move up the ranks. That said, I am the same person I was when last I ran for the DRI Board, now with even more experience in working with friends and colleagues toward the best possible decision-making. My friends and colleagues still come from all walks of life and still share their experiences to allow me to grow my own understanding. We have incredible conversations about a wide variety of topics—and conversations which don't morph into debates, get heated or create ill feelings. Respect is key to this sort of communication, and I emphasize respect and kindness whenever possible. If I can put it into one sentence, I would say I strive to know, understand and respect each person as an individual, no matter what the circumstance.

I moved from junior to senior partner almost overnight. In the span eight months, four senior partners and one junior partner became just two 50/50 partners. When I gained the position where my opinion actually carried some weight, my partner and I offered a partnership position to our senior associate, the first woman attorney at the firm. With the retirement of our third partner a few years back, she and I

are the 50/50 partners. We work together to mentor other women so that they can develop the skills and experience to join us as firm leaders.

With DRI, my DE&I initiatives began when I became vice-chair of the Law Practice Management Committee. While DRI has long had a seminar geared toward managing partners, it was not put on by the Law Practice Management Committee, but rather an independent committee of leadership and staff. It was easy to see that the presentations were geared more toward law firm leadership that might be characterized as the "old guard." The committee chair and I did not feel this was a productive approach, as it did not include the people whom we expected would (and did) become the future leaders within their firms and within DRI. We reached out to the affinity groups to help us put together more diverse programming with younger and diverse lawyers to speak. We developed an approach that might be best labeled "training in reverse". Rather than having the law firm leaders tell the attorneys what they needed by way of training, the young and diverse attorneys were able to tell the law firm leaders what they expected from the training and, ultimately, what they needed from the firms they worked for. The committee learned quickly that the needs and expectations of diverse and young attorneys are vastly different than what the "old guard" was offering. The change in expectations was probably the most significant that our profession had ever seen in any prior 10 year period. I watched, listened and learned. As a member of the Executive Committee, I intend to repeat this approach: watching, listening and

Is there anything else you would like to add that has not already been previously stated?:

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learning from members is key not only to DE&I initiatives, but also to the future health of DRI as an organization.

I love this organization and I am proud to even have the opportunity to seek a position on the Executive Committee. I want to be selected. I am confident that I will do a job that will be beneficial to DRI and the rest of the Executive Committee. That said, win or lose, I will still be there to serve in any capacity the Board needs.



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