



The Voice of the
Defense Bar™

The Voice

June 17, 2020

Volume 19, Issue 24

This Week's Feature

Article of Note

COVID-19

Member News

DRI News

DRI Cares

Upcoming Webinars

DRI Membership—Did You Know...

New Member Spotlight

This Week's Feature



The Hospitality Industry in the Wake of COVID-19

By Xeris Gregory

In the midst of a worldwide pandemic, fears for the economy and public health are at the forefront. Companies are making difficult decisions regarding furloughing employees to save money or reopening to the public to generate revenue. These difficult decisions also have potential to create liability for businesses that open too soon.

[MORE](#)



We've been prepping
for your next case
for 50 years.

S-E-A
Know.
ENGINEERING, INVESTIGATION
AND ANALYSIS SINCE 1970.



dri™ *Upcoming*
WEBINARS

- Phantom Medical Bills, Medical Litigation Funding, and How to Fight Them
- The “Protection” of Biometric Data and the Data Cyber Insurance Market
- And more!

CLE in the comfort of your home! **LEARN MORE**

Article of Note

- Tiger King Meets Trucking Law: Spoliation and Trucking Cases, By Mike H. Bassett

[MORE](#)

COVID-19

- DRI: Alive in a New and Unanticipated Way, By Heather Sanderson, DRI Canadian Region Director

[MORE](#)

Member News

- Goldberg Segalla Announces Leadership Transition

[MORE](#)

DRI News

- Upcoming DRI Elections
- DRI Call for Nominees: Annual Professional Achievement and Service Awards

[MORE](#)

DRI Cares

- Grange Associate Sews Masks as Part of the Company's Relief Efforts

[MORE](#)

Upcoming Webinars

- Virtual Mediations of Life, Health, Disability, and ERISA Disputes, June 18, 2020, 12:00–1:00 pm CDT
- Remote Advocacy, June 22, 2020, 2:00–3:00 pm CDT
- Preventing Nuclear Verdicts in Trucking and Transportation Cases in the COVID-19 Era, June 26, 2020, 11:00–12:30 pm CDT
- The “Protection” of Biometric Data and the Data Cyber Insurance Market: Closing in on a Tipping Point, June 30, 2020, 12:00–1:00 pm CDT
- Truck Drivers and the Transportation Industry: The Public's Perception Post-COVID-19, July 8, 2020, 12:00–1:00 pm CDT

[MORE](#)

driTM

**COVID-19 Legal Insights/
Practical Strategies**

**Live and On-Demand
Programming**

View our growing list of COVID-19-related topics. Learn what you can do for your practice and how best to advise your clients and companies.

LEARN MORE

**Subscribe to the
DRI Podcast!**



Our podcasts are accessible via
**Apple Podcasts,
Google Podcasts,
and Soundcloud.**

DRI Membership—Did You Know...

- DRI's Corporate Membership: DRI's Best Kept Secret (and It Shouldn't Be)

[MORE](#)

New Member Spotlight

Stephen J. Bell, Cranfill Sumner & Hartzog LLP

[MORE](#)

Quote of the Week

"This country can have no more democracy than it accords and guarantees to the humblest and weakest citizen."

—[James Weldon Johnson](#) (b. [June 17, 1871](#)).

This Week's Feature

The Hospitality Industry in the Wake of COVID-19

By Xeris Gregory



In the midst of a worldwide pandemic, fears for the economy and public health are at the forefront. Companies are making difficult decisions regarding furloughing employees to save money or reopening to the public to generate revenue. These difficult decisions also have potential to create liability for businesses that open too soon.

The hospitality industry, a giant in today's world, may be faced with even greater difficulties than those of the ordinary business. From the decision to reopen hotels for emergency purposes, to opening to the general public, to mass layoffs, the hospitality industry must be wary about both long-term survival and about a potential rise in liability.

The Statistics

The hospitality industry supports nearly 8.3 million jobs; however, with nearly 40 million people in the United States unemployed, the industry is far from immune to economic downturn. To the contrary, hotels are currently experiencing the lowest occupancy rates since 09/11. Hotels have already lost more than \$29 billion in room revenue, eight of ten hotel rooms sit empty, and 2020 is projected to be the worst year on record for hotel occupancy.

Reopening the Hospitality Industry

Some hotels have remained open despite shelter-in-place orders to the extent that they have provided rooms for essential workers, such as first responders and medical personnel, or for at-risk populations, such as the homeless. Others have been taken over entirely by government entities in larger cities for their exclusive use in providing emergency shelters. However, as the federal government has unveiled guidelines, *Opening Up America Again*, and as state restrictions begin to loosen, members of the hospitality industry must decide where and when to reopen hotels to the public.

Reopening businesses and loosening restrictions in cities nationwide, though, have been met with mixed results. For example, states that have loosened restrictions and allowed businesses to reopen have shown an increase in coronavirus hospitalizations in recent weeks. Thus, the

hospitality industry should be wary about reopening hotels to the public as the coronavirus rages on, lest guests or employees contract the virus on a hotel premises.

The Potential for Increased Liability

A significant risk posed to the hospitality industry in reopening to the public is the potential for lawsuits arising out of a business's handling of the virus. Hospitality businesses need to prepare for claims brought by guests that will allege that a hotel was negligent in its response to COVID-19. This includes claims that a hotel failed to maintain the premises properly and failed to prevent the presence of the coronavirus, claims that a hotel knew that an employee was infected and didn't take necessary precautions, or claims that a hotel wrongfully quarantined individuals.

Potential claims may be brought by any third party, which includes customers, guests, independent contractors, or employees. Many of these claims arise out of negligence; therefore, a plaintiff will be required to show that (1) the hotel owed the plaintiff a duty of care; (2) the defendant failed to meet the duty of care; (3) the breach in duty caused the plaintiff's harm; and (4) the plaintiff suffered damages as a result. Hotels generally have a duty to protect guests from unreasonable risks of harm, but what is "unreasonable" may depend on the circumstances and any relevant federal or state law. Although it may be hard to prove that a plaintiff contracted the coronavirus on a hotel's premises, the industry must be prepared, nonetheless.

Thus, hotels need to prepare by closely monitoring and following any federal, state, and local mandates for safety. Both state and federal governments have implemented protocols for reopening businesses and maintaining safety and social distancing. While each mandate differs, some protocols include requiring that customers and employees wear masks at all times, taking extra precautions to make sure that the premises are sanitized and free from disease, or requiring ill employees to stay home and quarantine. A hotel that fails to abide by these guidelines runs the risk that the virus will spread among guests and staff and give rise to liability for failing to keep the premises safe.

This Weeks Feature

Additionally, hotel owners should review contracts to ensure that there is strong indemnification language and insurance coverage. For example, some property insurance policies do not contain provisions for change of use. Accordingly, a hotel that is not open to the general public but remains open for essential workers or vulnerable populations runs the risk that its insurance company will not cover the costs of litigation that arises out of this type of use. Only by maintaining a close watch on emerging guidelines from state and federal officials and implementing safeguards on hotel premises for the safety of the public and employees can hotels minimize legal exposure.

The Industry's Future

The hospitality industry is faced with a double-edged sword: business owners run the risk of losing too much revenue if they remain closed, or of exposing themselves to liability if hotels reopen to the general public too soon and without proper precautions. Although nobody knows what the future of the industry will look like, many changes in how public health and safety are viewed are likely here

to stay, as are increased safety protocols. Thus, the hotel industry needs to be proactive and adapt to survive the pandemic and return to normal operations. Hotel owners need to be cautious and take preventive measures to ensure health and public safety. Otherwise, hotels are likely among the biggest to lose as liability arises in the wake of coronavirus.

Xeris Gregory is an associate in Baker Donelson **Bearman Caldwell & Berkowitz PC's** Birmingham office and a member of the Advocacy Department. She practices in several areas of litigation, including complex litigation and labor and employment. Ms. Gregory received her undergraduate degree from the University of Texas at Austin and her J.D. from the University of Alabama School of Law. She is a member of several professional organizations, including DRI, the American Bar Association, the Birmingham Bar Association, and the Alabama Defense Lawyers Association. Ms. Gregory is a member of the DRI Young Lawyers Committee.

Article of Note

Tiger King Meets Trucking Law: Spoliation and Trucking Cases

By Mike H. Bassett



Preservation of evidence is an essential component in all areas of civil litigation. The result of not preserving evidence can lead a court to determine that spoliation has occurred. In turn, a court has wide latitude in crafting a remedy for failing to preserve evidence—from monetary sanctions to striking the spoliating party's pleadings.

The purpose of this article is to provide an overview of the law regarding spoliation in through examining *Ashton v. Knight Transportation*, which was a nightmare spoliation case set in federal court. The egregious facts of this case make it the Tiger King of spoliation in trucking law.

The Current State of Spoliation Law

In 2014, the Texas Supreme Court clarified the appropriate framework for a spoliation analysis in *Brookshire Bros. v. Aldridge*, 438 S.W.3d 9, 19 (Tex. 2014). The court held that the duty to preserve evidence arises when a substantial chance of litigation arises and extends to all evidence in the party's control that "will be material and relevant." *Id.* at 20. A party breaches this duty to preserve evidence by failing to exercise reasonable care. *Id.* In considering remedies, the court set forth that the remedy must simply be proportionate. *Id.* at 21.

Enter the Tiger King: *Ashton v. Knight Transportation*—a "Knightmare" Spoliation Case

Ashton v. Knight Transportation involved a particularly egregious case of alleged spoliation that occurred after Knight Transportation's truck driver drove into an automobile accident scene, hit and allegedly killed one of the parties, fled the scene, cleaned his truck, falsified his driver's logs, replaced broken and damaged parts, and then "lost" the old parts. See *Ashton v. Knight Transp., Inc.*, 772 F. Supp. 2d 772, 776 (N.D. Tex. 2011).

Husband and wife Kelly and Don Ashton were struck by a 1988 Chevrolet Camaro, and subsequently struck by an 18-wheeler owned by Knight Transportation (Knight). *Id.* at 775. According to the plaintiff, Kelly Ashton, Don survived the first wreck and crawled out onto the highway where the defendant and Knight's driver, George Muthee

(Muthee), struck him with the 18-wheeler. *Id.* The defendants alleged that Don died due to the initial accident. *Id.*

The plaintiff further alleged that the defendants spoliated evidence, specifically (1) the evidence on Muthee's tires and truck after the accident, and (2) Qualcomm communications between Muthee and Knight that occurred after the accident. *Id.* at 776. As mentioned, according to the plaintiff, Don Ashton survived the initial accident and was hit by Muthee, who then fled the scene, stopped a short distance away to inspect his truck, and then drove 1,400 miles to a Nevada town, where he had his tires replaced. *Id.* at 776–77. After fixing the truck, Muthee drove to a parking lot in California, where Knight employees retrieved the truck and stored it at one of the Knight facilities. *Id.* at 777. From there, Knight hired an attorney and an investigator who inspected the truck and removed "flesh" samples from the truck and placed them in baggies. *Id.* Worse, Knight refused to cooperate with law enforcement investigators and failed to disclose its investigator's inspection until about three years later. *Id.* The only way that the truck was traced to the accident was by a damaged piece that broke away and was found at the scene. *Id.* at 776.

The court determined that a "wealth of circumstantial evidence" led to the "inescapable conclusion that [Knight and Muthee] engaged in spoliation" of the physical evidence on the vehicle and the Qualcomm communications. *Id.* at 795. The court found that Knight and Muthee had a duty to preserve the evidence from the truck and the Qualcomm communications, and it had breached that duty in bad faith. *Id.* at 802. The court further found that the spoliation severely prejudiced the plaintiff because Knight's actions destroyed the only direct physical evidence available that could have proved that Knight's truck struck the decedent (the piece left at the scene only proved that the truck hit one of the vehicles at the scene, not the decedent). *Id.* at 803. As a result of the bad-faith spoliation, the court imposed the harsh penalty of striking all of the defendants' pleadings and defenses to liability and allowed the plaintiff to amend her petition to plead for punitive damages. *Id.* at 805.

Article of Note

Conclusion

The preservation of evidence is vital in all cases, but especially in trucking cases. To assure that no allegations of spoliation occur, parties must be mindful and cognizant when evaluating what evidence could be material to a claim or defense. Texas courts have determined two instances in which spoliation instructions are appropriate: “(1) a party’s deliberate destruction of relevant evidence, and (2) a party’s failure to produce relevant evidence or explain its nonproduction.” *Brookshire Bros.*, 438 S.W.3d at 19. Failing to preserve evidence properly could be extremely harmful to a case and can lead to monetary sanctions, spoliation instructions, or even the striking of pleadings.

[Mike H. Bassett](#), senior partner of **The Bassett Firm**, specializes in the areas of premises, product, and professional liability; personal injury and transportation litigation; and mediation. Admitted to the State Bar of Texas, his court admissions are the U.S. District Courts for the Northern, Southern, and Eastern Districts of Texas. He is a member of the DRI Trucking Law Committee and the Texas Association of Defense Counsel as well as other professional associations.

COVID-19

DRI: Alive in a New and Unanticipated Way

By Heather Sanderson, DRI Canadian Region Director

I circled March 12, 2020, on my calendar. It was the watershed date. That date divides the before and the after. On March 12, my home city, Calgary, Alberta, declared a state of emergency due to the presence of COVID-19 in the community. Within days, the province of Alberta declared a similar emergency. Everything, and I mean everything, came to a screeching halt. The streets emptied; our bars, restaurants, and pubs closed; concerts were cancelled; and everyone telecommuted. Soon the border between Canada and the United States closed to nonessential traffic and the Quarantine Act was invoked. Travel between provinces was highly discouraged. It seemed that everything that we took for granted before March 12 was fundamentally changed.

I was to go to the DRI Insurance Law Committee's Insurance Coverage and Claims Institute in Chicago the first week of April. I was then heading to DRI International's annual meeting in Tel Aviv the first week of June. I was really, really looking forward to both events. But they were not to be ...

Without doubt, the cancellation of the DRI in-person seminars was and has been a loss. But something else has happened—unexpected, unanticipated, and completely wonderful. Individual DRI members—my friends, the reason why I look forward to the in-person seminars and events—reached out and connected. We decided to have regular video chats. Instead of meeting at a coffee shop, we meet virtually in video chats. We have regular pints together. In some ways I feel closer to them now than ever. And, the energy that

DRI channels into its incredible in-person seminars was redirected into an equally incredible suite of webinars and Zoom conferences.

DRI came alive in a completely new and unanticipated way. The relevance of DRI became plain and obvious and the reason why I joined DRI so many years ago also became plain and obvious. Through DRI I have made real friends. Real friends are those who care. And they care. We

all do the same thing in different regions and in different countries. Our common professional interest forges a common bond, but through that bond we learn about each other, our ups and downs, the good and the bad. We laugh together and we commiserate together. Despite the distance that separates us, that friendship is important, vital, and sustaining.

Last week, on my morning run, I pitched forward on a sidewalk trip edge. Landing face first on the sidewalk, my sunglasses were driven into my forehead resulting in facial bruising, swelling, and two wonderful shiners. I also fractured my right wrist. Yes, I am right-handed. There is no way to disguise those injuries, which were so apparent in the videocalls. I am

thunderstruck at the number of people who responded to my appearance and wished me well.

DRI is composed of genuinely good people. Good people with a common interest. Good people with a sense of humor. Good people make the best of friends. I will be leaving the DRI Board of Directors in October 2020, but I will not be leaving DRI.



Member News

Goldberg Segalla Announces Leadership Transition

Goldberg Segalla LLP recently announced the first phase of a leadership transition. The process will see a redistribution of certain management and operational responsibilities and conclude in January 2021 with the election of a new managing partner, only the second person to fill that role since the firm opened its doors on April 20, 2001.

In an email to the entire firm community on Monday, June 8, 2020, founding managing partner and DRI member

Rick Cohen announced his decision to step back from the position he has filled for two decades. Mr. Cohen will remain a member of the firm's five-person Facilitation [Management] Committee. The committee members will collectively fulfill the responsibilities of the managing partner until the end of the year, and will recommend a new managing partner in January 2021. In the meantime, fellow DRI member Chris Belter, also a member of the Facilitation Committee, will step into the new role of chief operating officer.

"Twenty years ago, I had a vision of a law firm that would be different, where people would come together as a team to support each other and our clients," Mr. Cohen said. "Twenty years later, we have not only realized, but have vastly expanded upon, that dream. It has been an honor to guide this firm from seven lawyers on folding tables in Buffalo to over 400 lawyers in more than 20 offices in 11 states. But this journey has also been all-encompassing, and quite frankly unfair to my wonderful wife and nine wonderful kids.

"With seven children suddenly at home due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (including six kids between the ages of four and eight) and in need of not only full-time parents but full-time parent-teachers, my responsibilities at both work and at home were simply too much for me to handle the way I wanted. But I wasn't alone. In the face of the task at hand, Chris Belter stepped up and took the lead on the implementation of our continuity plan. I'm incredibly confident and excited to announce this transition—and even more excited to focus a bit more on my children."

Separating the managing partner and chief operating officer functions, Mr. Cohen and Mr. Belter said, will better

position the firm to manage growth as client demand continues to increase. Mr. Cohen will remain an integral part of the firm's Facilitation Committee and will lend his full support and skillset to his eventual successor.

"Rick has been not only a partner but a friend to me for two decades," Mr. Belter said. "And as both a partner and friend, I'm thrilled that our firm has evolved to a point where Rick doesn't have to carry all of this load alone, and

will be able to spend more time with his family. I'm also grateful, though, that Rick will remain a close advisor to me as I step into the new role of COO, and will remain an integral part of our leadership through the Facilitation Committee and other roles."

Rick Cohen has been a member of DRI since 1993. He is a past chair of the DRI Construction Law Committee Insurance Coverage SLG, a member of the Law Practice Management Committee's steering

committee, and an active member of the Insurance Law Committee. A member of DRI since 2002, Mr. Belter is a past chair of the Construction Law Committee and an active member of several others.

"As the only managing partner in Goldberg Segalla's history, it is a little strange transitioning to a slightly more complementary role, but it is a transition I am very much looking forward to," Mr. Cohen said. "It has been an exhilarating but exhausting last couple of decades for me but it is time to focus a little more on the 10 loves of my life: my beautiful wife, Tamara, and nine wonderful kids. I am very excited about not only the next chapter for me personally, but also the next stage of our firm's continuing evolution."

Regarding DRI, Mr. Cohen continued, "[the organization] has been interwoven into our firm's fabric since our very inception—and even before that. When we started Goldberg Segalla back in 2001, my partner and friend Neil Goldberg was literally in the middle of his term as DRI President. I have been a member of DRI for more than a quarter century, ever since Tom Segalla chaperoned me into the organization as a young associate. Now that I will hopefully have at least a little more time on my hands, I look forward to becoming more actively involved in DRI once again."



DRI News

Upcoming DRI Elections

Four **Director Elected Nationally** seats on the DRI Board of Directors, plus the offices of **Second Vice President** and **Secretary-Treasurer**, will be filled at the [2020 DRI Summit](#) in Washington, D.C., October 21-24. To be considered for any position, a DRI member must first file a Declaration

of Candidacy form. For more information, please contact **Nancy Parz** at DRI headquarters: nparz@dri.org or **312.698.6224**. **Declarations are due by July 1, 2020. This deadline is not being postponed.**

DRI Call for Nominees: Annual Professional Achievement and Service Awards

Do you have a colleague who deserves recognition for his or her professional contributions? **DRI's Annual Professional Achievement and Service Awards** celebrate and honor outstanding performance by state and local defense organizations, DRI law firms, and individual members, and we are looking for nominees.

These awards aim to recognize individuals for their achievements on behalf of the defense bar and the civil justice system or their involvement in community and public service activities that have a positive effect on society at large. Recognition enhances members' personal growth and accomplishments, provides us all with role models, and

strengthens members' images in the legal and business communities and with the general public.

Please [download](#) a copy of our awards brochure and read how you can nominate a deserving individual, your organization, and its members. We encourage you to submit an entry for each award by **July 1, 2020**. Winners will be announced at the Celebration of Leadership on Friday, October 23, held in conjunction with the DRI Summit in Washington, D.C., from October 21-24, 2020. In addition, DRI will recognize award recipients in *For The Defense* and through press releases to national and local media.

DRI Cares

Grange Associate Sews Masks as Part of the Company's Relief Efforts

Amber LaPoint, associate at **Grange Insurance Company** in Columbus, Ohio, was recently featured on a [Central Ohio news channel](#) for sewing hundreds of masks for local health care workers and nursing homes. "Making masks felt like the right thing to do—even if I hadn't sewn in 25 years! I had to buy a new sewing machine, but it was all worth it," remarked Ms. LaPoint.

On May 19, 2020, Grange announced that it is contributing \$1 million to local nonprofits to support health and human services response efforts to the COVID-19

pandemic. The company is giving \$100,000 grants to each of the following organizations in Central Ohio: Community Shelter Board; LifeCare Alliance; St. Stephens Community House; United Way of Central Ohio; and YWCA Columbus; as well as \$100,000 to the United Way Fox Cities in support of its affiliate partner, Integrity Insurance, headquartered in Appleton, Wisconsin. Grange will distribute the remaining funds over the next few weeks to additional nonprofit organizations serving on the front lines of this crisis with some recipients selected by vote of Grange employees.



Upcoming Webinars

Virtual Mediations of Life, Health, Disability, and ERISA Disputes, June 18, 2020, 12:00–1:00 pm CDT



This webinar will discuss how to conduct virtual mediations of benefits disputes—ERISA and Non-ERISA—providing insight from the perspectives of an experienced mediator, a defense counsel, and an in-house counsel. [Click here](#) to register.

Remote Advocacy, June 22, 2020, 2:00–3:00 pm CDT



This program will address best practices in remote advocacy, including appearances at depositions, hearings, and trials. We will identify technologies that can improve your presentation during the COVID-19 crisis and beyond. Further, we will show pitfalls to avoid in this remote world, including the prior exchange of exhibits, preparing witnesses for remote testimony, coordinating with opposing counsel for stipulations on presentation, and other technological considerations. [Click here](#) to register.

Preventing Nuclear Verdicts in Trucking and Transportation Cases in the COVID-19 Era, June 26, 2020, 11:00–12:30 pm CDT



The trucking and transportation industry has been disproportionately affected by nuclear verdicts and settlements over the last decade. While the plaintiff reptile methodology is partly responsible for some of these enormous verdicts, several other key factors are clearly driving the increased frequency of plaintiff verdicts with exceptionally high damages. Many pundits have hypothesized that “millennial jurors” are largely to blame, however jury decision-making analyses from real and mock trials have revealed contrary results.

This program is designed to provide defense attorneys, claims specialists, and in-house counsel in the trucking and transportation industry with a deep analysis of the causes of nuclear verdicts, as well as proven tactics to avoid these disastrous outcomes. The industry has the chance to use the current “timeout on the field” to reassess and refine their case assessment, file handling, witness preparation, and trial tactics in an effort to turn the tables on the plaintiffs’ bar. [Click here](#) to register.

The “Protection” of Biometric Data and the Data Cyber Insurance Market: Closing in on a Tipping Point, June 30, 2020, 12:00–1:00 pm CDT



The capture of biometric data creates a delicate balance between privacy and efficiency. Recently, with the advent of COVID-19, it has become increasingly apparent that the use and collection of personal identifiable information is not clearly regulated. This program will discuss the current (and pending) measures in place to address these privacy concerns, as well as recent trends in litigation. In addition, it will offer some “best practices” for reducing potential liability in this new COVID-19 world. Further, this program will discuss the current state of the cyber insurance market and provide an overview of cyber insurance coverage trends, particularly in light of COVID-19. [Click here](#) to register.

Upcoming Webinars

Truck Drivers and the Transportation Industry: The Public's Perception Post-COVID-19, July 8, 2020, 12:00–1:00 pm CDT



Attendees will hear from an industry claims director and assistant general counsel, the general counsel of the American Trucking Associations, and a seasoned trucking attorney regarding the changing perception of truck drivers and the trucking industry as a whole in light of COVID-19. The speakers will discuss in detail how the trucking industry responded to assist Americans in the midst of COVID-19, the recent press relating to truck drivers and the trucking industry as a result of how the trucking industry responded to COVID-19, and the educational opportunities for those working in the trucking industry (drivers, managers, lawyers, among others) presented by this global health pandemic. Additionally, the speakers will discuss the ways in which the trucking industry and the legal profession can preserve and use the improved public perception of truck drivers and the trucking industry in the post-COVID-19 era to defend against a plaintiff's claims, including during the discovery phase, during voir dire, and during trial.

[Click here](#) to register.

DRI Membership—Did You Know...

DRI's Corporate Membership: DRI's Best Kept Secret (and It Shouldn't Be)

If you think that DRI membership is just for law firm attorneys, think again. We have options for clients and business associates as well.

Did you know that DRI corporate membership encompasses a variety of nonattorney professionals who want to take advantage of DRI's wealth of resources, increase their profile, develop business connections, and contribute their expertise to the legal defense community?

DRI corporate membership is an option for insurance companies, municipalities, consulting companies, hospitals, nursing homes, auto companies, and pharmaceutical companies, just to name a few.

What do you get with a corporate membership?

Each corporate member listed on the application will receive subscriptions to *For The Defense* and *In-House Defense Quarterly* magazines in addition to other valuable resources and benefits of DRI membership. **All first-time corporate members listed on the initial corporate membership application will receive a FREE certificate to attend a DRI seminar, excluding the DRI Summit.**

[Click here](#) for the link to DRI membership benefits. [Here's the link](#) to join as a corporate member. For just \$500 per year, up to four attorneys and nonattorneys can join DRI and receive all the benefits of DRI membership (*that's \$125 per person*); each additional member is \$150 per year. **Please note that law firms are excluded from corporate membership.**

New Member Spotlight

Stephen J. Bell, Cranfill Sumner & Hartzog LLP



Stephen J. Bell is an associate in the Wilmington, North Carolina, office of Cranfill Sumner & Hartzog LLP, where he handles a broad array of civil litigation matters. He joined the firm in February 2020, after a family move from Charleston, South Carolina.

Mr. Bell has over seven years of experience litigating complex commercial matters for plaintiffs and defendants in state and federal courts and before administrative bodies. His work includes commercial litigation, class actions and multidistrict litigation, securities litigation and arbitration, government whistleblower actions, real property disputes, high-net-worth estate litigation, premises and product liability litigation, and professional liability litigation. He has also acted as outside counsel to several businesses in the Carolinas, guiding his clients

through regulatory issues, risk-mitigation endeavors, and transactional matters.

Mr. Bell is admitted to the state and federal bars of North Carolina and South Carolina and is a member of the Bar Associations of North Carolina, South Carolina, New Hanover County, and Charleston County.

He attended the Wake Forest University School of Law, where he served as articles editor of the *Journal of Law & Policy*, a research assistant, and an extern for a North Carolina Court of Appeals judge. Mr. Bell received his undergraduate degree from Clemson University.

When not in the office, he enjoys spending time on the water with his family.

Quote of the Week

“This country can have no more democracy than it accords and guarantees to the humblest and weakest citizen.”

—[James Weldon Johnson](#) ([b. June 17, 1871](#)).