

# Virginia Lawyer

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Welcome to the New President  
The Duty to Answer Police Questions  
Annual Meeting Coverage



President Stephanie E. Grana  
2022-2023



# Choosing to Get Involved

by Deirdre Norman

Stephanie Elaine Grana's mother grew up on a North Dakota sheep farm and studied in a one room schoolhouse before making her way to New York City alone at 18. Her father was a Cuban immigrant whose family arrived at Ellis Island and who was repeatedly sent home from school for not being able to speak English. What they instilled in their only daughter was a desire to accomplish goals, a competitive spirit, and a willingness to take on as many challenges as life happens to present to her.

Grana is the newly inducted 84th president of the Virginia State Bar, and her five-page resume is a study not only in relentless hard work, but also in firsts. She is the first Latina to head the Bar. She is assuredly the only Virginia State Bar president to be both a collegiate-level synchronized swimmer and a black belt in Tae Kwon Do. And in all likelihood, she's the only VSB president to take a flying trapeze class over the East River in New York City.

On a professional level, she is undoubtedly the first VSB president to also have been president of the Virginia Trial Lawyers Association, the Virginia chapter of the American Board of Trial Advocates, the Lewis F. Powell Jr. America Inn of Court, and the Metro Richmond Women's Bar Association.

When asked about this, she says simply: "I'm really bad at just joining. I like to become president." Or as her husband says: "She cannot say no."

She also likes to get things done. Throughout her career as a personal injury lawyer, she has won more than 50 verdicts and settlements of over one million dollars while balancing motherhood to three now adult children, countless hours of volunteer work, and professional accomplishments too numerous to mention.

Grana is married to Scott I. Bemberis, a family law attorney, who she often credits for helping her make her diverging aspirations a reality. When asked how she balances the rigors of parenting and personal injury trial work, Grana says, "I have been blessed to have a wonderful husband and my parents have been great. So, I was the lawyer who had little kids who still tried cases: a rarity back then and, sadly, even now in the legal profession. I would get up in the morning, put on my suit, and be leaving the kitchen, and I would have to hide behind a door or in the bathroom. Scott would grab a toddler so they didn't see me so I could get out of the house without a child crying for mommy, which broke my heart."

Grana describes her law practice as not a job, but as a calling. But whether she is delivering her remarks at her presidential induction in Virginia Beach, posing for a photo with her family, or being interviewed for this article, there is little doubt that her strength and her joy comes from her family. In Virginia Beach, she told the audience of hundreds of lawyers, "I do, first and foremost, want to thank my family: My husband Scott, who puts up with a lot to be married to me. He thought our next year would be spent as empty-nesters and I said, 'Hey, what if I ran for president this year?' and he just looked at me and said, 'If that's what you want, honey.'"

Grana went on to speak of her mother, Kathleen Beauclair Grana, who was at her side as Grana was sworn in by the Hon. Stephen R. McCullough, Justice of the Supreme Court of Virginia. "I also want to thank my Mom. I love her dearly. She also puts up with me and my moods and, you know, if it's a rough day at the office, she knows about it."

In some ways Grana has lived an idyllic life, growing up across the street from her middle school in Malverne, a small town on Long Island, New York, with strong but adoring parents and an older brother, Joe. As a teenager, she had a paper route and worked at McDonald's where she learned two things: (1) the customer is always right and (2) if you're ordering a burger late at night, "Be sure to order a custom or your burger won't be as fresh."

She flourished in school and in sports, as did Joe, and they both attended college by cobbling together academic, sports, and need-based scholarships. Joe attended Fordham University on a track scholarship, while his younger sister headed south to swim and eventually compete as a synchronized swimmer for the University of Richmond. "Yes, I wore a nose clip," she laughs, noting that the highlight of her synchro career was when the Spiders tied for second in Nationals, losing only to perennial powerhouse Ohio State. She recalls that one of her individual routines was performed to Kenny Loggins' "Footloose."

Grana would graduate magna cum laude in just three years from U of R where she was Phi Beta Kappa and won the Female Student Athlete Award. She then attended the University of Richmond Law School, once again excelling academically. During this time, she met her future husband, fellow law student Scott Bemberis from Ridgefield, Connecticut, who had come to U of R and received a partial scholarship as an undergrad to play Division I tennis.

I may not be the smartest one in the room, but I'm going to be the most prepared.



After graduating from law school, Grana clerked for the Hon. Joseph E. Baker of Norfolk on the Virginia Court of Appeals. She had just bought a new car, and never one to let an opportunity to learn or participate pass her by, Grana offered to drive Judge Baker to Richmond for court. She ended up with four other judges in the backseat of her Nissan Altima, “I was sweating. If I had accident, half the Court of Appeals would be out. I don’t know if they’d let us do that anymore.”

Though she originally wanted to be a defense attorney (she had interned for Richmond defense attorney Ned Mikula in college and loved the law school course taught by Craig S. Cooley), or work for the attorney general’s office, Grana ultimately landed as an associate in a Richmond personal injury/medical malpractice firm. And the rest, as they say, is history. She has gone on to win numerous multimillion dollar verdicts and settlements, written prolifically and spoken frequently on advanced issues affecting trial lawyers in Virginia, and won numerous awards, including the RVA 2022 Power Women Award and the 2019 VADA-VTLA Civility and Professionalism Award. She has also served as a mentor to many female trial lawyers.

But sprinkled among the extensive professional and civic accolades on Grana’s lengthy resume are the parental accomplishments Grana considers equally as important: dance team volunteer, soccer photographer/team mom, and PTA volunteer. She says of her years balancing a strenuous profession with her desire to be a present parent, “I could always feel the supposition after I had a child that ‘Oh, this is it. She’s not coming back.’” But anyone who thought that she couldn’t be both a successful trial lawyer and an involved mother doesn’t really know Grana.

Today she says of herself, “I always prepare, I over-prepare. It doesn’t matter if I have a court approval of a settlement or a discovery motion, I’m going to prepare. I’m going to make sure I know the facts of the case, the numbers, the liens, make sure my clients show up. I may not be the smartest one in the room, but I’m going to be the most prepared. And unfortunately, if that requires no sleep or one hour sleep, that’s what I’m going to do.”

The story of the Grana Bemberis family in many ways encompasses the complexities of balancing two legal careers and three children. And it exemplifies the adage that opposites attract. Though Grana has loved to debate since she was the star of the debate team in high school, she says that, in contrast, “Scott doesn’t like to argue.” Similarly, Bemberis’s family law practice does not require travel all over the Commonwealth for trials as Grana’s does, and he was more than willing to step in behind the scenes, change



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the diapers, drive to practices/games, and help balance the often-consuming workload Grana's practice requires.

And Grana points out: "Scott likes to cook. And you know, I don't cook at all. Like, I hate it."

Grana and Bemberis have three children: Nicole, who is a 2L at William & Mary Law School; Garrett, who is a junior at Wofford College in South Carolina; and Dakota, who will be a first-year at the University of Virginia. Perhaps Grana's most telling story about herself involves the birth of Nicole, who entered this world at only four pounds in early 2000 when Grana was a young attorney at Shuford, Rubin & Gibney, P.C. Her daycare would not accept a four-pound baby, and so Grana did exactly what you might expect her to do: She brought Nicole to work and continued to practice as a trial lawyer for six months with a newborn in her office.

"John Gibney was great about it," Grana says, referring to the firm's name partner who is now the Hon. John Adrian Gibney Jr., Senior United States District Judge of the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia. "One thing to know about Judge Gibney: he loves babies," Grana says with a smile. "He would take Nicole to his office whenever he could just to talk to her."

In 2002, Grana's parents, who had both worked for

TWA Airlines in different capacities, moved from their retirement home in Florida to Richmond to be closer to their grandchildren. They spent many hours helping with sports, school, doctors' appointments, and swimming lessons, even buying a sedan that could fit three car seats in the back seat so they could take all three children with them wherever they went. In 2008, tragedy struck when Grana's father and brother were killed after the small plane they were flying crashed in Chesterfield.

"My father was our rock," Grana says. "He was a race-car driver, an aeronautical engineer. He served in Vietnam. He worked a lot when we were kids, but he spent so much time with his grandchildren. And the only reason I have three children, the only reason I'm a litigator and a lawyer of the caliber I am is because both my parents helped me without ever making me feel like I was lacking."

The loss of her father and brother gave her a first-hand understanding of the profound sadness of the sudden tragedies many of her clients experience, and Grana says quietly, "It helped me to understand my clients even more." The accident also deepened the bond between Grana and her mother, who now lives with her daughter and her family, and who held the Bible during Grana's presidential oath.



Her induction speech was a witty tribute to the Bar. She peppered the lawyers and judges in the audience, many of whom volunteer on numerous conferences and committees that further the Bar's mission, with questions about where to turn if you needed a certain problem solved, had an issue with a client, or a question regarding professional ethics. The correct answer was always the Virginia State Bar.

Grana closed her induction speech by quoting Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who said: "If you are going to be a lawyer and just practice your profession, well, you have a skill, so you are very much like a plumber. But if you want to be a true professional, you will do something outside yourself, something to repair tears in your community, something to make life a little better for people less fortunate than you."

During her year as VSB president, it is Grana's goal that more lawyers turn to the VSB not only for help, but to find ways to give back. "While I am president, I want to make sure that the State Bar is relevant to all of our members," she said.

And if her past is any indication of the upcoming year, Grana will indeed do her very best to reach that goal. 🍷



## Stephanie E. Grana

Cantor Grana Buckner Bucci, P.C.

### Virginia State Bar:

Executive Committee  
Bar Council, 14th Circuit  
Budget and Finance Committee  
3rd District Disciplinary Committee  
Study Committee on the Future of Law Practice  
Committee on Women and Minorities in the Profession  
Budget and Finance Committee

### Admission to Practice:

Commonwealth of Virginia  
Supreme Court of Virginia  
United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit  
United States District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia

### Professional Affiliations:

Virginia Model Jury Instruction Committee  
Supreme Court of Virginia—Court of Appeals Study Committee  
Virginia Law Foundation, Fellow  
Virginia Trial Lawyers Association, Past President  
American Board of Trial Advocates, Past president  
Lewis F. Powell American Inn of Court, Past President  
John Marshall American Inn of Court  
Boyd-Graves Conference Committee  
Litigation Counsel of America, Fellow  
American Association for Justice  
Greater Richmond Bar Foundation  
Henrico County Bar Association  
Richmond Bar Association  
Chesterfield-Colonial Heights Bar Association  
Metropolitan Richmond Women's Bar Association, Past President

### Education:

J.D., School of Law,  
University of Richmond  
B.A., University of Richmond

### Family:

Scott Ivars Bemberis, spouse  
Mom to Nicole (22), Garrett (21), and Dakota (18)  
Adopted mom to Beau Grana,  
Morkie extraordinaire

### Photos:

1. Grana riding horses in North Dakota with cousin, Michele Beauclair.
2. Grana and Bemberis at their wedding at University of Richmond's Canon Memorial Chapel in 1996.
3. Kathleen Grana with her daughter, Stephanie.
4. Grana and her father, Joseph, at the U of R Ring Dance at the Jefferson Hotel.
5. Grana, dressed for her job at McDonald's.
6. Grana delivering remarks in high school.
7. The Bemberis/Grana family on a vacation to Canada.