

# Detroit Lawyer



SPOTLIGHT ON:

**FOLEY**

FOLEY & LARDNER LLP



*DRIVING*  
**INNOVATION**  
*in DETROIT—*



Foley & Lardner LLP

BY MARK HANSEN



t a trendy Detroit restaurant, four women partners from Foley & Lardner LLP sat down for dinner—and for each other. By the time the plates were cleared, they had committed to continue with their plans to collaborate and deliver seamless legal solutions to their clients across a multitude of areas.

The four—Jennifer Belveal, Vanessa Miller, Erin Toomey, and Ann Marie Uetz—focused on how they could best serve their clients and better support each other.

And, while perhaps surprising to some that lawyers would focus on working together rather than competing with each other, these four women all share Foley’s commitment to innovation, cooperation, and collaboration in the name of client service.

That commitment has been a cornerstone of Foley’s growth in Detroit. The office opened in 2000 with five lawyers as a way to better serve the firm’s auto industry clients. It has since grown to 40 attorneys and diversified its client base.

Led by office managing partner Philip B. Phillips, whose tenure at Foley fittingly stretches back to January 2001, shortly after the 2000 opening, Foley’s Detroit office now proudly represents clients in a wide variety of industries including companies in the automotive, aerospace, construction, e-business, health care, finance, gaming, retail, steel, transportation, and private equity and venture capital sectors.

None of that growth would have been possible without a continuing commitment to innovate—on behalf of their clients, the firm, and each other.

Belveal, Miller, Toomey, and Uetz each practice in different areas and represent a cross-section of the firm itself. Foley has nearly 900 lawyers in 19 offices throughout the United States, Asia, and Europe with more than 60 unique practice areas.

The four partners interact in the office, but Uetz saw the idea of quarterly dinner meetings first as a way to welcome Belveal, who laterally to the firm in mid-2016, and then to find a way to integrate their synergistic practices. “We already share a lot of interests and clients,” Uetz says, “and this time together provides a great opportunity for us to discover how we can cross-serve our clients.”

What they have found is that getting to know one another better has not only made them closer to each other, but also closer to each other’s clients and their business objectives.

## Jennifer Belveal

Belveal is a bit of a rare breed in that she is a trial lawyer who focuses on both commercial disputes and what is traditionally referred to as white collar criminal investigations and defense. She has more than twenty years of experience representing companies, corporate boards, and individuals in high-stakes matters involving potential civil and/or criminal consequences, as well as reputational damage. Many of her clients are in manufacturing, health care, or real estate, but they are not limited by industry or geography. Often, the only common



thread in her work is that her clients are facing a legal problem with significant risk.

Clients trust Belveal to lead bet-the-company litigation, internal investigations, and crisis management. Although most of her clients find themselves needing a lawyer because of a business situation, she admits that legal problems often permeate into every aspect of her clients’ lives. Belveal feels a personal obligation to each of her clients, entities, and individuals alike.

“I try to look at every issue from my client’s perspective. I work hard to deliver the best possible solution for the client’s needs, which means going above and beyond the typical lawyer response.” She considers all available resources to address complex situations. She jokes that she often “works herself right out of a case.” For example, Belveal loves to try cases, having tried more than 50 in her career, but she knows that going to trial is not always best for clients.

Belveal has received numerous local and national accolades for her work in the areas of both commercial litigation and white collar criminal investigations and defense. She is the vice chair of the American Bar Association’s Women in White Collar Subcommittee.

In 2016, Belveal joined Foley with two of her long-time partners because they wanted to work in a firm with a collaborative environment and a national platform.

“Having a national platform with a deep bench has already proven to be invaluable,” she says. “Clients get the benefit of not only my Detroit colleagues, but they also have the support and expertise of the entire Foley law firm collectively.”

Community service has always been important to Belveal. She volunteers her time for a number of charitable organizations and has served on several nonprofit boards. She currently serves as a Trustee for Detroit Public Television.

Despite all that is on her plate, she still finds time to vacation regularly with her husband and two children. “My motto has always been to work hard and to play hard,” she says. She’s ridden camels on the beach in Morocco, helicoptered to the top of a glacier to go dogsledding in Alaska, and climbed mountains carved out of granite in Arizona. According to Belveal, “every new situation—whether with family and friends or with my clients—gives me an opportunity to learn something that could be useful someday, in or out of the courtroom.”





## Vanessa Miller

When Miller decided to go into private practice following a clerkship for the Honorable Patrick J. Duggan in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan, Foley was her first choice. She liked the fact that it was a smaller office with a heavy focus on the manufacturing and automotive industries, but that it also had an international footprint.

She began her career at the firm working with John Trentacosta, one of the top commercial litigators in Michigan with a national expertise in handling supply chain disputes for automotive and other manufacturing companies. She has been working with Trentacosta on complex, and often cross-border, supply chain and other commercial disputes for 12 years.

Miller, who currently chairs the Litigation Department in Detroit, loves working with manufacturing companies that are creating things and she takes great pride in learning about the various parts that go into complex assemblies.

Every supply chain dispute affords her the opportunity to work with individuals from several departments across the client's organization, including engineers, sales teams, procurement, finance groups, in-house legal, and executives. She explains, "this is because the supply chain touches upon so many different—and critical—functions within each company."

Even isolated quality issues and short disruptions in a just-in-time supply chain can result in millions of dollars in damages in an hour, making her practice very exciting. But her practice is not limited to litigating supply chain disputes that have already arisen. One of her key goals "is to look for ways to help clients realize the maximum value out of their supply chains," and then to "manage the risks inherent in any supply chain."

Some ways that she helps clients to manage those unavoidable risks include comprehensive training programs for sales and procurement groups, negotiation strategies, drafting assistance for critical supply contracts and long-term agreements, and contingency planning for quality and continuity issues in the supply chain and force majeure events.

Given the international nature of most supply chains, Miller has substantial international arbitration expertise in various venues across the world. She has traveled all over Asia, Europe, and Mexico representing clients in arbitration proceedings.

When she is not traveling for work or spending time with her two kids (10 and 4), Miller enjoys throwing elaborate wine-paired dinner parties at her home where she hosts friends and clients. She insists on making everything from scratch, with the help of her husband, who jokes that he's just the "sous-chef."

For her dinner parties, she has made as many as 12 courses, but has found that 6 to 8 courses is plenty of food and wine for her guests. War stories inevitably arise, Miller says, but she tries hard to keep such events strictly social. "I don't want to ruin a good dinner by talking shop," she says.

## Erin Toomey

As the first attorney in the Detroit office to rise from summer associate to partner, Toomey has spent her entire legal career at Foley.

Toomey started at Foley in litigation, working on commercial litigation, bankruptcy, white collar criminal defense, and government procurement matters. After a few years, Toomey decided to focus her practice on government procurement, an area that would make her indispensable to the firm and her clients.

She also knew that, so long as we have a government, that government would need to buy goods and services, making the government contracts market—with a \$500 billion annual spend—a steady source of opportunity.

As one of the only attorneys in Detroit focused exclusively on government procurement law, Toomey represents both small and large businesses throughout all phases of contract award, performance, and closeout. She also helps government contractors to understand the laws and regulations that govern their contracts and implement policies and procedures to ensure compliance.

Toomey often explains, "When you do business commercially and things go wrong, the parties may sue one another. When you do business with the government and things go wrong, someone may go to jail." And when the government investigates one of her clients, Toomey teams up with Belveal and other partners in Foley's white collar group to conduct internal investigations and respond to the government.

Within the area of government procurement, Toomey has carved out a niche for herself as the go-to deal attorney when a client is buying or selling a government contractor, identifying and addressing risks that may be unfamiliar to



mergers and acquisitions attorneys who handle deals involving companies operating entirely in the commercial sector. As Toomey explains, “Clients must conduct due diligence of a government contractor differently. A company’s failure to comply with government contracting requirements can lead to significant civil or criminal liability, and potential suspension or debarment, which could significantly impact the value of the acquired company.” Toomey teams up with mergers and acquisitions attorneys at Foley and other firms to provide this specialized service.

When she’s not helping her clients navigate their way through the labyrinth of the government contracting process, Toomey may most likely be found on the sidelines of one of her sons’ sporting events. She has three young sons who are heavily involved in sports, and a husband who does double-duty as their coach.

Toomey is as committed to her family as she is to her practice and clients, helping her boys prepare for their games as she helps her clients prepare for the often rigorous government contracting process. She has learned so much about football that she sometimes fills in as a booth spotter or announcer. She jokes about how far she has come from the day when, as a play-by-play announcer for her son’s football game, she learned that there was no such thing as a 52-yard-line.

## Ann Marie Uetz

Uetz joined Foley’s Detroit office shortly after it opened, and quickly became its first female partner. Nearly 20 years later, she remains confident in her decision to join Foley, which offers a national network of nearly 900 lawyers to engage with while remaining based in her hometown of Detroit. She chose Foley not only because she liked and respected the partners who first opened its Detroit office, but also because of its unique platform of attorneys upon whom she and her clients rely for a broad range of support.

“It’s the best of both worlds,” she said.

With a practice focused on business litigation and bankruptcy, Uetz represents many clients involved in the manufacturing industry’s supply chain—chiefly suppliers in the automotive and defense sectors, but also lenders and private equity sponsors—counseling them on contracts, business disputes, financing, and restructuring. It’s a practice that fits nicely in Detroit and beyond.



Going to school in Detroit and practicing law in the city for the past 25 years, Uetz has enjoyed the city’s highs and helped her clients survive its lows, including especially the near-collapse of the North American automobile industry in 2009 when General Motors and Chrysler, as well as many automotive suppliers, filed for bankruptcy. She served as a founder and co-chair of Foley’s Automotive Crisis Response Team which collectively represented more than one hundred automotive suppliers in those bankruptcy cases.

She couldn’t be more excited to be part of the city’s renaissance.

Uetz has observed that Detroit’s 18-month odyssey through municipal bankruptcy played an obvious key role in the city’s resurgence, but so too did the efforts of the scores of people who have moved to Detroit and made it their home. She gives credit to business leaders like Quicken Loans founder Dan Gilbert for the speed and scale of his efforts to remake downtown, to companies who are relocating to Detroit, and to the many others who have been willing to take a gamble on Detroit’s resurgence.

So last year, Uetz picked up and moved to the historic Brush Park neighborhood to take part in the city’s rebirth. The move to her new home has the added advantage of cutting her commute time to about ten minutes, which she often walks with her recently-adopted dog Bowie, named after the late singer and songwriter David Bowie.

Uetz, who was named to the *Crain’s Detroit Business* Most Connected List in 2015, has an expansive network of friends and clients in Detroit and beyond. “One of my favorite things to do is to bring people together and help create opportunities.”

Outside of Foley, Uetz enjoys biking (which usually involves Belle Isle followed by Eastern Market), music concerts near and far (she has seen Bruce Springsteen more times than she can count, including in Ireland and Australia), and exploring her new neighborhood. She says it seems like there’s a new restaurant, shop, art gallery, wine bar, bike path, or indeed dog park opening every day. And she’s making it her personal mission to try most of them.

“I’ve got a list a mile long,” she says, which she pulls up on her phone and happily shares with friends and visitors.

Uetz is certain that list includes several new restaurants for Foley’s women partners’ next round of dinners. And, Miller, Toomey, and Belveal are all eager to add to that list—and invite new colleagues to join them on their adventures.

Their collaboration is emblematic of Foley & Lardner in Detroit: working together to create a better outcome for their clients.

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Foley & Lardner LLP is an international law firm started in 1842. With nearly 900 lawyers in 19 offices across the United States, Foley’s Detroit office provides local access to the firm’s global resources and to attorneys who cover virtually every legal practice area.



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