

philadelphia

WOMEN
CHANGING
THE WORLD
pg. 35



Also Inside:

Leading health
systems,
outdoor living,
and more

**Julianna Merback
Burdo** of the law
firm of **Wapner
Newman** finds joy
and meaning in her
work whether she is
handling a medical
malpractice case or
mentoring the next
generation.

page 32



by **Matt Cosentino**
photos by **Alison Dunlap**



WAPNERNEWMAN



JULIANNA MERBACK BURDO OF THE LAW FIRM OF **WAPNER NEWMAN** FINDS JOY AND MEANING IN HER WORK WHETHER SHE IS HANDLING A MEDICAL MALPRACTICE CASE OR MENTORING THE NEXT GENERATION.

More than three decades into her career, Julianna Merback Burdo remains deeply passionate about the law. Perhaps nothing gives her greater joy than having the privilege to represent the interests of an injured individual or grieving family. Although statistics suggest that most cases settle before ever getting to trial, she vigorously prepares for each case as if she will ultimately get into the courtroom to stand up and fight and to be the client's voice for justice.

"I'm a Leo, and supposedly the limelight is a trait that follows us Leos," she says with a laugh. "But really, I just love advocacy. A courtroom is the perfect arena to be passionate and tenaciously advance what you think is right."

An accomplished personal injury lawyer since the 1990s, Burdo is the very definition of a "leading lady" or "power woman," even though she would never use those terms herself. She is the only female partner at the renowned Philadelphia firm Wapner Newman. Despite the demands of her complex legal practice, she has made time throughout her busy career to raise two children, contribute to local politics in Bucks County, establish herself as one of the most respected medical malpractice attorneys in the region, and mentor younger professionals.

Mentorship is particularly meaningful to Burdo, because she remains grateful to all of the lawyers who guided her on this path. From her start at Fox Rothschild as a litigation paralegal and later an associate, to stops at various firms in Philadelphia and Bucks County, she was surrounded by dedicated attorneys who informed and influenced the way she thinks and practices law.

"I think it was a lot of luck in terms of the lawyers, the partners, and the men that I got to work with who took me everywhere and gave me so much responsibility," she says. "I had a very romantic upbringing in terms of getting to sit next to some of the greatest lawyers, I think, that Philadelphia has known. Not many women lawyers can say they were raised by Louis Fryman, Joseph Smukler, John Rothschild, and Jim Griffith, and then got to practice law with

A Passion for the Profession

Tom Kline, Shanin Specter, and Jim Haggerty.”

After opening her own firm in Bucks County to be closer to her family, Burdo was able to return to Philadelphia after her children were grown. Merging her firm with Wapner Newman was a perfect match.

“Before I went out on my own and opened Burdo Law Firm, I had been looking for a home for my cases and had talked to Wapner Newman about whether it was a fit,” she says. “At that time, the stars just didn’t align, but I was already fond of everybody here. I’m a sucker for longstanding tradition, so Wapner Newman being one of the oldest personal injury firms in the city of Philadelphia means a lot to me. The support here has been tremendous and having the encouragement to really cultivate my cases as I see fit is truly rewarding.”

Burdo’s values have aligned perfectly with the rest of the firm, according to Robert S. Miller, Wapner Newman’s managing partner. He describes her as an “invaluable” asset to the firm and its clients.

“Throughout her career she has represented clients with catastrophic injuries suffered as a result of medical malpractice, trucking and motor vehicle claims, as well as construction site and premises accidents,” he adds. “She is smart, aggressive, and loves protecting the rights of our clients. Julianna has tried multimillion-dollar cases to verdict. I know I can always call upon her to passionately represent our clients from the first meeting or at any point in the litigation to try any case through its successful conclusion.”

While Burdo focuses on multiple areas of personal injury law, she has been drawn to the intersection between law and medicine in medical malpractice cases since the early days of her career. She is one of the few lawyers in Pennsylvania and New Jersey who consistently handle dental malpractice cases for the injured patient; she has become the trusted recipient of many dozens of cases referred to her by other attorneys. This notoriety stems from dental cases Burdo handled early on in her career that yielded significant results and has continued throughout her numerous publications and lectures on vetting and handling dental cases.

She also has a particular interest in handling cases pertaining to women’s health care, especially those in which patients are dealing with sensitive issues.

“I think there’s a population of women who feel more comfortable sharing their private health care needs or experiences woman to woman,” she says. “Everybody has complex medical needs, but female health care is so unique to women that it just inspires me when I have the opportunity to handle these cases, whether it’s a case involving a routine gynecology checkup, delayed breast cancer diagnosis, screenings for cervical, uterine, and colorectal cancers, a fertility or family planning case, a GYN surgery case, a

cardiovascular, autoimmune, or other specialty care case, or women’s mental health conditions.

“Of course, the obstetrical cases have a whole other component to them,” she continues. “There is no responsibility I regard as higher than when medical providers deliver a baby, and I know the female patient perspective is unique in that setting. Cases involving women’s health issues are not more important than the other medical cases, but it’s just something I feel very passionate about.”

No matter the nature of the medical malpractice case, Burdo dives headfirst into the preparation. She loves working with her experts, learning the medicine, and being taught challenging medical concepts.

“These cases are very complex, and there’s a lot at stake,” she says. “A catastrophic injury is a life-altering event, whether it arises from a slip-and-fall or a medical or dental error. I think in all of those instances, people who are catastrophically injured get one shot at seeking justice and holding wrongdoers

responsible. As their attorney, I take the opportunity of handling that ‘one shot’ very seriously.”

Thirty-five years into her career, Burdo enjoys the work more than ever. Getting the chance to pass on her knowledge and passion to give 100 percent effort to future “leading women” like herself—whether it’s her own daughter, currently a student at Villanova Law School, or her cherished associate-mentee at Wapner Newman—is one of the most fulfilling aspects of her career. Burdo has been honored as a finalist for Best Law Firm Mentor at this year’s 2025 Pennsylvania Legal Awards.

“Bringing my practice to Wapner Newman gave me the opportunity to return to a setting where there were a lot of younger attorneys,” she says. “I love mentoring—I had one incredible mentor after another along the way. At this twilight stage of my career, I now get to enjoy being able to give back. I don’t know that my mentoring can hold a candle to what I received, but I am determined to try my very best.” ■



Burdo is the only female partner at Wapner Newman. Robert S. Miller, the firm’s managing partner, describes her as an “invaluable” asset to the firm and its clients.

Wapner Newman Attorneys at Law

1628 John F. Kennedy Blvd., Suite 800 | Philadelphia, PA 19103 | (215) 569-0900
www.wapnernewman.com