

As Seen In... Forbes, May 7, 2007

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## Skellenger Bender

### A Unique Take on Construction Law

Construction law is not an uncommon area of practice. But one Seattle law firm has carved out an unusual niche in the industry. According to Skellenger Bender Partner Beth Andrus, many construction law practitioners represent project owners, contractors, or subcontractors, "the people who actually pick up the tools and do the building," she says.

However, Skellenger Bender has focused its construction law practice on a different side of the business. "Our primary focus is representation of design professionals," says Andrus, "architects, engineers, environmental consultants, landscape architects, geologists, construction managers. These professionals are involved in nearly every segment of the construction industry, from private residential projects to large public works projects."

While the firm represents design professionals involved in small commercial or residential projects, its primary clients are those companies engaged in large-scale infrastructure projects such as water and wastewater treatment plants, pipelines, dams, tunnels, bridges and highways. High-rise building projects, condominiums, and environmental clean-ups also dot the practice's résumé.

#### Experience Makes the Difference

When he joined the firm in 1979, Partner Bill Bender represented the Washington Public Power Supply System in lawsuits relating to the construction of the Hanford nuclear power plants. That experience served as a springboard to develop Skellenger Bender's construction practice. By the 1990s, Bender was working with environmental contractors and engineering firms on contracts for a variety of large, complex construction projects. Through the years, Bender developed a reputation in the construction industry in the Pacific Northwest and Alaska for innovative approaches both to contracting and resolving construction claims.

When Andrus joined the firm in 1995, she and Bender made the strategic decision to focus the practice's efforts on the designer and consulting side of the construction industry. Andrus and Bender found they enjoyed learning about the design industry, the exciting projects on which these clients worked, and the legal challenges design professional clients faced.

Over the years, the firm's construction law group has added attorneys whose backgrounds serve to strengthen the practice and provide added value for their clients. Terry Scanlan



**Skellenger Bender Construction Practice Group**

Back row: David K. Eckberg, Peter Offenbecher, Terence J. Scanlan, William J. Bender; Front row: Lindsey Malone Pflugrath, Beth M. Andrus, Kara Masters

and Kara Masters brought with them extensive trial practice experience. David Eckberg, an engineer by training, served 15 years as in-house counsel for an environmental engineering firm. "He has incredible experience in negotiating complex construction contracts and business transactions, including corporate mergers and acquisitions," says Andrus. "Another partner, Peter Offenbecher, has led clients through difficult and complicated criminal or regulatory investigations arising out of public works projects."

"Whatever their specialties, the attorneys in our construction practice all have

an intimate knowledge and in-depth understanding of the design industry," she says. "This enables us to develop legally sound, cost-effective solutions for our clients."

#### Construction Law and More

Skellenger Bender offers clients an eclectic mix of specialties, says Andrus. In addition to the construction/design professionals practice, the firm features a thriving family law practice, including substantial experience in adoption and assisted reproduction cases. The firm also has attorneys whose practices involve health care professional disciplinary proceedings, employment and commercial litigation, and white collar criminal defense.

According to Andrus, the variety of practices has served the firm well. "Working alongside such diverse clients has made us more insightful, responsive and innovative attorneys," she says.

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