

Speaker Bios

(In order of appearance)



Mike Mohler

Chief Administrator | MALA President
[Baltimore County Liquor Board/Rental Registration Program](#) | [Maryland Alcohol Licensing Association \(MALA\)](#)

In addition to his duties of regulating all facets of the licensing and sale of alcoholic beverages within the county, Mike Mohler has been appointed Co-chair of the Baltimore County Liquor License Review Task Force, consisting of 10 business leaders from diverse backgrounds to review and recommend changes to Baltimore County's Liquor License Laws. Mr. Mohler also manages Baltimore County's Rental Registration Program, which has grown from 249 units in 2007 to over 19,000 today.

Past positions include the Deputy Director of Permits and Development Management for Baltimore County's Code Enforcement division. As Deputy Director, he managed a diverse department that included a staff of 31 – supervisors, coordinators, inspectors, rental registration administrators, and clerical staff. Prior to this time, Mohler held the position of Mid-Atlantic Region Sales Director for DIAGEO-GUINNESS USA where he managed the sales of the Guinness beer and FMB portfolio in a six-state, 3.5 million case region accounting for \$70 million in annual sales in Pennsylvania, Southern New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, DC, and West Virginia.



Thomas R. Akras, Esq.

Director, Legal and Legislative Division
[Alcohol and Tobacco Commission \(ATC\)](#)

As Director of ATC's Legal and Legislative Division, Mr. Akras reviews and monitors alcohol and tobacco-related legislative bills and State laws and regulations; recommends and develops new ATC relevant legislation; and updates existing state regulations. He also provides guidance to local liquor boards, health departments, industry members, and others and serves as the lead Administrative Hearing Officer for the ATC.

Additionally, Tom serves as the Chief of Operations Management for the Downtown Partnership of Baltimore (DPOB), Inc. where he oversees the day-to-day operations of the Hospitality, Public Maintenance, Parks and Programming, Capital Projects, and Homeless Services divisions for the DPOB. Responsibilities include: creating statistical based management tools to monitor and track operational performance; drafting and managing implementation of the annual \$7.5M DPOB Operations budget; and collaborating with DPOB partners to identify and apply for grant opportunities.

Prior positions include the Deputy Executive Secretary for the Board of Liquor License Commissioners of Baltimore City, Assistant City Solicitor/Assistant State's Attorney for the Baltimore City Housing, and Assistant State's Attorney for the Baltimore City State's Attorney's Office, District Court. Mr. Akras received his JD – University of Maryland School of Law and also holds a Master's in Public Administration – University of Baltimore, and a BA in Government and Politics – University of Maryland College Park.



David Mister

Founding Partner

[Mister, Winter & Bartlett, LLC](#)

Civil, criminal, administrative, and appellate litigator with over 47 years of experience. Substantial practice for national clients in the alcoholic beverages industry. Author or co-drafter of numerous Maryland legislative bills, regarding alcoholic beverages, enacted into Maryland law by the General Assembly of Maryland.

Principal areas of practice include: (1) Regular representation of clients and litigation before Boards of Liquor License Commissioners and Liquor Control Boards, regarding the transfer of alcoholic beverage licenses and/or issuance of new alcoholic beverage licenses, and alcoholic beverage license appeals to the Circuit Court and higher appellate courts, as well as actions for injunction and declaratory relief regarding the interpretation and enforcement of alcoholic beverage laws; (2) Practice in the area of the sale and acquisition of businesses, including alcoholic beverage licensed businesses; and (3) Counsel to government and industry regarding alcoholic beverage licensing in the context of economic development and urban/suburban revival and drafting of alcoholic beverage legislation; (4) Acting as court-appointed trustee for the sale and transfer of alcoholic beverage licensed businesses; (5) Serving as court-appointed special alcoholic beverage license counsel for United States Bankruptcy Trustees.

Lecturer to private practice attorneys, prosecuting attorneys, and industry groups in areas of the law including use of experts in trial, wiretapping and electronic surveillance law, search and seizure law, gambling and controlled dangerous substances investigations, and preventing violations and defending alcoholic beverage licensees.

Former Assistant State's Attorney for Baltimore County, Special Investigation Division; former Special Assistant State's Attorney for Calvert County; former Special Assistant State's Attorney for Carroll County; former Special Assistant State's Attorney for Frederick County; and former Special Assistant State's Attorney for Queen Anne's County.



Kevin Atticks

Founder

[Grow & Fortify](#)

Kevin Atticks started out writing press articles for the wine industry, but soon grew the Maryland Wineries Association with new events, promotional programs, government affairs initiatives, and more. After leading the wineries association for 15 years, he founded Grow & Fortify to promote Maryland's value-added agriculture industry, notably wineries, breweries, and distilleries. He serves on the University of Maryland College of Agriculture's Global Leadership Council, is the past chair of the Maryland Tourism Coalition, past president of the Maryland Agricultural Resource Council, and past chair of the WineAmerica State & Regional Associations Advisory Council. Kevin holds a Master's in Environmental Journalism from CU-Boulder, a Doctorate in Communications Design from University of Baltimore, and a bachelor's degree in Journalism and Music Composition from Loyola University, where he holds a faculty position.



Judy Crow

Owner

[Crow Vineyards](#)

Judy is the former President of the Maryland Wineries Association. She and her family own and operate Crow Vineyard & Winery and Crow Farmstay BB. On the Crow's 365-acre diversified farm, they are growing 12½ acres of grapes and are proudly making wine from their grapes. They also make wine for three-to-four other start-up wineries in the area. Crow is a destination for Maryland and regional travelers spending the weekend at the BB or experiencing wine in the Tasting Room. It is important to have Crow wines in wholesale locations so when the visitors leave to go home, they can find Crow wines on retail shelves.



Monica Pearce

Founder and “Boss Lady”
[Tenth Ward Distilling Company](#)

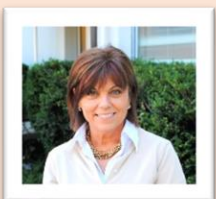
Monica started her career spending eight years working in the conservation biology field. She received an undergraduate degree in Environmental Science and Policy from the University of Maryland, College Park and an Executive Master's in Natural Resources from Virginia Tech. Additionally Monica has over 20 years' experience in the service and hospitality industry and 10 plus years' experience with marketing, branding, and strategic planning. Monica eventually moved back to her hometown of Frederick, MD where she founded Tenth Ward Distilling Company in July of 2016. She has grown the business from a tasting room and distillery from 1600 square feet and virtually no employees to an expanded cocktail bar and tasting room, private event venue, and production facility with a combined square footage of 20,000 feet. Since starting the business, Monica now sits as VP on the board of the Maryland Distillers Guild, is a member of the Frederick Tourism Council Board of Directors, a graduated fellow from the James Beard Foundation's Women's Leadership Program, and recognized as Frederick County's top 50 under 40 entrepreneurs.



Judy Neff

Owner
[Checkerspot Brewing](#)

Judy Neff is a longtime homebrewer living the dream. She is a Certified Cicerone and helped found Baltimore Beer Babes, a craft beer appreciation group bringing more women into the fold and is a proud member of the Pink Boots Society. She has a PhD in microbiology from The Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, so she isn't afraid of the scientific side of brewing, but firmly believes that the creative side and understanding of the ingredients are just as important. She loves all of the beers, but Juniperus IPA is definitely the #1!



Kathie Durbin

Director | MALA Vice-President
[Montgomery County Alcohol Beverage Services](#) | [Maryland Alcohol Licensing Association \(MALA\)](#)

For over 15 years, Kathie Durbin has been responsible for Montgomery County, Maryland's alcohol licensing, alcohol policy, education, legislative initiatives, and business compliance. Ms. Durbin was confirmed as the Director of the Montgomery County's Department of Alcohol Beverage Services (ABS) in May 2021. ABS is the wholesaler of beer, wine, and spirits in the County and operates 26 retail stores, generating more than \$35 million in net income annually.

Ms. Durbin began her career as a Responsible Alcohol Beverage Service Instructor for the Restaurant Association of Maryland's Hospitality Education Foundation while working in restaurant management positions in DC and Maryland.

She then spent 10 years as a contractor for the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services where she wrote and managed state grants, mini-grants, and managed the substance abuse prevention network. During that time, she also served as the Executive Director of the Montgomery County Restaurant Association, collaborating with local agencies and the executive board to craft meaningful alcohol legislation.

Kathie is a University of Maryland, Baltimore County Graduate and is also certified by the State of Maryland as an Alcohol Server Instructor and a Substance Abuse Prevention Professional. She is an active member of the National Alcohol Beverage Control Association, Responsible Hospitality Institute, and the Responsible Retailing Forum. Recognized in 2016 by the National Alcohol Licensing Professional Association for Innovation and Leadership and again in 2017 by the Center for Alcohol Policy as Regulator of the Year, Kathie is considered an expert in the field of alcohol regulation, education, and policy.



Chris Swonger

President & CEO

[Distilled Spirits Council of the United States \(DISCUS\)](#)

With over 25 years of experience in the public and private sector, representing elected officials and three diverse, global consumer goods companies, Chris has led integrated corporate affairs strategies with responsibility for public affairs, international government affairs, corporate reputation management, corporate communications, brand public relations, philanthropy, and social responsibility.

Currently, Chris serves as the President & CEO of both the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States (DISCUS) and [Responsibility.org](#). [Responsibility.org](#) was founded in 1991 and has received more than \$250 million dollars voluntarily from the nation's leading distillers to fight drunk driving and underage drinking and promote responsible decisions about beverage alcohol. DISCUS is the leading voice for distilled spirits in the U.S. market and serves as the industry's advocate in state capitals, the nation's capital, and foreign capitals around the globe.

Chris has extensive experience guiding corporations to lead in business while playing a positive role in communities through proactive engagement. In this capacity,

Chris focuses on breaking down the traditional barriers that exist between corporations, non-government organizations, and activist groups by facilitating consensus-based outcomes which are deliverable, actionable, and measurable.

A native Texan, Chris received his bachelor's degree from Texas Tech University and lives in McLean, Virginia with his wife Amy and their two sons Holden and Beckett Boone.

Chris' favorite drink? Bourbon on the rocks.

Something you should know about Chris? "I love to play chess!"



Lester Jones

VP, Analytics and Chief Economist

[National Beer Wholesalers Association \(NBWA\)](#)

Lester Jones tracks the economic factors that impact the beer distribution industry and alcohol policy decisions at the federal, state, and local levels. He evaluates and develops primary industry data, including economic impact, tax impacts, sales, and volume data.

Jones has more than 20 years of experience in research, survey methodology and applied economics. He previously served as chief economist at the Beer Institute, where he developed and executed significant research initiatives that helped shape America's beer industry. Jones also has become a respected public speaker, offering in-depth technical, analytical and quantitative expertise.

In addition to his decade of work at the Beer Institute, Jones previously worked for Arbitron Company (Nielsen) in Columbia, Maryland, and the Regional Economic Studies Institute in Towson, Maryland. Jones holds a Master of Science in Economics from the University of Delaware, as well as a Bachelor of Arts in Economics from the University of Maryland Baltimore County.



John Bodnovich

Executive Director

[American Beverage Licensees \(ABL\)](#)

John Bodnovich is a leading advocate for America's beer, wine and spirits retailers. He works closely with ABL's state and regional affiliates representing on- and off-premise beverage licensee members on matters of concern to beverage alcohol retailers. His work includes managing ABL's federal government affairs portfolio, grassroots advocacy, and strategic communication efforts between ABL and its affiliates.

John is ABL's primary representative to industry trade associations, alcohol suppliers, wholesalers and importers, as well as social responsibility organizations and other industry stakeholders. During his time with ABL, John has led association initiatives including legal advocacy, membership and responsibility campaigns, and public awareness efforts addressing alcohol issues.

A native of Illinois, John holds a B.A. in Government & International Relations from the University of Notre Dame and a Master's degree in Political Management from The George Washington University. He and his wife, Erin, reside in Kensington, Maryland with their four children.