

DALE SWOPE HONORED WITH THE JUSTICE BARBARA PARIENTE AWARD

by Sara Pratt

The Florida Justice Association® proudly announces Dale Swope as the 2025 recipient of the prestigious Justice Barbara Pariente Award. Named in honor of Justice Pariente, a trailblazing lawyer and former Florida Supreme Court justice, this award recognizes those who, through extraordinary tenacity, grit, and resilience, uphold the principle that every Floridian deserves equal justice under the law.

Dale has spent his career fighting to protect and preserve Florida's civil justice system. A Tampa native, Dale is the managing partner of Swope, Rodante P.A., the firm he founded just six months after graduating from the University of Florida Levin College of Law in 1979. Since then, he has built a legacy defined by fierce advocacy, leadership, and an unwavering commitment to justice.

Dale has earned virtually every professional honor available to attorneys in his field. He has received several prestigious awards from the FJA®, including the Compassionate Gladiator Award, the S. Victor Tipton Legal Writing Award, the Mickey Smiley Award, and the EAGLE® Centurion Award. He served as president of the Florida Justice Association from 2017 to 2018 and was a founding member and the first president of the Tampa Bay Trial Lawyers Association.

This year's Justice Barbara Pariente Award recognizes Dale's extraordinary pro bono service in defense of a young student who was sued after courageously reporting sexual misconduct by her college professor. In 2019, a Florida Gulf Coast University student came forward with her story, leading to the professor's termination following a Title IX investigation. A month later and in retaliation, the professor filed a defamation lawsuit against her alleging libel per se, slander per se, and defamation by implication.

When Dale learned of the case through a friend of a friend of a friend, he did not hesitate.

"Dale Swope's defense of this young woman was the purest example of courage and compassion in action. He gave his time, talent, and heart to fight for someone who had been wronged, asking for nothing in return," says Curry Pajcic. "Free of charge, Dale defended this young victim, and his tenacity, grit, and determination prevailed."

Over multiple years of hard-fought litigation, Dale faced numerous procedural challenges but remained resolute. The crux of Dale's closing was that what the student described sure sounded like "rape" under today's societal standards — or at least that's the conclusion Florida Gulf Coast University reached. But

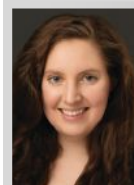


she never used that word and, most importantly, never lied about what happened (and therefore could not be held liable).

In August 2022, Dale and his team prevailed at trial, with the jury awarding no damages to the plaintiff and fully vindicating his client.

Through his tireless advocacy, Dale protected not just one student, but others who had been victimized. His work in this case reflects the values that have defined his career: courage in the face of adversity, dedication to those in need, and a belief that justice must be accessible to all.

The Florida Justice Association congratulates Dale Swope on this well-deserved honor and thanks him for his lifetime of service to the cause of justice. His career is a testament to the idea that the fight for justice is never finished. ■



SARA PRATT

currently serves as Florida Justice Association's Marketing Director and is dedicated to supporting FJA's mission to strengthen and uphold Florida's civil justice system and protect the rights of citizens and consumers. Pratt received her master's in public administration from Florida State University and is a storyteller with experience in developing and managing public relations and marketing campaigns for both the public and private sectors. Prior to FJA®, she spent time in the public sector leading a public information team during disasters including Hurricane Michael and the COVID-19 pandemic.