

Daily Journal

MAY 2, 2018

Top Women Lawyers 2018

*The Daily Journal's Annual List of
Leading Women Lawyers in California*

Christine D. Spagnoli

Most recently, Spagnoli obtained a \$25.9 million jury verdict against an old opponent of hers in Florida circuit court, Ford Motor Company, regarding a wife and mother of four who died while being transported in a church van.

"They seem to underestimate me," Spagnoli said of Ford.

The case dealt with tire separation, an issue well known to the trial lawyer, along with defective seat belts. In addition to going after Ford, Spagnoli sued First Baptist Church, claiming it negligently maintained the van.

"They had tires on the van that were subject to recall," Spagnoli said.

And last fall, after more than 100 depositions and 17 motions in limine, Spagnoli was gearing up for the fight of her life as co-lead plaintiff's counsel in a personal injury case against Federal Express.

The delivery company faced a slew of lawsuits alleging its driver was negligent in an accident in which a company freight truck crossed oncoming traffic on Interstate 5 in Orland and crashed into a bus carrying students. Thirty-six people were injured and 10 died. *Federal Express Vehicle Collision Cases*, JCCP4788 (L.A. Super. Ct., filed July 22, 2014).



But the case confidentially settled on the eve of trial.

Her team felt that key government reports about the crash were flawed, including a National Highway Traffic Safety Board determination that the driver experienced a medical emergency prior to the crash. Spagnoli succeeded in blocking the federal agency's report from being entered into evidence.

**GREENE, BROILLET &
WHEELER LLP**

SANTA MONICA

Practice Type: Product liability

Spagnoli said FedEx was moved to settle after the judge ruled on key evidentiary issues in the plaintiff's favor, including admitting the driver's cellphone records.

Spagnoli said her team had uncovered evidence showing the driver regularly used his phone to text, make phone calls and use the internet while behind the wheel, including in the moments leading up to the crash. This wider picture of the driver's history of cellphone use was admitted into evidence by the judge, Spagnoli said.

She said police and government investigators "didn't assess his history and habit of using his phone while driving."

"That was the big evidentiary issue, one frequently debated among us and the defense lawyers," said Spagnoli.

— Justin Kloczko