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Jennifer Cona, Esq.
Cona Elder Law



Melinda Novak
Long Island Game
Farm & Children's Zoo



**David and
Peter Friedfeld**
ClearVision Optical



Charlotte Sky and Dylan Skolnick
Cinema Arts Centre

CONA ELDER LAW PRESENTS:

Legacy Leaders of Long Island

PRESENTED BY: CONA ELDER LAW

The Legacy Leaders of Long Island

Three Long Island Leaders Create Lasting Legacies: Their View on What it Takes and the Power of Succession Planning

Cona Elder Law has been creating customized trusts, estates and corporate plans for over two decades. We have been privileged to represent many businesses

and families who have become household names and whose organizations create impactful legacies across Long Island. They collectively employ thousands of

employees and their businesses have improved our way of life. These companies are aligned with our firm's core values and vision of making New York a great place to

live, work and age with grace.

In this, our second issue, Jennifer Cona, Elder Law and Trusts and Estates industry thought leader, philanthropist and activist for the older adult community, has interviewed three business pioneers and leaders on Long Island who have built a legacy and remain active in their work and philanthropy.

Learn the wisdom they are passing on to the next generation and the importance of corporate succession planning.

Charlotte Sky, Co-Director, Dylan Skolnick, Co-Director, Cinema Arts Centre, Huntington New York

“Be Open Minded and Support the Arts”

Founded in 1973 by Vic Skolnick and Charlotte Sky, the Cinema Arts Centre (CAC) is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. CAC is located in the heart of downtown Huntington and has delivered on its promise to bring the best in cinematic artistry to Long Island and to use the power of film to expand the consciousness and awareness of the audience. CAC created its legacy by bringing independent films and provocative films of substance to the community. With over 150,000 annual visitors, CAC has earned its reputation by creating meaningful experiences for all participants, including members, patrons, partners, speakers, film artists, and film scholars. It features over 250 events per year from receptions, concerts, and live performances, to educational programming and workshops for children and adults. Throughout 2023, CAC is screening many of their favorite films from over the 50 years. Today, CAC is managed by Charlotte Sky and her son, Dylan Skolnick, who joined the not-for-profit full time over 20 years ago and became CAC Co-Director upon his father's passing in 2010.

How does community relate to your legacy?

We are a community-based organization. We are reliant on our donors and members and the support of everyone. People need their spirits lifted and the arts, through music, cinema, and



From left to right: Dylan Skolnick, Charlotte Sky, Ed Burns & Vic Skolnick

education, provide insights and create a dialogue and point of view to move conversations forward on culture, politics, immigration, the environment, health and wellness, and more.

What are the secrets to your success?

We have been good listeners. We learn what our community wants and needs,

and our default answer has always been “Yes”. This has opened us up to some of the best collaborations.

What has been your biggest challenge?

The COVID-19 pandemic required us to close our doors for two years. We took the opportunity to remodel and are evolving to meet the changing habits of

our patrons and our audience. Older adults remain apprehensive regarding coming into the theaters, but we continue to have a consistent “crew”. In fact, the screening of *The Last Waltz* was sold out! We are also attracting a younger clientele with cinema and programs that define that audience, such as “Night Owl Cinema” screenings of *Fight Club* and *Taylor Swift: Eras Tour*.

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What is the most important lesson you will teach the next generation who will run the business?

Keep an open mind and don't ignore what's popular, but don't only look at what's popular. We want to open people up to new experiences, especially our younger audiences. The cinema has a point of view; we keep that in mind when bringing in movies of substance. Respect the audience and they should respect the CAC's point of view as well. Our wish is that CAC will continue to be a resource

where you can hear all types of voices.

What is the best advice and conversely the worst piece of advice you ever received?

The best advice has been to be bold and try new things. This has led us to successful collaborations with other organizations. As for the worst advice: I was given this quote by screenwriter William Goldman: "In the movie business, no one knows anything."

This actually means you never know

when you have a winning movie or a flop. So, you can be too careful. That is a recipe for disaster.

What is the most recent program that has become popular?

In honor of our 50th anniversary, throughout the year we are revisiting our greatest hits from the past 50 years like *Life is Beautiful*, *Pan's Labyrinth*, and *Ladybird*, which was directed by Greta Gerwig, who just directed *Barbie*. Of course, we are screening *Nashville* and

The Godfather, which are CAC staples and keep people coming back each year. Besides these favorites, we are also working on having some special guests. We will keep our fingers crossed that it will work out because they're always busy and it's challenging to pin them down, but we will have some exciting announcements. We are going to be having an event with a couple of classic films including the first film we ever showed here, *Lilith*, with Warren Beatty and Jean Seberg, airing on our anniversary, December 1st.

The Key to Corporate Succession is Early Planning

By Cona Elder Law

It's difficult to start and grow a business. Finding the strength to believe that the "dream" you want to offer and market to the public is something someone will want and be willing to pay for requires a level of personal perseverance and belief that many do not possess. And this is all before you sit down to tackle the business formation documents. And as the years pass, to succeed you face and overcome daily challenges. Every business owner, big and small, finds themselves emotionally entangled in their business. And these emotional entanglements make moving forward with one's business succession planning difficult and emotional.

This is why it is important to begin your succession planning early, sometimes as early as day one. We like to say that business planning is no different than planning for the other relationships in your life. Most of us would not consider getting married without a prenuptial agreement or dying without a Last Will & Testament. Why? Because with

one you are agreeing with your future life partner how to grow your mutually created assets while ensuring that you remain in control of your personal assets and with the other, you are again taking control of your individually owned assets to designate who will benefit from these assets following your death. If you don't, then state laws control in divorce (equitable distribution) and death (the laws of intestacy). You may be surprised to learn that state laws will also determine the dissolution of your business if you do not create your own succession plan.

The problem is that many of us don't believe we need to plan an exit until the exit is needed. And frequently it is too late. Many of you may have a child who works in your business and another child who does not. You may still want to ensure that all of your children benefit from the business you grew, albeit unequally. If you don't plan now for how your business will be managed during your life, at retirement, and upon your death, you are giving up control over that decision and potentially harming

the child in the business, your employees and the momentum of growth that you spent a lifetime creating.

Those corporate books you received when you formed your business by yourself or with your partners are generic forms that we find are frequently not completed or fail to address major business changes, such as the death or disability of members or shareholders. They also don't provide for the transferring of interests to eligible parties outright or in trust or contain qualified subchapter S language. This is because exit plans are typically not considered until one wants to retire or needs someone to buy-in due to an illness or sudden death.

We recognize that our culture tells us not to worry about the exit but instead focus on building a great business. While growth is important, we want to tell you now that it is crucial that you take steps during the life of your business to ensure the successful transition to the next generation or in a third-party sale. If you intend to bring your children into the business or give or sell everything to one

child, we encourage you to not just have the conversation with the next generation but also to review your corporate documents to determine how that transition will take place in practice. Further, you must analyze how it will impact your estate documents and planning in order to avoid testamentary conflicts and unintended results. And if you intend to sell your business to your employees or an outside third party, do the due diligence now because you don't want to learn at the signing that the buyers have creditor issues or drug problems, only to have the buyout canceled at the finish line.

Whether we admit it or not, our business is our baby and moving toward that next phase in life - whether its retirement or bringing in the next generation or outside parties - is emotional. As with any relationship, we can avoid many surprises and catastrophes if we begin the planning early. This is accomplished by reviewing our corporate documents to make sure we can successfully transition to the next owner and having open discussions about what we as the business owner want and expect, as well as what our children or an outside party will bring to the business. This new challenge, ensuring our business will run successfully once we relinquish the reins, is an exciting one filled with emotional and legal hurdles. Let's take on the task with the same passion that allowed our businesses to grow so that our legacy lasts for generations.



Customized Trusts, Estates, Corporate,
and Elder Law Plans

Cona Elder Law is an award-winning law firm and is recognized as the leading Elder Law and Estate Planning firm on Long Island. In practice for over 25 years, the firm is known for its creative advocacy and cutting-edge strategies in the areas of asset protection, Medicaid planning, estate and tax planning, estate and trust administration, corporate succession planning, guardianships, special needs planning, and estate litigation. Cona Elder Law takes a holistic approach to elder law and estate planning, providing support and resources for older adults and caregivers, and maintaining long-term, partnering relationships with clients to provide the best solutions for multiple generations. Cona Elder Law has been ranked the #1 Elder Law Firm by Long Island Business News for eight consecutive years, was honored as "A Firm That Makes a Difference" by the Hauppauge Industrial Association (HIA-LI) and received the HIA-LI Business Achievement Award. For additional information, visit www.conaelderlaw.com.

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*David Friedfeld, President,
Peter Friedfeld, Executive Vice President, ClearVision Optical*

“Make Each Day Better for Someone Else”

Entering its 75th year, ClearVision Optical is a true family business and one of the largest family owned eyewear distributors in North America. Founded in 1949 as the eyewear industry was blossoming, ClearVision Optical has become legendary in the optical industry and is built upon the core values established by Fred Friedfeld and continued by his sons, David and Peter. Based in Hauppauge, the company designs and distributes eyewear and sunwear for 14 distinctive brands including ASPIRE, BCBGMAXAZRIA, Steve Madden, Ellen Tracy, Revo, IZOD, Op, Jessica McClintock, as well as its own collections including ILLA, Dilli Dalli, Demi+Dash, Adira, ClearVision Collection and Advantage.

As president, David Friedfeld provides vision and leadership to all areas within the ClearVision organization. Under his guidance, ClearVision has received numerous honors and accolades from both the eyewear industry and the business community. David is a featured speaker at many industry-related events and has appeared on several internet radio shows including The Growth Strategist, The CEO Show, and “Gary Gerber’s Power Hour.”

Who was a person who helped you get to where you are today?

“My father, Fred, played a crucial role in shaping my journey to where I am today and one that I don’t take for granted. His vision to create a great experience for independent eye care professionals has been the foundation of our company’s mission. At 21, after leaving the Navy, he earned one of the first optician licenses in New York State. I also credit my mom, Mimi, who literally called me to join the family business in 1984. And my brother, Peter, Executive Vice President, who joined in 1981, and who has been my partner in driving innovation and change at ClearVision for over forty years”, states David.

Committed to a business plan that emphasizes flexibility, opportunity, and change, the brothers continue to redefine ClearVision’s short and long-term goals. “As a medium-sized company within the global world of optics, being innovative is how we distinguish ourselves,” says Peter. Running a family business comes with a unique set of challenges, but the brothers learned early on how to balance the yin and yang of their management styles and personalities. By giving each



From left to right: Fred Friedfeld, Dr. Douglas Friedfeld, Madeline (Mimi) Friedfeld, Peter Friedfeld, Liz Friedfeld-Gebaide, David Friedfeld

other the space to do well and trusting each other’s judgment, they’ve been able to carve out unique roles. Over the years, they’ve benefited from the expertise and experience of both their parents. Many family members, including their sister Liz, who is head of business development work for the company. The idea of family also goes beyond that inner circle to include nearly everyone who comes in contact with this unique company. “My dad was very clear on that,” says David. Employees, suppliers, eye care professionals, business associates, and members of the community at large form what David refers to as “intersecting circles, or extended family” creating an environment that empowers others to do well and enables the company to be proactive and implement positive change in a timely manner.

What do you believe is the “secret sauce” to Clearvision’s success?

The “secret sauce” to ClearVision’s success lies in its values-based approach. The organization continues to uphold its values of Respect, Integrity, Compassion, Performance, Service, Innovation, and Fun. The staff is flexible and innovative and can “turn on a dime”. They operate with integrity and a commitment to making each day better for someone else.

Innovative technology, employee engagement and unparalleled customer service are the cornerstones of

ClearVision Optical. Remaining open to new opportunities and leveraging the talent of its extended family, the company has found a formula that works. One of the things I’ve learned from the past, is that whenever you are faced with an opportunity or a problem, you have more power and more solutions than you think. Peter adds, “Always look at everything as an opportunity. And don’t think that just because something didn’t work in the past, it won’t work today. It may simply be that we did it wrong the first time.” We have a huge capacity for feedback and we routinely solicit input from our vendors, customers, community through surveys, focus groups, social media, testimonials to tell us ways to improve and adjust to make an impact.

These philosophies have paid off as ClearVision has received multiple Corporate Awards under David and Peter’s leadership, including Long Island Business News’ Corporate Citizen Award, Smart CEO Family Business Award, and has been voted Best Company to Work For in New York State in 2023 and for the last eight consecutive years.

What has been your biggest challenge as President of ClearVision Optical?

One of the significant challenges I’ve faced as President is navigating the

ever-changing landscape of the optical industry. We’ve had to adapt to managed care and government regulations while also competing with online eyewear sales. Honoring the past while moving the company toward the future is no easy feat, but our commitment to innovation and customer service has helped us overcome these challenges. We continually reinvent ourselves to keep up with the latest trends and technologies. We embraced 3D printing over 20 years ago and it has permitted us to be nimble and take advantage of eyewear innovation from when it was viewed as a piece of medical equipment to the fashion accessory it is today.

What is the best advice and conversely the worst piece of advice you ever received?

The best advice I’ve received is to create an environment that empowers others to do well. We believe in making each day better for someone else.

We truly mean our employees are our family. We treat them with respect, attend their family events, are sensitive to their needs and this is essential in building our company culture, and it lets us be proactive and implement positive change in a timely manner.

As for the worst advice, I can’t pinpoint

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a specific instance, but generally, any advice that encourages compromising our values or integrity would fall into that category. We've always stayed true to our principles, and that's been a key driver of our success.

Tell us about the legacy you wish to leave.

The legacy I wish to leave is one of positive impact and sustainability. Uniquely the business is centered on values and has a tremendous capacity to innovate with a startup mentality and a future focus orientation. I want ClearVision to continue to be a model company of

business excellence in our marketplace, community and for our children while thriving and upholding our values and commitment to our employees, customers, and community. I hope that our legacy inspires future generations to lead with integrity and make a meaningful difference in the lives of others. We have tremendous pride for a family business in servicing our customers that are also family businesses and who represent the community that gives the gift of sight. Also we have a commitment to Long Island, where we grew up and our families have grown and flourished for generations. We employ a lot of team members

children and grandchildren through our internship program and have had generations work for us over time.

Your legacy includes planning for the future of others in your family and community. What is your philosophy on estate/legacy planning for your workforce?

Our family-based culture has yielded a population with strong tenure ranging upwards of at least 10-30 years. We have employees who could retire but choose to stay because they appreciate the stability of our company, the feeling of belonging, and the opportunity to be a mentor to others.

Estate and legacy planning are crucial. We provide resources like workshops on elder law, estate planning, life insurance, long-term care planning, and 529 plans. Our profit-sharing plan offers a substantial retirement benefit that grows significantly each year so they have a retention incentive to continue their careers.

We do a substantial amount of financial wellness year-round. Not only do we provide resources, but we contribute and invest in income protection for our team members and their families through varied insurance and company subsidized benefits.

Melinda Novak, President, Long Island Game Farm Wildlife Park & Children's Zoo

“Be a Fountain, Not a Drain”

The Long Island Game Farm Wildlife Park & Children's Zoo sits on 26 acres in Manorville and was founded in 1970 by Stanley and Diane Novak. When Stanley passed in 1999, his daughter, Melinda Novak, joined her mother, Diane, and sister, Susan, in running the family business. Susan passed away in 2001 and when Diane retired in 2020, Melinda took over the reins completely.

How does community relate to your legacy?

After my mom passed in 2021, I was at a crossroads. At that point I had been managing the family business for twenty years and I was faced with an opportunity to either sell the farm to build condos or maintain the commitment begun by my parents who founded the Game Farm in 1970 to make Long Island better and create a sanctuary for animals. I was only 8 years old when we moved to the farm. I grew up with the animals; they were welcome in my home and I would bottle feed the babies in my kitchen. My parents wanted everyone to slow down and enjoy the animals and nature. We created the LI Game Farm to provide education and entertainment and continue to do so. It just didn't feel right to sell, so I decided to embrace the farm and continue my parents' legacy. Animals are disappearing from the world, and we need more zoos to support them and to keep our connection with wildlife. The LI Game Farm has become an institution here on Long Island and an educational destination for so many of all ages.

Who was a key person who helped you get to where you are today?

I inherited my passion for the farm and animals from my parents who were



Melinda Novak and Bobo the giraffe

incredibly inspiring. However, after my parents passed, Tricia Snyder, a longtime friend and mentor encouraged me to make the farm a more stable year-round business for all of Long Island, not just the local community, where I could pursue my passion for educating the public and be out with our visitors and patrons. Through Tricia's guidance we created a not-for-profit this year, the Foundation for Wildlife Sustainability, Inc. which is allowing us to offer exciting new programs to the public, the ability to renovate our structures for the public and for the animals, including Woodland Hall and Amphitheater, and to create new attractions such as the under-construction Nature Trail and Labyrinth. Tricia is helping me realize my ideas and dreams for the farm. She's like the opposite side of my brain. We are walking into the next chapter of the farm together.

What is the best advice and

conversely the worst piece of advice you ever received?

The best advice came from my 93-year-old friend Grace Iaccarino who worked at the farm for over 27 years and is now more like family. She said, “Be a fountain, not a drain”. That encapsulates our philosophy. Advice we never embraced was the encouragement by business advisors and colleagues to be more like “Disney” and create animatronic animals and other virtual or technology driven attractions. We would never replace real animals and eliminate the getting down and dirty with the animals in their native habitats.

What is the most recent program that has become popular?

This year we have been able to launch our Senior Social Club. We had wanted to do so for several years and the Foundation was the vehicle that allowed us to launch it. Open to those aged 62 plus, the farm is open to seniors each Thursday (in certain

months) at a discounted rate of only \$10. The wellness aspect of the LI Game Farm is so important for seniors who often feel isolated. Touching an animal is magical and since we launched the program just a couple of months ago, we have over 20 seniors who come to engage with the animals and each other every week.

To help us develop the program we asked what they are looking for and one of the ladies said, “we are looking for alternatives to library programs.” And we would love to learn more about animals and nature.”

It starts on Thursdays at 10:00 and the first hour, we ask people to just enjoy the park, get your steps in, meet other people. And then at 11, we have our educational component in the renovated Woodland Hall, which is our first heated and air-conditioned building, and we even have one of those giant TV's. At the last session, we taught the seniors about the enrichment that is required for our non-human primates. We brought them all out and they followed me around and kind of got a little private tour and then I showed them how we trained them. We are training our lemurs, giraffe and squirrel monkeys to hold a paintbrush and paint. It's enriching for the animals, and we are planning to auction off their artwork at our next fundraiser. Other educational programs for the seniors include nature photography and introductions to all our rescued animals.

Your legacy includes planning for the future of others in your family and community. Tell us about the legacy you wish to leave.

We are in the process of getting accredited by the Zoological Association of America. We are a zoo and with the correct classification it will have positive implications for the farm's sustainability and financial strength. My daughter Chela is a zookeeper here and I hope will be part of the Farm's future. By establishing the Foundation, we will be more assured about the continuation of the LI Game Farm and Zoo.



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