

THE DAILY RECORD

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MCBA committed to diversity

The Monroe County Bar Association's commitment to diversity runs deep.

MCBA support for helping to increase the diversity of the legal profession in the area extends well beyond the Rochester Legal Diversity Clerkship Program — the MCBA's best-known diversity program — and also includes representation and action at the national level, work with employers, support of speakers, and efforts to improve retention.

The MCBA also is involved in pipeline programs to improve urban students' awareness of, and exposure to, the legal profession as a career option.

The 2010 Diversity Clerkship program is off to an excellent start. The program is one of the main activities of the MCBA's Diversity Committee, which is led by Chairwoman Judy Toyer, senior counsel at Eastman Kodak Co., where she handles employment issues and advises the company's chief diversity officer, and Vice Chairwoman Maria Herrero-Jaarsma, and ably supported by MCBA Program Manager Louise Spinelli.

The program has embraced a more inclusive model this year, with the full support of the MCBA's Board of Trustees, and is being co-sponsored by the Greater Rochester Association for Women Attorneys and the Rochester Black Bar Association. The Diversity Clerkship is intended to reach out to those from groups that historically have been under-represented in the legal profession, such as members of racial and ethnic minorities, as well as differently abled persons and those who are openly gay or lesbian.

Through better communication efforts and greater outreach, the program has increased the number of legal employers participating this year, from eight in 2009 to 12. The number of students who will be clerks this summer also increased, from eight to 10 (two will split their summers between two employers). We believe this year's class exemplifies the core goals of the program better than any in the past, accomplished by recruiting and selecting students from groups that have been markedly under-represented among Rochester legal employers, and allowing all with a commitment to increasing diversity the opportunity to participate.

Legal employers that accepted clerks this summer are Boylan, Brown; ChamberlainD'Amanda, Eastman Kodak, Hiscock & Barclay, Harris Beach, Legal Aid, Nixon Peabody, Thomas & Solomon, Thomson Reuters, Ward Greenberg, The Wolford Law Firm and Woods Oviatt. Two clerks from 2009 will return as reg-

ular summer clerks to their firms — Harris Beach and Harter Secrest — after their second year of law school.

The success of the Diversity Clerkship program was demonstrated clearly at the most recent MCBA Law Day celebration, which included impressive, powerful remarks from two program alumni, Janelle Whitaker and Vivek Thiagarajan. Both spoke of their backgrounds, with no legal connections, and the impact the program has had on them personally and professionally. Janelle is now an associate at Nixon Peabody, and Vivek is an associate at Harris Beach.

Based on their remarks to the crowded hall of lawyers and other dignitaries, Janelle and Vivek clearly are very well-qualified young lawyers who probably would not have come to Rochester to practice law without the Diversity Clerkship program to introduce them to the benefits of practicing in the area. By their very presence, Janelle and Vivek at the same time are helping Rochester law firms to increase their diversity and add to their overall depth, expertise and attractiveness to clients.

Participants in the Legal Diversity clerkship program this summer can expect to gain a wide variety of professional experiences and opportunities to learn more about the Rochester area and life here as a young professional. They also should expect to meet a broad variety of lawyers and others in the community, and learn first-hand about law practice opportunities and the role of the MCBA. Our summer law clerks and their participating employers will be featured at the MCBA Installation Dinner on June 22.

The Foundation of the Monroe County Bar is a key supporter of the Legal Diversity clerkship program. The foundation typically underwrites the cost of the clerk working at a legal services provider, and is considering further support for this year. Participating employers also provide critical financial resources, through the salaries they pay the law clerks and their participation in the program and sponsorship of related events.

In addition to her service as chairwoman of the Diversity Committee, Toyer also is the MCBA's delegate to the American Bar Association House of Delegates. She has been involved on the national level as a member of the Practitioner Working Group, which contributed to the just-released ABA report on diversity, "Diversity in the Legal Profession: The Next Steps," which notes the significant progress that has been made toward



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greater diversity in the legal profession. The report also details several discouraging trends, and the fact that our profession still lags far behind when it comes to diversity, and does not closely reflect the composition of the society in which we practice.

Other MCBA programs that complement the Legal Diversity clerkship program include tutoring at School 29, through the Lawyers for Learning Committee, and support through the Diversity Committee of programs relating to the law magnet program and related efforts through the City of Rochester schools. Such programs allow MCBA members to work with students at different grade levels — first on basic skills at the elementary level and, later, at middle school and high school programs — allowing city school students, most of whom are members of minority groups, to become involved with MCBA members and appreciate the potential benefits of a legal career.

There are several other programs supported by MCBA members and the bar foundation that encourage diversity in the

profession indirectly, including Rochester Teen Court, Law Explorers and High School Mock Trial. All three were featured at a Law Day celebration at the Keating Federal Courthouse as the guests of U.S. District Judge David Larimer, who was the chairman of the MCBA Law Day activities for 2010.

The Diversity Committee has additional projects in mind intended to improve the long-term retention of diverse lawyers with legal employers, including mentorship, education and outside speakers. The programs' purpose is to help diverse candidates in particular to grow professionally, to be increasingly valuable to their firms and other legal employers, and to help them become fully involved and satisfied as contributing members of the profession. Each year such efforts are undertaken helps to remedy the historic inequalities of opportunity and achieve the goal of a diverse legal workplace that fully reflects the society of which it is such an important part.

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