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May 21, 2004

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Columbus Law Firms Show 96% Increase in Minority Attorneys; CBA Reports Steady, Significant Progress with Diversity Initiative

COLUMBUS -- Three years into a historic public commitment to increase the racial diversity of Columbus law firms, the number of minority attorneys at participating firms has increased by 96 percent, the Columbus Bar Association reports today.

Increases in minority lawyers are seen at every level, from a larger incoming class of summer law interns (up 153 percent), to more minority attorneys at the 'partner' level – considered a critical anchor of leadership and authority within a law firm. By comparison, the total number of all attorneys has increased by 11 percent since 2000.

“Our commitment to diversity is real. A 96 percent increase clearly shows Columbus law firms are successfully learning what it takes to recruit, retain and promote minority attorneys. Best of all, the structural and cultural changes they are making are benefiting the entire firm,” said Sam Weiner, President of the Columbus Bar.

“We applaud the firms for their continuing efforts. We want the public to know this legal community is truly passionate about creating diversity in the legal system. Most important, we want to clearly communicate to minority attorneys and law school students that Columbus holds great opportunity to create successful and fulfilling legal careers.”

The results are included in an annual diversity survey conducted by the Columbus Bar Association as part of its award-winning program, the **Managing Partners' Diversity Initiative**. The Initiative is a unique collaboration joined by twenty-two Columbus law firms, the John Mercer Langston Bar Association – comprised primarily of African American attorneys – the Ohio State University Moritz College of Law and Capital University Law School, in addition to the Columbus Bar. Each of the participating organizations committed to specific action steps designed to recruit, hire, train, retain and promote minority attorneys, and create an environment conducive to success.

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The participating firms range in size from more than 200 employees to at least 15. According to this year's survey:

- Since 2000, the number of minority attorneys has nearly doubled, beginning at 46 to the current 90. This represents a 96 percent increase.
- Minority attorneys now comprise 6.6 percent of the total population of lawyers, up from 3.71 percent in 2000.
- In 2004, African American attorneys comprise 4 percent of all Columbus attorneys (up from 2 percent in 2000). Hispanic, American Indian and Alaskan, and Asian & Pacific Islander complete the 6.6 percent total.
- Thirty-three percent of the 133 attorneys added since 2000 are minority attorneys (44 attorneys.)
- Comparing progress from 2000 to 2004, minority partners have increased from 13 to 31, and associates from 31 to 54.
- The pipeline to maintain the progress has been primed with minority summer associates. The number has doubled, going from 19 in 2001 to 48 in 2004.
- Increases in the number of minority attorneys were seen in all sizes of firms – small, medium and large. This is a major accomplishment particularly for the small and mid-sized firms.

“True diversity isn't created in a single day or even a single year. It's a comprehensive, ongoing, sophisticated process that involves every department in the firm - not just human resources,” said Rich Simpson, Managing Partner at Bricker & Eckler, and Chair of the Managing Partners' Diversity Initiative Advisory Committee. “Our efforts so far have created positive results, but we have much more work to do, and we are committed to doing it,” he said.

While each firm develops programs that meet their own specific management structures and cultures, some of the common successful strategies this year were:

- Breaking through stereotypes in hiring criteria to better tap the existing pool of talented minority lawyer;
- Reevaluating criteria to make sure it doesn't exclude talented minority lawyers whose promise might be reflected in other ways beyond simple comparisons by the numbers;
- Developing mentoring programs that bridge generational as well as racial and cultural gaps;
- Having excellent minority attorneys on staff already, and promoting minority attorneys;
- Diversity improves diversity; increasing minority attorneys at all levels in the firm helps build critical mass so minorities don't feel in the minority, and helps attract and retain new talented minority attorneys.
- Establishing firm wide diversity task force/committees;
- Communicating a strong commitment to diversity.

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“Simply put, justice is better served when law practitioners reflect the face of the clients we serve. The Diversity Initiative is the right thing – and the best thing – to do,” Weiner said.

The Columbus Bar's effort is seen as a model program across the country. Last summer it received a ‘Partnership Award’ from the American Bar Association as an exemplary effort to increase diversity in the legal profession. In Columbus, it received the 2003 United Way’s ‘Champion of Diversity’ Award for outstanding leadership and commitment to managing diversity.

Participants in the Managing Partners' Diversity Initiative are: Bailey Cavalieri, Baker & Hostetler, Benesch Friedlander Coplan & Aronoff, Blaugrund Herbert & Martin, Bricker & Eckler, Buckingham Doolittle & Burroughs, Carlile Patchen & Murphy, Carpenter & Lipps, Chester Willcox & Saxbe, Crabbe Brown & James, Isaac Brant Ledman & Teetor, Jones Day, Kegler Brown Hill & Ritter, Lane Alton & Horst, Luper Neidenthal & Logan, Maguire & Schneider, Porter Wright Morris & Arthur, Schottenstein Zox & Dunn, Squire Sanders & Dempsey, Thompson Hine, Vorys Sater Seymour and Pease, and Wiles Boyle Burkholder & Bringardner. Additional participants include: Capital University Law School, The Ohio State University Moritz College of Law, John Mercer Langston Bar Association.