

Managing Partners' Diversity Initiative builds solid foundation in first year

Columbus law firms are making progress in a collaborative effort to significantly increase the number of minority attorneys recruited, hired and promoted. Last year the Columbus Bar began an unprecedented diversity initiative involving more than 20 of Columbus's largest law firms and provides this first-year progress report.

The Columbus Bar leads the diversity initiative along with the John Mercer Langston Bar Association, which is comprised primarily of African American attorneys, The Ohio State University Mortiz College of Law and Capital University Law School.

"Every member firm of the Columbus Bar has made the commitment to increase the number of minority attorneys in this city," said David Patterson, Columbus Bar president. "We are delighted to report that, after the first year, the initiative is off to a strong start and that we have made progress on several fronts.

The most noteworthy accomplishments are:

- Increasing minority attorney hires by 5 percent in the first year. (A similar initiative in San Francisco showed a 7.5 percent increase in 10 years);
- Allocating \$50,000 toward the establishment of a diversity coordinator at the Columbus Bar, to be hired later this year and;
- Creating greater awareness among firms about the need to have in place activities and policies designed to recruit and retain minority attorneys.

Member firms and local law schools established several diversity-building best practices and achieved other accomplishments in the first year. They include:

- Seeking outside expertise on cultural sensitivity training and leadership assistance;
- Establishing or contributing to scholarship programs;
- Hosting a winter reception for law students who are home for the holidays;
- Forming diversity committees and policies;
- Recruiting from other firms and government agencies;
- Using retired and former partners as recruiting incentives;
- Expanding criteria for applicants to OSU and Capital Law Schools;
- Matching existing students to potential recruits at OSU and Capital;
- Providing more funds for opportunity scholarships at OSU and Capital; and
- Updating and improving websites to attract minority students at OSU and Capital.

While the first year yielded many achievements, the managing partners also identified several areas of particular challenge. They include the retention of minority attorneys, keeping entry-level associates on a long-term partner track, and smaller recruiting

classes.

The initiative's first year effort also helped to solidify and refine long-term goals and strategies:

- Enlarging the pool of law firm applicants by reassessing hiring criteria;
- Providing three-way mentoring methods for comprehensive growth;
- Publicizing signatory firms to students;
- Establishing a more inclusive atmosphere for new recruits to make sure they know all practice areas are open and that they can participate in client meetings and social gatherings;
- Making minority partners and associates available for law school activities.
- Attending the annual Black Law Students Association (BLSA) dinner and networking with students;
- Recruiting early with high school and college students;
- Considering third year law students for clerkship and identifying students through collaboration with law schools;
- Tracking attrition within the firms;
- Providing feedback to the Columbus Bar on Minority Clerkship students;
- Identifying central Ohio students at marquee law schools through placement offices; and
- Updating websites as they relate to welcoming minority students.

"One of our strongest achievements is increasing awareness within all law firms about minority hiring and the power of diversity," said Patterson. "We still have much work yet to do, but our strong start provides momentum to keep the initiative going and ultimately establish a more diverse legal community in Columbus."

The diversity plan was created following several months of research and planning conducted by the managing partners of the city's major law firms. At that time, a local survey showed that of 1, 237 attorneys in the participating firms, only 28 attorneys - 2 percent of the total were African-American. Attorneys of Hispanic, Asian-American and Native American descent each represented less than 1 percent of the total.

The resulting diversity initiative committed each of the participating firms to specific action steps designed to recruit, hire, train and retain minority attorneys, as well as invite them to join the partnership ranks of the city's law firms. Co-chairs of the effort were two managing partners: Alex Shumate of Squire Sanders & Dempsey and Ben Zox of Schottenstein Zox & Dunn.

Participants in the Columbus Managing Partners' Diversity Initiative are: Arter & Hadden, Baker & Hostetler, Benesch Friedlander Coplan & Aronoff, Blaugrund Herbert & Martin, Bricker & Eckler, Buckingham, Doolittle & Burroughs, Carlile Patchen & Murphy, Chester Willcox & Saxbe, Cloppert Portman Sauter Latanick & Foley, Crabbe Brown & James, Isaac Brant Ledman & Teetor, Jones Day Reavis & Pogue, Kegler Brown Hill & Ritter, Lane Alton & Horst, Luper Sheriff & Neidenthal, Maguire &

Schneider, Porter Wright Morris & Arthur, Schottenstein Zox & Dunn, Squire, Sanders & Dempsey, Thompson Hine, Vorys Sater Seymour and Pease, Wiles Boyle Burkholder & Bringardner and Zeiger & Carpenter. Additional participants include: Capital University Law School, The Ohio State University College of Law, John Mercer Langston Bar Association and Columbus City Attorney's Office.

For more information on the Diversity Initiative, please contact Annette Hudson-Clay at 221.4112 or at annette@cbalaw.org.