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Letter from the Publisher

While the celebration of our differences as humans continues to grow throughout society, we all know there are hurdles yet to be cleared.

Missouri's legal community is a microcosm of those efforts and challenges.

The American Bar Association leads the profession nationally through its Diversity and Inclusion Center resource. The Missouri Bar follows suit with its committee on diversity, forums on the topic and multiple training sessions. Local bar associations do the same from Springfield to St. Louis, and a growing number of legal associations are devoted to diverse segments of attorneys doing remarkable work within the profession and the justice system.

Firms today are more devoted to the work of inclusion, recognizing that excellence starts with a commitment from the top but builds from beneath. It's the individuals of any association or firm who make sustainable change. When diversity is celebrated and inclusion guaranteed in any endeavor, its core value is truly recognized.

Embracing the range of human differences fuels bigger success. And then there's this — it's the right thing to do.

The individuals we honor through our inaugural Diversity and Inclusion Awards do the right thing. They are part of the bedrock that supports a foundation of work throughout

Missouri's legal profession.

When we made the decision to add these awards to our event series that highlights legal excellence, the most difficult part was

distilling the scores of nominations to the list of 20 honorees we recognize on these pages. We did so with the help of a selection committee made up of individuals who have spent much of their careers pursuing this cause.

So much incredible work, often conducted outside of the spotlight, is done every day by remarkable humans coming together.

Their achievement and dedication to this cause have exerted an incredibly positive influence on the profession and on justice.

We are all better for it.



Liz Irwin
Publisher

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Circulation: (877) 615-9536

■ MISSOURI LAWYERS WEEKLY

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These profiles were reported and written by Missouri Lawyers Weekly Senior Reporter Scott Lauck, News Editor Rachel Webb, Digital Editor Allyssa Dudley, Staff Reporters Nicholas Phillips and Jessica Shumaker, and freelance writer David Baugher.

In 2016, for the first time, female students outnumbered male students in American law schools. Yet that distribution is not yet reflected in the litigation world, said Susan Bassford Wilson, a partner at Constangy, Brooks, Smith & Prophete.

“Walk into any courtroom, and I can almost guarantee you 70 percent of the lawyers will be Caucasian males,” Wilson said. “Every time I see that, it bothers me.”

Her awareness of diversity (and lack thereof) makes her a good match for Constangy, where women and people of color make up 55 percent of the attorney roster and 43 percent of its partners. Wilson has been on the firm’s diversity council for about five years, and one of the aspects of the firm she finds hopeful for the future is the make-up of the associates coming up the ranks: about one-third are

about navigating the digital universe. How should online screenings be conducted? Can employees sign their onboarding documents electronically? Should an employer discipline someone as a result of a social media footprint? The firm agreed that eLaw was a useful bundle of services and made her co-chair of the practice group, the first associate ever to hold such a position.

Wilson is a native of Columbia and a University of Missouri alumna who earned her law degree at the University of Michigan. At Constangy, she specializes in counseling and litigation prevention for technology, transportation, health care and retail companies. She helps clients address employee issues through policy development, audits and training. In addition, she disseminates useful info about employment law to human-resources, trade and employer groups.

In April, when the firm held its St. Louis Quarterly Breakfast Briefing, Wilson was the co-presenter. The title of the talk: “HE SAID WHAT?! How to conduct an outstanding workplace investigation.” Wilson and a colleague explained the nuts and bolts of how a company should handle a sexual-harassment complaint in the #MeToo era: how to select an investigator, whom the investigator should interview, how to draw a conclusion and what the next steps should be.

“The worst thing you can do is sweep it under the rug,” Wilson said.

Wilson has been at Constangy for eight years and said she has no plans to leave.

“If you are a woman and you’re looking for a job, are you more attracted to a firm where you’ll be the only woman, or is it more attractive to see women on the executive committee?”

— Nicholas Phillips

“If you are a woman and you’re looking for a job, are you more attracted to a firm where you’ll be the only woman, or is it more attractive to see women on the executive committee?”

minorities and two-thirds are women.

Yet Wilson said she also appreciates how the firm’s hiring patterns are more than an attempt to “bump up the numbers.”

“At Constangy,” she said, “those attorneys are office heads, they’re practice-group heads, they’re assigned significant roles in litigation.”

Wilson herself was allowed to flourish early. In 2014, she conceived of a new kind of practice group: eLaw. Constangy is a management-side labor and employment law firm, and she noticed that clients had a lot of questions



Susan Bassford Wilson

Constangy, Brooks, Smith & Prophete



Hillary Bean

Armstrong Teasdale

Hillary Bean did not read Sheryl Sandberg’s 2013 national bestseller, “Lean In.” She devoured it.

“I had just assumed I was the only one who felt this way,” said Bean, a partner in Armstrong Teasdale’s Financial and Real Estate Services practice. “I was enthralled.”

In the book — the subtitle of which is “Women, Work and the Will to Lead” — the author advocates that women be more professionally assertive and ambitious, despite societal pressures not to be. Bean highlighted and dog-eared pages of her own copy. Then she bought more copies and gave them to some male partners at Armstrong Teasdale to raise awareness among them.

She even organized a book-club discussion for the firm’s Women’s Inclusion Network, an internal group founded in 1998 to elevate women lawyers through coaching and networking. Bean’s enthusiasm propelled her in 2014 to be selected as the director of WIN.

From that perch, she has organized lunch-and-learn events at Armstrong Teasdale. In July, for example, there was a panel discussion on the firm’s new four-month paid maternity-leave policy (a cause that Bean and others had championed). She also instituted a quarterly newsletter in which a new employee is highlighted each month.

In her real estate practice, Bean handles leasing, financing and large transactions; she was heavily involved in the \$290 million redevelopment of a Fortune 100 company’s corporate headquarters in St. Louis. She also has experience in transactions that include environmental risk, and she has used innovative environmental and excess-indemnity insurance and escrow in such matters. In addition, she has expertise in leasing issues related to build-to-suit and design-build projects.

Aside from her legal practice and her leadership role in WIN, Bean also has been a proponent of the Michael C. Tramble Foundation Scholarship Campaign. Tramble was an African American associate at Armstrong Teasdale who was murdered in 1998 along with his wife and two children. The campaign began holding a chili cook-off to raise funds for the scholarship at the University of Missouri the firm set up in his name; the scholarship aims to create opportunities for minorities to succeed in the legal profession. In the past five years, the foundation has raised more than \$50,000. When Bean chaired the

“... the truth is, I love it here, and I just want it to be the best place it can be.”

committee several years ago, she added a soup competition to the cook-off, as well as a dessert challenge. She admitted she cannot compete with her colleagues’ cake-baking talents, but she did once get plaudits for her chili.

Asked why she involved herself in all of these side activities at the firm, Bean gave a simple answer.

“You probably won’t want to include this,” she said, “but the truth is, I love it here, and I just want it to be the best place it can be.”

— Nicholas Phillips

Long before Jim Breckenridge was a bond litigator or U.S. State Department interpreter, he was a kid in rural Kansas who sometimes felt scared.

"I didn't feel free to express my true self," said Breckenridge. "You'd hear homophobic slurs at school. I remember being bullied and slapped up side of the head with a biology book and called a 'faggot.' It drove me to seek other opportunities outside the place I was raised."

For his junior year of high school, Breckenridge studied in Venezuela as a Rotary International student. The trip left him not only with Spanish-language skills but also self-confidence — and wanderlust.

A full scholarship pulled him to the University of Kansas, where he graduated in 2002. He spent some time in Peru working at a school for children on the autism spectrum, then

day, while in Washington, D.C., he got a phone call. His aunt in Kansas had suffered an accident and was hospitalized.

"I realized that I couldn't continue to travel and be on the road so often if I was going to be there for my family," said Breckenridge. He knew his parents would need more care as they aged. He also craved a more rooted life. The practice of law appealed to him.

"I think interpreting and lawyering are very similar in terms of making quick analysis, conducting in-depth analysis, learning about different areas of policy and the functioning of the courts and the government," Breckenridge said. "There's a lot of overlap there."

While studying law at the University of Missouri – Kansas City, he grew intrigued by contract law and fell into commercial and bond litigation, which he practices at Levy Craig. In

addition, he takes immigration cases, some on a pro bono basis. In one such pro bono case, he was alerted to the plight of a Ukrainian teen who had come out as gay while studying in Kansas only to learn that his parents back home had disowned him. Breckenridge is trying to secure an avenue through which the teen can remain stateside.

Once a month, Breckenridge speaks on immigration issues at the Mexican consulate. He offers his audience free legal consultations. Many of those who assemble don't understand the difference between local, state and

federal law-enforcement agencies, he said. During the past two years, he said, he has noticed more fear in their faces and voices. He attempts to alleviate it.

As for Breckenridge himself, he no longer feels the same fear he used to. He married his partner earlier this year in Sweden.

"Ten years ago, my marriage wouldn't have been possible," he said. "It's important not to focus too much on the negative because negativity will kill you."



James A. Breckenridge
Levy Craig Law Firm

"It's important not to focus too much on the negative because negativity will kill you."

returned to the United States, where he earned his certification as a court interpreter in Missouri.

Working with language appealed to him so much that he decided to study French in Montreal, then earn a master's degree in Conference Interpreting at the Monterey Institute of International Studies in 2009. That degree led him to the U.S. State Department, where he interpreted on a freelance basis for the International Visitor Leadership Program and for diplomatic-security trainees.

In this stage of his life, he was traveling 11 months out of the year while fulfilling federal-government contracts. Then one

— Nicholas Phillips



Levy Craig
would like to Congratulate

JAMES BRECKENRIDGE

for being selected as a
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We are proud that James is being recognized for his efforts



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Retain Your Edge.

Edward Jones

Patrick Chavez

Inclusion and Diversity Honoree

Edward Jones

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Since she was young, Koriambanya “Kori” Carew has played a role in bringing people together and facilitating tough discussions.

Her motivation is rooted in her own background. Carew, now Shook, Hardy & Bacon’s director of strategic diversity initiatives, was born in Canada to a family from Sierra Leone. She grew up in Nigeria.

In her own family, each of her siblings was born in a different country. Her relatives include people of different ethnicities, religious faiths and languages.

She said her job at Shook allows her to access the skills she has gained navigating those differences.

“We have worked very hard to make inclusion part of our language, to help people understand what it means to walk it out and talk it out.”

“Every single day allows me to tap into my education, gifts, talents, what I’m passionate about, what I see as my vision for how I want to contribute to the world,” she said. “I know I’m supremely blessed — not everyone has that perfect combination.”

In Nigeria, Carew said she initially was interested in becoming an aeronautical engineer. She studied electrical engineering in college until a strike by professors disrupted her education, prompting her to come to the United States.

In the United States, she majored in math with minors in physics and chemistry. A professor convinced her to add a political science minor, and she plugged into studying the politics of underdevelopment. She met her husband, who is from Iowa, went to law school at Drake University and

eventually settled in Kansas City.

Prior to joining Shook, Carew worked for Fields and Brown, a minority-owned firm in Kansas City where she practiced labor and employment law; and Baker Sterchi Cowden & Rice, where she focused her practice on product liability, torts and employment matters. She was Baker Sterchi’s first female partner of color.

In 2012, Shook snapped her up to lead the firm’s diversity efforts.

“I like to say I transitioned from something I loved and was good at, to something I believed I would be great at,” she said. “Thankfully, I was right.”

As a leader, she’s promoted taking a new look at diversity and inclusion.

“We have worked very hard to make inclusion part of our language, to help people understand what it means to walk it out and talk it out.”

She said the conversation isn’t just about retaining diverse employees.

“When we come to work, what we want is to be leveraged. We want to be part of the team,” she said. “[When we ask], ‘How do we engage and advance people?’ We have a different narrative. Now we’re not just looking at numbers. Now

we’re saying, ‘What do you need to succeed? How can we help you succeed?’ We start to have a conversation about intentionally investing in and developing people.”

In another initiative under Carew’s leadership, the firm has become more proactive in responding to national issues.

After the Pulse Nightclub shooting in Orlando in 2016, she noted the firm was one of the few nationally to respond to it through a letter from the firm’s chair and in programming honoring the victims.

She said such activities and responses are “making a difference in how people feel and the kind of conversations we have.”

— Jessica Shumaker



Koriambanya S. Carew

Shook, Hardy & Bacon



Patrick I. Chavez

Edward Jones

During the past decade in St. Louis, Patrick Chavez has been instrumental in raising awareness of the importance of diversity in the legal profession.

Chavez played a key role in reviving the formerly defunct Minorities in the Legal Profession committee of The Bar Association of Metropolitan St. Louis and also in starting the Hispanic Bar Association of St. Louis. He has held leadership roles in both groups — he was co-chair of the BAMSL committee for five years and president of the Hispanic bar for two years.

Chavez said the revitalized committee’s goals included enhancing inclusion and diversity resources for lawyers, attracting diverse lawyers to the region and increasing interest in pursuing the legal profession.

“[We were] really trying to look at the law firms and trying to develop some kind of baseline of what law firms were doing to attract and retain diverse talent, with varying success over the years,” said Chavez, the chief privacy officer and associate general counsel at Edward Jones.

Chavez noted that the committee now is a section of BAMSL. Previously, there was no central group working on diversity and inclusion issues — just specialized bar groups, he said.

“It was really raising the profile amongst the general population of lawyers that these issues exist, and it’s always a business case for firms to embrace diversity,” he said.

Chavez said the formation of the Hispanic Bar Association of St. Louis followed his work with the committee. He’d tried to start a similar effort 10 years earlier, but it fizzled then.

He said it was meaningful to see a group dedicated to Hispanic attorneys coalesce.

“I don’t think people even think there’s a large group of Hispanic lawyers in St. Louis, or there’s even a need for that in St. Louis,” he said. “We do have a large Hispanic population . . . It was a very satisfying moment to have that

incorporated, and I was super honored they would ask me to be the first president.”

Chavez said he was inspired to become a lawyer in high school by participating in his school’s mock trial team. He’s a Texas native who grew up in Truth or Consequences, New Mexico, before completing his undergraduate degree in Texas and coming to Washington University in St. Louis to study law.

After graduation, Chavez stayed in St. Louis, working at such firms as Beach Burcke Helfers Mittleman & Stewart; Moser & Marsalek; and Williams Venker & Sanders.

In 2014, he learned Edward Jones was planning to build

“We do have a large Hispanic population . . . It was a very satisfying moment to have that incorporated, and I was super honored they would ask me to be the first president.”

an e-Discovery team. An attorney he knew asked if he’d be interested in meeting with people from the company.

“I did, and the rest is history,” he said.

In his job, he’s tasked with developing and implementing information privacy and security policies. He works closely with tech experts to ensure the company’s data is secure.

“I like the intersection of technology and the law,” he said. “Not a lot of lawyers play in that place, so it’s a good niche practice for me.”

— Jessica Shumaker

A childhood argument with her mother planted the seed for what would eventually become Lauren C. Collins' career.

Even as a young child, at age 5 or 6, "I wouldn't let up" during the exchange, Collins said.

Her grandfather, watching the scene, made a remark that stuck with her.

"He said, 'That girl would be a good lawyer,'" she said.

At the time, she didn't know exactly what a lawyer did. Still, she thought to herself at the time that, yes, she did want to be a lawyer, and that led her to the University of Missouri School of Law.

joined HeplerBroom. There, her practice is focused on complex litigation matters, including toxic tort litigation.

In her time at HeplerBroom, Collins has promoted diversity and inclusion efforts at the firm as its co-director of diversity.

"The firm saw there was a need for diversity within our organization," she said. "I was kind of asked to spearhead that and sit on the committee, and I was able to help them select some other members for the committee."

The firm's committee is new — it's been in place for less than a year — but its members have set their sights on helping to recruit diverse candidates. The firm also has taken part in a diversity job fair for the first time.

"We want to have a selection of candidates, as opposed to coming from one school or one type," she said.

In her role with the committee, Collins said, she helps to coordinate events and acts as a liaison for the firm with outside groups and bar associations. She's also working to bring speakers to the firm to talk about diversity issues.

She said the firm's clients are very interested in the firm's diversity practices and having diverse lawyers on their cases.

"I was at an event and ran into a general counsel for one of our clients, and I had recently started working on that client's cases," she said.

Collins said she introduced herself, and immediately the other attorney asked if Collins worked on any of the client's cases.

"I said yes, and she said, 'Good, that's what I like to hear. That's what I like to see,'" she said. "I think it's important for firms to recognize that you have to get ahead of things like that."



Lauren C. Collins

HeplerBroom

— Jessica Shumaker

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*Brown & Crouppen proudly
presents and congratulates partner
ANDY CROUPPEN
on the 2018 Diversity & Inclusion award.*



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Nicole Cortes hadn't always planned to become a lawyer.

As an undergraduate student, she studied Spanish and psychology, and she developed an interest in pursuing a master's degree in social work. She also found herself drawn to help the Latino community.

After obtaining her degree, she spent time abroad, volunteering with youth in Chile and teaching English as part of a fellowship program.

"The more I reflected on it, the more I felt the way I could best affect change for that community would be to have a law degree and be able to walk with folks as they seek more permanent outcomes," she said.

In 2012, Cortes graduated from Washington University in St. Louis with a law degree and master of social work degree.

where they lived.

While in their second year of law school, they hatched the idea for the MICA Project, seeking out help from their mentors at the law school, nonprofit organizations and private attorneys.

Cortes said representation at MICA is based on the idea of "working with clients as opposed to for them."

"We really try to put our clients in the driver seat and empower them with the tools they need to make decisions in their case," she said.

Today, MICA has seven paid staff members and four lawyers; it also added a case manager in the past year.

From the start, their sense that they could fill in the gaps between existing services was affirmed, Cortes said. Quickly, they saw just how large the need for their advocacy remains.

"We still every week are turning away 10 to 15 cases we really could open if capacity allowed," she said. "You want to fix things. You want to be able to address the problems we are addressing."

In the past two years, she said, the needs of her clients have increased. Cortes said she's been honored to stand at their sides.

"They're not always victorious, but when they are it's such a pleasure," she said. "The stakes are so high, especially when a family is faced with deportation or sort of life-changing consequences.

To be able to be there and walk a family through that is incredible."

While the work can be difficult and draining, Cortes said her clients give her a new perspective on perseverance.

"It sort of pales in comparison to what my clients have lived through," she said. "I draw a lot of inspiration from them."

— Jessica Shumaker

"We really try to put our clients in the driver seat and empower them with the tools they need to make decisions in their case."

She and a classmate, Jessica Mayo, immediately put their education to use in founding the nonprofit Migrant and Immigrant Community Action Project in October 2012. The organization's mission is to work with low-income immigrants and help them overcome barriers to justice.

The MICA Project provides legal services to immigrants and also takes part in organizing, advocacy and education. Cortes said she and Mayo witnessed firsthand how clients with whom they worked at their internships were unable to access certain services, either because of their income or



Nicole T. S. Cortes

The MICA Project



Andy Crouppen

Brown & Crouppen

Ask for Andy Crouppen's resume, and he'll chuckle a bit. There'd be only one entry.

"I think I'd just put Brown & Crouppen on it," he said, laughing.

Though he's held other jobs, that entry would make sense. Crouppen has spent a decade and a half with the firm his father Terry Crouppen started with Ron Brown in 1979 and which has since become nearly a household name in local personal-injury law. He was named a partner in 2012. Three years later, he took on his role as managing partner with partner Ed Herman.

Originally, the New York Law School graduate considered representing musical artists as a talent agent. Later, he joined an online enterprise during the heady days of the what he described as the "internet gold rush." But the law was in his blood, and ultimately he came home to St. Louis and the family firm.

"I think some of it was just hardwired," he said. "I've always had a real problem with people being taken advantage of."

In addition to its reputation as "the winningest plaintiffs' law firm," Brown & Crouppen also prides itself on its inclusion efforts, particularly its celebration of Black History Month which Crouppen said included sharing informational cards on important figures in black history and holding a firmwide luncheon and speaker on the issue of diversity.

That philosophy also informs the firm's hiring practices. Crouppen said that in the firm's early days, diversity seemed to flow naturally from the inclusive mentality of the organization. But recent initiatives also have included adding a committee to specifically address the topic.

"As we grew, we realized that with over 200 people, we really had to be more intentional about our culture," he noted. "We realized we could do better and have increased our efforts in this area to take what we already considered a great workplace and challenged ourselves to do more."

Crouppen has taken a leading role in the effort, according to those who know him.

"This is an issue he believes in, and the changes are important to him, not because it looks good to outsiders or makes good business sense, but because it is the kind

"As we grew, we realized that with over 200 people, we really had to be more intentional about our culture. We realized we could do better and have increased our efforts in this area to take what we already considered a great workplace and challenged ourselves to do more."

of world he wants for his daughters," a nominator wrote of Crouppen.

He said his ethos is a simple one — whether he's engaging with clients, employees or community members.

"I think if you treat everyone respectfully and like they matter, generally you'll be treated that way in return," he said.

— David Baugher

In some ways, Judy Draper's path to the law stemmed from childhood trips to the grocery store. Born in Seoul, South Korea, she remembers walking with her immigrant mother — and the local children who threw rocks at them while telling her mom to “go back to China.”

“As a kid, I just felt like this is not right, and there has to be a way to respond to this and let people know this is not just,” said Draper, whose father was an American GI and brought his family to the United States after the Korean War.

Today, she works to find just solutions for litigants on a daily basis from her bench in Missouri's largest county. For her work, the Howard University Law School graduate has received meaningful accolades, including two presented earlier this year — the Dred Scott Freedom Award and the Women of Achievement Award for Multicultural Awareness.

“Judges are public servants to the people. Especially for those who are unrepresented, we need to make sure that they have confidence in their access to justice.”

A founding member and former president of the Missouri Asian-American Bar Association, Draper also has been honored by the YWCA and NAACP and is a recipient of The Missouri Bar's annual Theodore McMillian Excellence in Justice Award, among other recognitions.

Draper came to the United States as a child of 6 or 7.

“As I grew up, I realized that laws were related to a branch of government,” she said. “I think that's what attracted me initially to have this passion [for the law].”

She began her career clerking for the Department of Labor in Washington, D.C., but she has taken on a variety of jobs.

The first female general counsel for the Missouri Department of Corrections, she also is a former prosecutor for the City of St. Louis and an adjunct professor of pre-trial practice at Washington University. Before joining the county bench, she served as a municipal judge for Northwoods and Berkeley in suburban St. Louis.

The Missouri Supreme Court has tapped her for the Missouri Task Force on the Future of the Legal Profession and the Education Committee for the Missouri Municipal and Associate Circuit Judges Association. Draper also was appointed last year to serve on the Host and Program Committee for the National Consortium on Racial & Ethnic Fairness in the Courts, for which she convened a law forum on issues that arose after the 2014 shooting of black teenager Michael Brown by white police officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson.

Draper said she tries her best to educate self-represented parties in her courtroom to ensure they can present their cases fairly and accurately.

“Judges are public servants to the people,” said Draper. “Especially for those who are unrepresented, we need to make sure that they have confidence in their access to justice.”

She also established a diversity and inclusion committee for her circuit.

“We have brought in some national speakers, some local speakers and have had panel discussions on what we as a court, along with our staff, can

do to help litigants of diverse backgrounds, cultures, ethnicities when they come in,” she said.

Throughout her work to ensure fair treatment for all, the memory of the harassment faced by her mother endures.

“I think that was the genesis of my feeling that there had to be a system that would let other people know that you don't treat each other like this,” she said. “I think that's where my sense of justice came about.”

— David Baugher



Judy P. Draper
Circuit Judge, St. Louis County



Willie J. Epps Jr.
U.S. Magistrate Judge,
Western District of Missouri

Willie J. Epps, Jr. has had an impressive career, but a chance meeting during high school with Walter Gellhorn — the St. Louis native, civil-rights leader and legal scholar — is the milestone that remains with him often.

Epps said he was honored that such an important man would take the time to suggest he attend Amherst College — Gellhorn's own undergraduate alma mater — though the school wasn't even on his radar at the time.

“That one act of kindness was one that sticks out,” Epps said, noting that he, in turn, takes as much time as he can to provide guidance for young people because of the potential impact on their lives. “I was blessed by mentors who opened my eyes to opportunities.”

Education was important in his family. The son of parents with doctoral degrees, Epps was born in rural Mississippi but moved to North St. Louis County as a fifth-grader. After Amherst and graduation from Harvard Law School, he worked in the U.S. Air Force as a Judge Advocate in courts martial during the late 1990s.

That led to an appointment as an assistant special counsel in the investigation headed by former U.S. Sen. Jack Danforth to examine the disastrous 1993 raid on the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas. Epps went on to spend several years in solo practice before joining Charter Communications, where he became chief compliance officer. He also spent time as a partner at both Shook, Hardy & Bacon and Dowd Bennett before joining Edward Jones in 2014, where he became associate general counsel and head of litigation. In 2017, he was appointed to the bench.

Epps said there initially were no attorneys among his relatives. Today, however, cousins on both sides of his family have earned law degrees, as did his sister — whom he calls “the smart, more talented lawyer.”

“I think at an early age, my parents exposed me to some

of the civil-rights lawyers who helped reshape America and make a huge difference throughout the country,” said Epps whose grandparents were active in the civil-rights movement. “Reading their stories and following their careers as a very young person let me know I wanted to be a lawyer.”

Epps stressed the rewarding nature of pro bono activities throughout his career, which he called “the best work I've done as a lawyer.”

“I've made lifelong friends doing that kind of work — work that I was not required to do, work that sometimes

“I think at an early age, my parents exposed me to some of the civil-rights lawyers who helped reshape America and make a huge difference throughout the country. Reading their stories and following their careers as a very young person let me know I wanted to be a lawyer.”

took away from my billable-hour requirements,” he said.

And he still mentors young people in the hope of helping them in the way that Gellhorn and others influenced him.

“You are just hearing about the different jobs that I've held. What you are not hearing about are all the stories behind why I got each of those jobs,” he said. “There's always a name behind that story. I feel so blessed that God has placed the right people in my life at the right time to lead me to the most amazing experiences.”

— David Baugher

For Kim Jones, becoming an attorney was the back-up plan. Working to further social justice was not.

When she did not get into the master's-degree program she initially wanted to complete, she changed course. It led her to a vocation in which she continues to improve the lives of numerous working women in and around Kansas City.

Jones graduated from Kansas State University in 1991 and earned her law degree at the University of Kansas in 1994. While there, she was the publications editor for *The Kansas Journal of Law and Public Policy*.

She also worked as a teaching assistant for an employment-law professor who later helped her to get a job in that practice area with a firm that did about 60 percent plaintiffs' work.

"You know how all the time people say, 'Life isn't fair?' But don't we all have the obligation to make it as fair as possible for as many possible?"

"It aligned very well with my liberal views, my crusade, my belief that I was going to save the world," Jones said.

But as her practice progressed, Jones discovered that companies weren't always wrong, and that sometimes her clients had deserved to be fired due to their own actions. She decided to switch to defense work and to help

companies improve their hiring and employment practices.

As an employment trial attorney, she now represents companies, not-for-profit organizations and higher-education institutions. She defends organizations in employment matters, but she also consults with them on personnel and anti-harassment issues.

In that work, she challenges clients to think "broadly and inclusively," she said. As managing partner of her firm, Jones promotes diversity and inclusivity in the hiring of new attorneys — a priority for her firm.

"Internally in my organization, we have a really profound commitment to creating and maintaining a very inclusive and diverse work environment," she said.

Issues of diversity and inclusion are not just a professional focus for Jones but a personal priority as well. Out of the office, she serves as vice chair of the board of the Women's Employment Network, a Kansas City-based organization that helps women achieve economic independence through employment.

WEN offers financial coaching, resume-review services, community services and a support network to bolster self-esteem. Jones said she is very thankful to be a part of that work.

"You know how all the time people say, 'Life isn't fair?'" she said. "But don't we all have the obligation to make it as fair as possible for as many possible?"

— Allyssa Dudley



Kimberly A. Jones

Seyferth Blumenthal & Harris



J. Justin Meehan

J. Justin Meehan, Attorney at Law

Civil-rights attorney J. Justin Meehan believes that if you live in a community, you shouldn't just take from it — you've got to give back. In 40 years of practicing law in St. Louis, he said that's what he's tried to do.

"I never turned my back on someone in need," he said. "I didn't make much money, but it's what I did. It's part of my commitment."

A New York native, Meehan is the son of an attorney who worked in a corporate environment but demonstrated a strong sense of social responsibility. As a self-described hippie in the 1960s, Meehan began his college career at Fordham University but left law school there after his first year.

In an effort to avoid being drafted and sent to Vietnam, he left New York and landed in St. Louis. There, he met people who marveled that he'd given up on a chance to become an attorney — both as a career choice and as an opportunity to effect change in the world.

Meehan returned to college, graduating cum laude from Saint Louis University in 1969 and earning his law degree there in 1975.

Within his first 30 days of practicing law, Ray Howard of Howard, Richardson & Singer hired him and assigned him to a murder case. Meehan said he didn't have any experience and "looked like a fool," when trying to pick a jury. But he went out into the community to gather interviews and information for the case, and ultimately his client was freed.

After two years with Howard, Richardson and Singer, Meehan became a solo practitioner. He's remained so ever since, and he's established a reputation for taking on the cases that to others seem hopeless and the clients who aren't always able to pay.

Thanks to Meehan's work in *State v. Williams* on behalf of a woman who had been charged with murdering her partner, the self-defense arguments once employed by battered spouses have been extended to all battered women.

As a result of his representation in the excessive-force case *Bell v. Board of Police Commissioners*, citizens of St. Louis now find it easier to file police-misconduct complaints.

He's helped students gain reinstatement to schools following their expulsion for speaking out about school issues, and he's taken on numerous cases involving allegations of civil-rights violations.

Meehan tries to find justice for people who often are denied access to it, and he "fearlessly stands in the gap for the oppressed, and has dedicated his life to the cause," a nominator wrote.

"I never turned my back on someone in need. I didn't make much money, but it's what I did. It's part of my commitment."

That approach to his career made for "rarely feast and a lot of famine" in his household, Meehan said, but his family shared and supported his sense of social commitment. He and his wife, Daizy, have two sons; one is a law student, and the other is a practicing attorney in St. Louis with whom Meehan sometimes works.

Forty years may have passed since he began his law career, but he hasn't forgotten his roots. He still sees areas of law he wants to change, among them workers' compensation rules and legalization of marijuana.

Today, he said, "the social revolutionary happens to be a lawyer."

— Allyssa Dudley

Law firms often tout their numbers of diverse staff, but Christopher Pickett knows that data doesn't always tell the story. And most of the data regarding diversity in the legal field doesn't tell a positive one.

Law firms might pursue diversity by hiring an attorney who fits the profile, but they don't make efforts to further that person's career, Pickett said. Statistics for the legal field overall show that the industry is still dominated by white men, especially when counting equity partners at major firms.

As a result, in 2015, 1.8 percent of partners at large law firms were African American men, 2.9 percent were Asian-American men and 2.2 percent were Hispanic men, according to the

"I do not want to be the only lawyer of color who is a shareholder," Pickett said. "I want there to be multiple people to be able to do it. Internally, my goal is that we fundamentally change how the firm looks."

After graduating from Saint Louis University School of Law, Pickett worked as a public defender in the town of Nevada to gain trial experience. He later worked at a smaller private firm before joining Greensfelder in 2012. His legal practice focuses on business litigation, including the areas of securities and higher education.

Law firms could make their staffs more diverse by taking action beyond hiring a diverse attorney to replace one who leaves, Pickett said. Students should receive mentoring while in law school, and firms should curtail the practice of ignoring students who have struggled academically during their first semester, Pickett said. Firms also should consider sponsorship programs for new hires in order to pair up-and-coming attorneys with advocates in law-firm matters.

At Greensfelder, Pickett is known for repeating two words often: "potential" and "outcome."

Under his leadership, the firm has encouraged diversity through mentorship and training programs, support for new parents, expanded sponsorship of events and organizations for black law students. This fall, he is organizing an event to target underrepresented law students who may have an interest in securities law. He also wants to improve the socioeconomic diversity of those seeking legal careers.

"The purpose of this work is putting someone in the position for outcome to match their potential," Pickett said. "I really want to help everybody. I want to put everybody in a position to succeed."

— Rachel Webb



Christopher A. Pickett
Greensfelder, Hemker & Gale

"I do not want to be the only lawyer of color who is a shareholder. I want there to be multiple people to be able to do it. Internally, my goal is that we fundamentally change how the firm looks."

Institute for Inclusion in the Legal Profession. By comparison, Asian-American women held 1.1 percent of partner spots. African American women and Hispanic women both counted for 0.6 percent of partners at large law firms. Pickett cited those statistics in an article he authored in Westlaw in December 2017.

"That isn't change," Pickett said. "It certainly isn't change from an industry perspective, and it certainly isn't change from a micro-perspective at a law firm level. That has to change so that we're not only allowing people to come in the door but also to succeed and advance up the chain."

As a shareholder and chief diversity officer at Greensfelder, Hemker & Gale, Pickett has every intention of improving those numbers — not only within Greensfelder but across the legal industry.



CONGRATULATIONS TO
Christopher Pickett

and all those selected for Diversity & Inclusion Awards



Thank you to Chris Pickett for your inspirational leadership and accomplishments as Greensfelder's Chief Diversity Officer.

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The choice of a lawyer is an important decision and should not be based solely upon advertising.

Keith Price wanted to be known as one thing: a great attorney.

He knew that after he graduated from law school at Baylor University and joined the St. Louis firm of Davis, Davis, Kasnetz & Greenberg. Still, even though he felt supported professionally, he was nervous about mentioning his personal life. He didn't bring dates to firm functions, he kept quiet about visiting certain bars and he scrubbed stories of vacations to remove any mention of the gay community.

As it turned out, his colleagues already had realized that he was gay — with no effect on their view of him.

"Their focus was on my skills, and their giving me the opportunity to advance those skills taught me how to help other diverse attorneys advance," Price said.

Price, who specializes in business law, now is a shareholder at

"We've opened up conversations and made people know that they can ask questions so they understand more. When people understand more, I think that leads to breakdown of discrimination."

Sandberg, Phoenix & von Gontard in St. Louis, which merged with his previous firm in 1998. Shortly after the merger, the firm adopted a non-discrimination policy that included sexual orientation. It was around that time, 10 years into his career, that Price started to use his business-law skills to help nonprofits working with an organization that brought AIDS services to underserved populations.

"As I got further into my career and developed some good relationships and started to discover I had support for who I was, I started to think about people who weren't getting support," Price said.

Price, who grew up in a small town in southern Illinois, had

known he was gay since high school. He understood that those who feel they must hide a part of themselves are less likely to perform well at school and work.

"It takes a lot of energy to keep a piece of you hidden all the time," Price said. "That distracts you from being the best lawyer you can be . . . You're spending so much energy on either not being who you are or being something that you're not, and that's just not productive."

Price's work to promote diversity expanded beyond an LGBTQ focus as he realized he wanted to make the legal field more welcoming for those who face marginalization in other ways. He has worked with prospective law students through Saint Louis University's PLUS program, which supports undergraduate students from groups traditionally underrepresented in the legal field.

As chair of the diversity committee at Sandberg Phoenix, he has sought to make the firm more welcoming for staff and clients alike while emphasizing diversity on several levels. The firm recognizes national diversity and inclusion observances, sending out information and resources related to people of color, religious minorities, people with disabilities and others in firm communications.

The firm also brings in speakers to help inform staff how they can work more effectively with people from those groups. One recent speaker discussed her experiences with blindness and answered

questions to increase awareness of issues that blind people face. Firm members have embraced the diversity initiatives, requesting more frequent events and seeking to plan events themselves.

"Sometimes all you read in the news is negative things about different groups, but when you put a human face on the group it's a completely different response," Price said. "We've opened up conversations and made people know that they can ask questions so they understand more. When people understand more, I think that leads to breakdown of discrimination."

—Rachel Webb



Keith Price

Sandberg Phoenix & von Gontard



Tamee V. Reese

AT&T

As the first member of her immediate family to graduate from college, Tamee V. Reese had her career planned out from the start.

"I've always wanted to become a lawyer," said Reese, now assistant vice president and senior legal counsel for AT&T in St. Louis. "I remember back in 10th grade — and maybe even earlier — always having the desire to be a lawyer, always wanting to help people."

As part of the Legal Department Diversity Committee at her company and regional coordinator of the Diversity & Inclusion Committee, she's been able to do just that. Reese remains at the forefront of efforts to increase sponsorships, promote supplier diversity and encourage attorney engagement.

But Reese's biggest impact may be in pipeline-to-career programs in which she spearheaded funding for two new initiatives — "Street Law," an effort geared toward high school students, and a summer diversity internship, both in cooperation with the St. Louis Chapter of the Association of Corporate Counsel. Last year was her second as co-chair of AT&T's diversity initiative at Saint Louis University School of Law, where she moderated a judicial clerkships panel and presented networking and interviewing workshops.

A University of Kansas graduate, Reese earned her MBA from Lindenwood University and her law degree from the University of Missouri. After school came a clerkship in the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals with the late U.S. Circuit Judge Theodore McMillian and a stint at Lashly & Baer before she joined CPI Corp. as an assistant general counsel. She came to AT&T in 2000.

Her other endeavors include work with the Mathews-Dickey Boys & Girls Club where she's been involved for three decades. She also has been recognized for her work with the Veteran's Consortium Pro Bono Program, and she is a recipient of both the President's Volunteer Service Award and a Missouri Lawyers Media's Women's

Justice Award.

Earlier this year, Reese launched another pipeline program for students at St. Louis Community College, which included empowerment discussions involving judges, attorneys and paralegals.

"If we can help to make their path a little smoother where we can help them navigate, I just believe that we've made a difference," said Reese. "That's what's important to me."

Her own path wasn't always so smooth. Her family was among the first to integrate their suburban St. Louis neighborhood and school district. That situation was

"I remember back in 10th grade — and maybe even earlier — always having the desire to be a lawyer, always wanting to help people."

sometimes uncomfortable, but her father believed it was important to put his children in circumstances where they could excel and succeed, even in difficult conditions, she said.

"I think about the stories of my parents and my grandparents who instilled the value in me of doing my very best to rise above adversity," said Reese, whose grandmother nourished her on stories about the successes of legendary civil-rights attorney Frankie Muse Freeman. "They instilled confidence in me and just that mentality to succeed."

—David Baugher



Reuben Shelton chuckles a bit about his decision to become an attorney.

“In my life I saw that the folks who made the most change in society were either lawyers or preachers,” he said. “I knew I probably wasn’t going to be a preacher.”

But even without the benefit of a pulpit, he had a substantial impact on the region’s business, government and legal landscape. A former special chief counsel for the Missouri Attorney General’s Office, he helped to secure a \$6.7 billion tobacco settlement for the state. Before retiring a year and a half ago, he handled groundbreaking intellectual property and antitrust work at agribusiness giant Monsanto for much of two decades. Before that, the Washington University MBA graduate headed the tort litigation department at Ameren for 14 years after working

Association of Metropolitan St. Louis, Shelton also has held roles with the Mound City and Missouri bar associations. He is a past regional director of the National Bar Association and chaired the American Bar Association’s Commission on Racial and Ethnic Diversity.

In addition to his legal work, Shelton also has served on numerous governing boards including the Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis, the Bi-State Development Agency, Children’s Hospital and others.

One of 10 children, Shelton grew up on the Northside of St. Louis with his father pulling double duty as a cab driver and auto worker for 40 years to make ends meet. He still recalls when his dad had to file a workers’ compensation claim.

“We ran into issues that lawyers helped us overcome,” he said. “I always felt that was pretty cool.”

It was cool enough to encourage him to go to law school at Saint Louis University after which he clerked for U.S. District Judge Clyde Cahill.

Progress has been made in promoting diversity since then, but much remains to be done, Shelton said. While hosting events on the topic, he said he has been surprised to discover how little the conversation has changed.

“I guess we have gotten better, but some of those same issues continue to rise in the discussion,” he said. “It was kind of weird that we had the same things back in the 1980s.”

At Ameren, he worked to boost minority hiring. At Monsanto, he helped to pair female and minority-headed contract firms with larger ones that had greater resources to assist the corporation with its legal needs.

“By and large, it kind of opened the door to a firm that otherwise wouldn’t have been able to get its foot in that door,” he said.

— David Baugher



Reuben A. Shelton

Monsanto

“In my life I saw that the folks who made the most change in society were either lawyers or preachers. I knew I probably wasn’t going to be a preacher.”

at Husch, Eppenger, Donohue, Elson & Cornfeld — a forerunner to today’s Husch Blackwell.

Shelton’s list of honors and accolades include recognitions from entities ranging from legal groups to magazines. He’s been named among 10 outstanding St. Louisans by the Junior Chamber of Commerce and one of 100 most inspiring St. Louisans by the NAACP. Declared a “Legal Legend” by the St. Louis Argus, he also has been recognized as one of the best corporate in-house lawyers in the state by Missouri Lawyers Media.

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 STINSON
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Lawyers are busy people. They have cases to try, briefs to file, contracts to review and clients to keep happy. They work long days, tracked in tenth-of-an-hour increments. How do you get them to care about diversity and inclusion — a subject that to some lawyers can seem touchy-feely, irrelevant or even uncomfortable?

For Stinson Leonard Street, the answer has been to make diversity a key part of the firm's strategy, something its leaders examine at both a firm-wide and an individual level.

"Basically, we look where the problems or potential problems are and we try and figure out, can we do something on a systemic basis to create change?" said Ann Jenrette-Thomas, Stinson's chief diversity and inclusion officer.

In many ways, diversity is a systemic challenge. Lawyers who come from less traditional backgrounds might be bright and hardworking but still find themselves bumping up against cultural norms.

"There are a lot of unwritten rules to succeeding in a large law firm, and if you belong to a minority group or are a first-generation lawyer in your family, you might not know some of those unwritten rules," Jenrette-Thomas said. "Without even realizing it, there were things they were doing subtly, or not doing, that were either foreclosing or not leveraging opportunities for them."

She would know. After earning her law degree from the Western New England University and her LL.M. from the Georgetown University Law Center, Jenrette-Thomas was a practicing lawyer in New York and Washington. She found herself increasingly unhappy.

"I didn't know how to navigate the unwritten rules," she said. "I didn't know what they were."

She turned that sense of unease back on itself and founded a coaching business, helping firms make all of their lawyers feel welcome and productive. That, too, brought a certain amount of disappointment. Some firms were more committed than others.

"On the institutional level, I could sense that a lot of places just brought me on to check a box," she said.

That has not been the case at Stinson. Jenrette-Thomas, who is based in Minneapolis, joined the firm 18 months ago hoping to find a place where she could do a "deep dive." She said she knew from her first interview that the firm's leadership was sincere in its commitment to diversity. As Managing Partner Mark Hinderks said in announcing Jenrette-Thomas' position, having a chief diversity officer was a key to one of the firm's "core strategic goals."

"With our commitment and support, she will help us deepen a culture that values all perspectives and backgrounds and recruits and retains the best talent," he said.

So how does a firm make those commitments a reality? For one thing, the firm created a five-episode podcast, "Big Law Success: The Inside Scoop for Law Students & New Lawyers," aimed at the law school student bodies in Missouri, Kansas and Minnesota from which Stinson seeks to recruit.

The firm also frequently visits the schools, helps to coach students in big-law know-how and actively recruits at diversity job fairs, such as the St. Louis Diversity Job Fair and Heartland Diversity Legal Job

"Sometimes if you want to be an advocate for an inclusive environment, you have to interrupt bias, and that's not always comfortable."



— Ann Jenrette-Thomas

Fair in Kansas City.

Those efforts appear to be paying off. According to the firm, Stinson's summer class of second-year law students was 57 percent diverse in 2016. Last year that figure rose to 68 percent, and this year it was 72 percent. The firm also said that its new fall associate classes for the past three years were 50 percent women — a figure surely driven in part by the firm's support for alternative and flexible schedules that don't remove an associate from consideration for partnership.

Currently, 38 percent of the firm's board of directors is diverse; as are the leaders of 57 percent of the firm's committees and 33 percent of its practice divisions.

Clearly, such results depend on buy-in not only from leadership but also from the lawyers who are willing to examine the barriers within the profession and their own unconscious biases.

"Sometimes if you want to be an advocate for an inclusive environment, you have to interrupt bias, and that's not always comfortable," Jenrette-Thomas said.

She's found that having one-on-one conversations with attorneys "demystifies the whole notion of diversity and inclusion."

"You really can help people feel a personal investment, and it happens a lot more organically," she said.

— Scott Lauck



Blake A. Strode

ArchCity Defenders

When you talk to Blake Strode about what he wants, you'll learn that his ambitions are not for himself. His ambitions lie in transforming the justice system so that the services offered meet the needs required.

It's a tall order, but it's one that he believes attorneys are best positioned to tackle.

"We are actors in this system," Strode said. "We lawyers are responsible for this legal system and all of the many messes it has created. And so every single person with a J.D. and bar number to my mind has a responsibility to be active on these issues."

Strode grew up in the St. Louis area, then attended the University of Arkansas and Harvard Law School. He returned to St. Louis shortly after graduation in 2015, in the aftermath of the Ferguson uprising. Strode received the Skadden Fellowship, which provides two-year fellowships to a handful of top students each year who want to work in public-interest law. He became executive director of ArchCity Defenders in January.

The organization provides legal services with the goal of reducing barriers to social services, advocates in court through litigation and seeks criminal justice reform. ArchCity, established in 2009, has led such undertakings as suing the city of St. Louis to shut down the city's Workhouse, a medium-security institution criticized for inhumane conditions. It also has filed numerous lawsuits to end the practice of jailing people with outstanding municipal fines, and it has represented protesters jailed after demonstrating against police brutality.

Since joining ArchCity, Strode has worked to implement partnerships between his organization and activist groups that work on similar issues, such as Missourians Organizing for Reform and Empowerment and the Organization for Black Struggle. The ultimate goal, he said, is to shift the discussion on issues involving equity and social justice, and eventually to close the justice gap — a mismatch between the legal services available and those that are needed.

"The vast majority of legal work is for high-paying corporations or high-net-worth individual clients," Strode said. "In my view, the need is greatest among low-income, working-class, poor and homeless individuals."

There's nothing wrong with taking a high-paying job, Strode said, but he observed that law students rarely are presented with opportunities to serve marginalized clients. After graduation, the job market and the pressure to pay off student loans incentivizes attorneys to take lucrative, private-firm work, which contributes to the justice gap, Strode said.

Attorneys are in a strong position to effect change, Strode said. Those working in private firms still have the option of public service through pro bono work and financial contributions to legal nonprofits, Strode said. Change also needs to happen on a systemic level, though, which is tougher

"The vast majority of legal work is for high-paying corporations or high-net-worth individual clients. In my view, the need is greatest among low-income, working-class, poor and homeless individuals."

to accomplish.

Still, he remains optimistic. The region is large enough that it has a lot of resources, but compact enough that people from different groups know each other, in addition to a new crop of activists roused by events related to Ferguson, Strode said.

"That kind of talent and passion combined with the fact it's a pretty small region where everyone knows each other means to me that we can transform the system," Strode said. "We can transform the way we do business here. We can transform the face of criminal justice and housing and homelessness."

— Rachel Webb

Improving the diversity and inclusion of the legal field is a good thing to do, but Lisa Sonia Taylor wants law leaders to understand it's also essential to ensure the success of the legal profession.

As the world becomes more diverse and fluid, the legal field needs to reflect that diversity in order to meet the community's needs and to garner trust from the community it represents, said Taylor, who for the past seven years has served as director of the Office of Inclusion and Diversity Education at Saint Louis University School of Law.

"We're in an era where our society and our communities are becoming more and more diverse," she said. "People are

"People are having very complex legal needs, and it's important for the legal field to be able to be responsive to a diverse community, to be able to serve a diverse community and to garner trust from a diverse community. The only way we can do that is to have a diverse profession."

having very complex legal needs, and it's important for the legal field to be able to be responsive to a diverse community, to be able to serve a diverse community and to garner trust from a diverse community. The only way we can do that is to have a diverse profession."

Taylor was born in Toronto but moved to her parents' native Trinidad as an infant. She returned north to earn an undergraduate degree in political science and history from the University of Toronto. With a university professor for a father and a teacher for a mother, she swore up and down she wouldn't work in education, and she started law school at Howard University, expecting to work with companies to improve their nondiscrimination and equal-opportunity policies.

Instead, after working for a few years in labor law, she found herself in education, making her way in 2011 to SLU, where

she headed the law school's Office of Inclusion and Diversity Education until this month.

At SLU, Taylor received a grant from the Law School Admissions Council to start a pipeline program, known as DiscoverLaw.org Prelaw Undergraduate Scholars, or PLUS. PLUS brings together undergraduate students from groups traditionally underrepresented in the legal field for a four-week program to introduce them to the profession and the rigors and expectations of law schools. Data has shown that PLUS participants are more likely to improve their GPAs after attending and tend to get admitted to more law schools than peers who did not attend such a program. Only a few students attending SLU's PLUS program have graduated so far, but early feedback indicates that the program has been instrumental in their pre-law success.

It also is vital for law schools to start looking for potential students at community colleges, which are an underused resource for talented students of diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, Taylor said.

"It's so important for students to start think about post-graduate careers early on," Taylor said.

"When students don't have prelaw advising at their institution, they start doing things too late in the cycle, and that comes with certain disadvantages when they do apply to law school."

Taylor is moving to the Washington, D.C. area, but she said she plans to remain involved in diversity and inclusion programs with SLU. She also wants to help build networks of diversity and inclusion professionals who work in similar settings in order to strengthen the burgeoning field.

"We're seeing more and more people like me that their sole role is diversity and inclusion, so I think it's an important time for diversity professionals to get a broader understanding of what we can do and have some kind of support organization as well," she said.

— Rachel Webb



Lisa Sonia Taylor
Saint Louis University School of Law



Michelle Wimes

Ogletree, Deakins, Nash,
Smoak & Stewart

When Michelle Wimes was in her teens, she was exactly the kind of person you'd predict would become a lawyer.

"I was one of these people who always stood up and spoke up for other people," said Wimes, who has spent her career as an attorney — both in practice and in leadership roles — doing just that.

Wimes graduated from the University of Missouri-Kansas City in 1988, then moved to Spain to complete graduate studies in history, art history, and literature. She also taught there for two years before returning to the United States to attend Tulane University, where she earned her law degree in 1994.

Wimes intended to become a public defender, but a stint in the immigration-law clinic at Tulane spurred her to revise that plan.

Her first job was with Blackwell Sanders, working in immigration and later in the firm's Associate, Labor & Employment and Education Law Practice Group. After four and a half years there, a recruiter from Shook, Hardy & Bacon called her, looking for an attorney who could speak Spanish.

Wimes spent five years at Shook before moving to Spencer Fane Britt & Browne, where she advised school districts on student discipline, constitutional, personnel and other policy issues. She also established its first firm-wide diversity committee.

Drawing on her experience as a woman of color who found success in a leadership role, she mentored young attorneys and developed programs with bar associations and other organizations to address diversity and discrimination issues. As she became more deeply entrenched in that work, however, she said her passion shifted from practicing law to improving the legal practice itself.

"I felt like I had a body of knowledge [on how] to be successful," Wimes said.

Wimes returned to Shook in 2008 as its Director of Strategic Initiatives, guiding the firm's national and international diversity efforts. She said she is proud of the firm's progress and the programs it implemented during her time there.

When Ogletree, Deakins, Nash, Smoak & Stewart offered her the chance to design her own position, however, Wimes seized the opportunity for a role that would combine professional development with diversity and inclusion issues. She said she wanted to ensure that diversity hires at the firm didn't stall out and that they would become successful attorneys, on track for leadership and advancement.

As Ogletree Deakins' Director of Professional Development and Inclusion and later as its Chief Diversity and Professional Development Officer, Wimes has developed a program that provides incoming attorneys with guidelines, a common language and a roadmap to succeed. She notes that they may not have grown up with attorneys in their families or known other attorneys to model in their own careers.

"You have to demystify what it takes to be successful,"

"I was one of these people who always stood up and spoke up for other people."

Wimes said.

Since Wimes has taken the lead of Ogletree Deakins' diversity efforts, the firm has achieved a perfect score on the national Human Rights Campaign's Corporate Equality Index for three years in a row. It also has obtained gold-standard certification from the international Women in Law Empowerment Forum.

Still, there is progress to be made, Wimes said. She wants to see more diversity in numbers of equity partnerships and more women in leadership roles.

"My goal is to work myself out of a job," Wimes said.

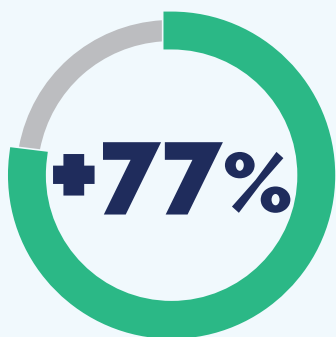
— Allyssa Dudley



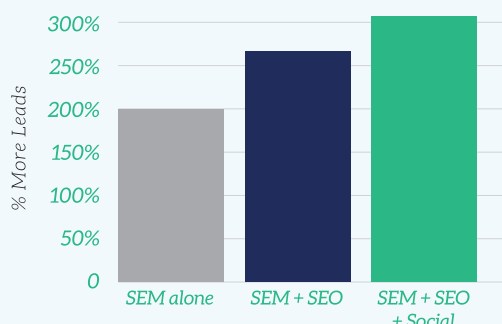
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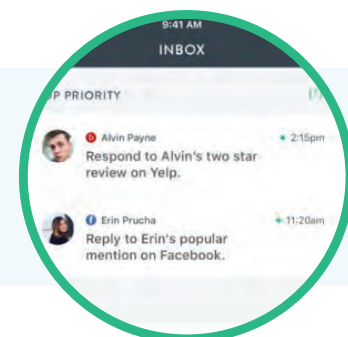


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