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MINNESOTA **LAWYER**

October 2020 • www.minnlawyer.com



MINNESOTA LAWYER
**DIVERSITY
& INCLUSION**
2020



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Diversity & Inclusion
2020 Honorees



Honoring Commitment

Faegre Drinker celebrates Lica Tomizuka's dedication to making the practice of law a more welcoming profession for all. We are committed to promoting a culture that prizes diversity and inclusion, and we recognize the leaders who work every day to bring these values to fruition.

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Letter from the Editor

“As each of us came into consciousness, we learned, based on the random outward manifestation of the combinations of genes that collided at the precise moment of our conception, that because of what we look like, the world has already assigned a place for us,” writes Pulitzer Prize-winning author Isabel Wilkerson in her new book, *Caste*.

It is up to each of us to either accept or challenge the role that we were cast into and make the world see what is inside us, Wilkerson writes, including our dreams and beliefs, and how we express love. “That we are not what we look like but what we do with what we have, what we make of what we are given, how we treat others and our planet.”

In this issue you will read stories about how Minnesota attorneys and judges are working to create a more equitable world, bringing equity into the workplace and improve hiring processes, fighting for racial justice, and creating work cultures that reward excellence, accomplishment and diversity.

In this issue’s cover story, *Standing in Solidarity*, you will also read about how affinity bar associations and their leaders, who are also among this year’s honorees, are uniting against prejudice and the dehumanizing of victims of violence, exemplified in the recent killing of George Floyd.

Minnesota Lawyer is honored to recognize our honorees for the example they set for each of us in diversity and inclusion.

“We had nothing to do with having been born into privilege or under stigma,” writes Wilkerson. “We have everything to do with what we do with our God-given talents and how we treat others in our species from this day forward.”

—Joel Schettler, editor

Note: Honoree photos were taken at the American Swedish Institute in Minneapolis.

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A seat at the table

Bar Association
president focuses
on diversity,
inclusion

Q&A

WITH
DYAN EBERT

By Brian Johnson | Staff Writer

Dyan Ebert has had a strong interest in the law since her middle school days, when she interviewed a local attorney about the legal profession and then penned a paper about her desire to be a lawyer.

That career interest led to a degree at William Mitchell College of Law, a leadership position at Quinlivan & Hughes law firm in St. Cloud, and — as of July — a turn as president of the Minnesota State Bar Association.

As CEO of Quinlivan & Hughes, Dyan Ebert represents government entities, corporations and individuals on matters related to employment, liability insurance coverage, casualty law and more.

In the following interview, Ebert talks about her duties as MSBA president, the challenge of attracting and retaining lawyers in Greater Minnesota, and making sure the justice system is fair for everybody.

The entire interview is available in the “Beyond the Skyline” podcast.

ML: What are your primary areas of focus?

Ebert: I clerked for a year with a couple of judges and then I immediately went to work with the firm that I’m at now. It was under a different name at the time. Their history had been in doing insurance defense litigation, so everything from car accidents to premises liability claims to employment claims, anything that traditionally was under the insurance umbrella that would garner some defenses. And so that’s how I grew up, if you will. It has, over the years, developed more into a more narrow practice of working with public entities — a lot of cities, counties, school districts — on employment-related claims and civil rights, constitutional claims, that sort of thing.

ML: Talk about your new duties as president of the Minnesota State Bar Association.

Ebert: The responsibilities of being the bar association president are wide and varied, even in the most usual circumstances. And I would certainly put us now into an unusual circumstance with the COVID era that we’re of course dealing with.

I think there’s slightly over 25,000 attorneys in the state, and almost 14,000 of them belong to the MSBA, so as you can imagine that brings together a wide variety of people and practices. It’s a pretty diverse spectrum of issues that we have to deal with. But the MSBA, at its core, helps deal with the administration of justice, of course, making sure that we’re addressing things that impact our profession. We work to make sure our membership has access to high-quality educational programs. Maintaining public trust in the legal system is very, very high on the MSBA priority list and certainly advocating for the interest of our profession, as well. So as the president, there’s a fair amount of balancing that you have to do on all of those fronts.

ML: I know you have a strong interest in social justice issues. Can you expand on that?

Ebert: One of the main purposes of the MSBA is to aid in the administration of justice, and for us to effectively do that, we have to make sure that the justice system is fair for every-

body, and not just exclusive to certain members of our society. The MSBA takes that position very seriously. I think the MSBA collectively, like many individuals and organizations following the killing of George Floyd, has had to sort of become more intentional about those responses that will be taken. Our MSBA Council is dedicated to making sure that the MSBA does something to move that needle forward as opposed to just simply reacting to what occurred back in May. I wish I could tell you what those efforts are going to be, but we’re still in the process of figuring that out. We do know that there are lots of organizations that are already working very hard at addressing those issues.

ML: Talk about the struggle to attract and retain lawyers in Greater Minnesota.

Ebert: It’s obviously an issue that’s near and dear to my heart because I do practice in St. Cloud. And I can say that as a business owner, we struggle to get applicants interested in coming out to practice in the Greater Minnesota area. And based upon conversations I’ve had with lots of different people across the state, they’re similarly struggling to attract attorneys to practice outstate.

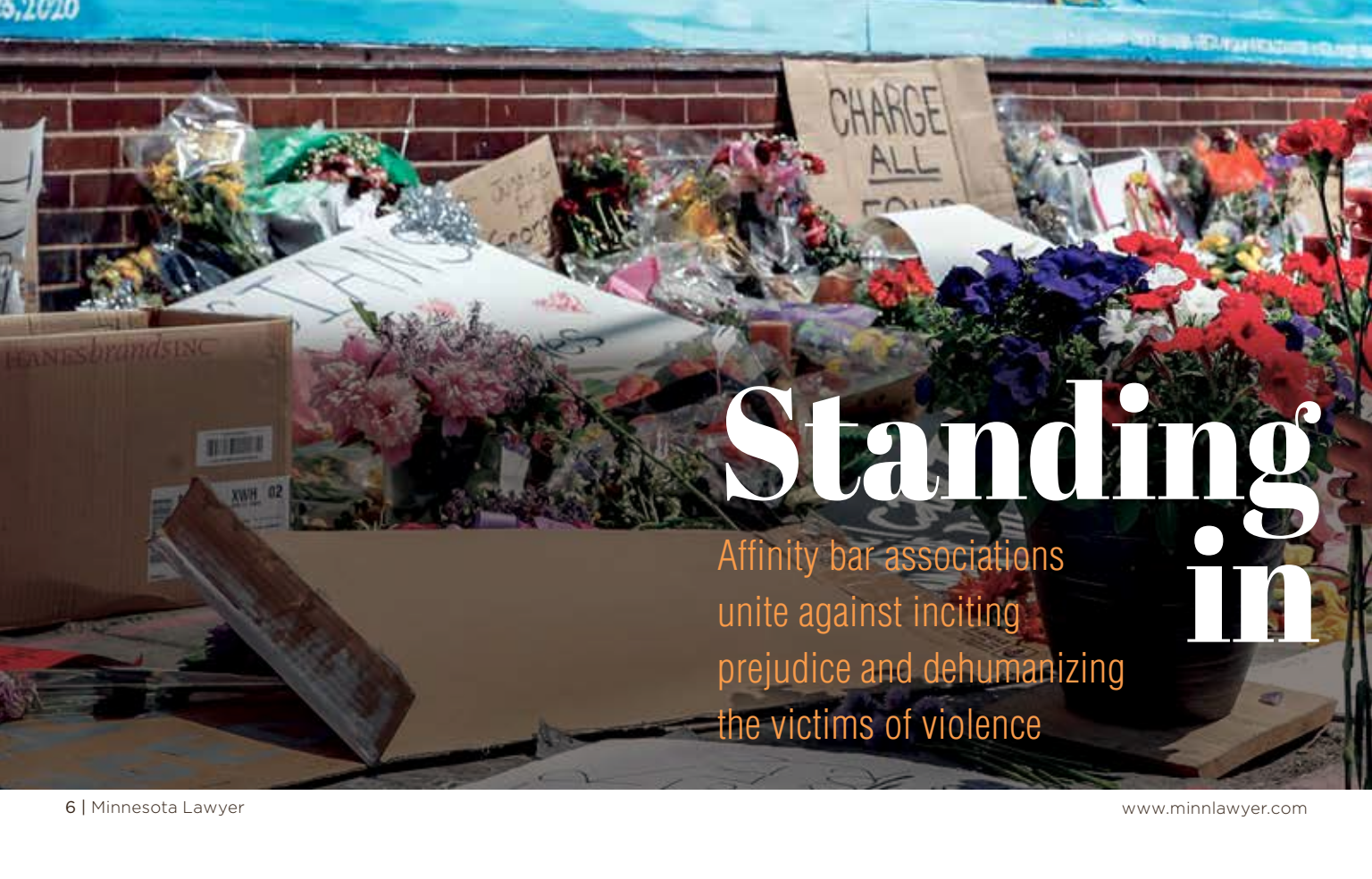
On a national level, there’s a lot of conversation at the ABA about rural practices across America struggling. So I think as a profession, certainly there are population centers in the metro that are attractive to people that want to practice. But it’s sort of like the old schoolhouse in rural America, in rural Minnesota. Once that closes, everybody says that the community dies. It’s sort of like the local lawyer as well. If you have to drive 70 or 80 miles to find a lawyer who can help you, that’s not good. And so it does stifle access to justice.

Not to say that something good has come of COVID because I think so much bad has, but practicing in the COVID era has really opened up opportunities for Greater Minnesota. You don’t have to drive to the metro for those bar association meetings. We’re doing all of our meetings virtually. And our attendance has been great. We are opening up opportunities for leadership through a virtual platform that someone might not have otherwise considered because it might have been too burdensome to do so. So, you know, we have to look at the silver lining on that.

ML: Do you have any thoughts on that how to attract more women and people of color to the profession and to leadership positions?

Ebert: Diversity and inclusion is certainly part of the core beliefs of MSBA, has been part of our strategic plan for the last several years. And we are always looking for ways to enhance that membership.

There’s a lot of statistics out there. Sometimes just extending the invitation to someone is all they need before they realize that, oh, I do have a seat at the table or someone is interested in me participating. We need to work to identify leaders and identify people that we know would take our organization forward. As a collective, we’ve got MSBA members on board with that conversation. ^{ML}



Standing in

Affinity bar associations
unite against inciting
prejudice and dehumanizing
the victims of violence



Solidarity

By Todd Nelson

Affinity bar organizations

in the Twin Cities say the four former Minneapolis police officers charged in George Floyd's death deserve a fair trial.

While nothing should interfere with that right, affinity bar leaders say they are raising their voices collectively to reiterate that those charged in the case are the ones on trial and not Floyd.

In a joint declaration titled, "Statement Against Criminalization of Black and Brown Victims," the groups condemn the actions of some defense attorneys who have focused on Floyd's past crimes and history of drug use in court documents seeking to have charges against their clients dismissed.

"The strategy of attempting to distract from law enforcement's conduct by inciting prejudice and dehumanizing the victims of violence is racist," the statement says. "Lawyers know better and must be better. And we should hold them to account when they do not. ... It is clear that this strategy is intended to fuel racial prejudice in a case being watched across the country."

The statement is from the Minnesota Association of Black Lawyers, the Minnesota Hispanic Bar Association, the Executive Committee of the Minnesota American Indian Bar Association and the Minnesota Asian Pacific American Bar Association.

Victims' rights bill sought

The statement calls for the state legislators to enact a victims' rights bill "focused on the rights of the victims of police brutality and violence."

The bill should limit law enforcement's use of victims' medical, criminal and substance abuse histories "to justify police brutality and violence," like rape shield laws that generally block admission and introduction of the sexual history of sexual violence victims, the organizations state.

"These tactics essentially change the dynamic of these cases to where it's the victim becoming the criminal and the accused murderers becoming the victim," said Richard Greiffenstein, president-elect of the Minnesota Hispanic Bar Association. "That obviously flips the case on its head and that's not the way these cases should play out."

In court documents, defense attorney Earl Gray, representing former officer Thomas Lane, stated that Floyd was "as the officers suspected, an addict. He was worse than that." Elsewhere in documents, Gray described Floyd as a liar and referred to Floyd's police contacts and convictions dating back 17 years. Gray did not respond to an email request for comment.

"The smearing of Mr. Floyd's character is nothing more than racial stereotyping masquerading as historical and objective facts," the affinity bar groups assert in their statement. "Since the birth of the eugenics movement in 1883, junk science theories

Malaysia Hammond, 19, places flowers May 31 at a memorial mural for George Floyd at the corner of Chicago Avenue and 38th Street. | AP FILE PHOTO

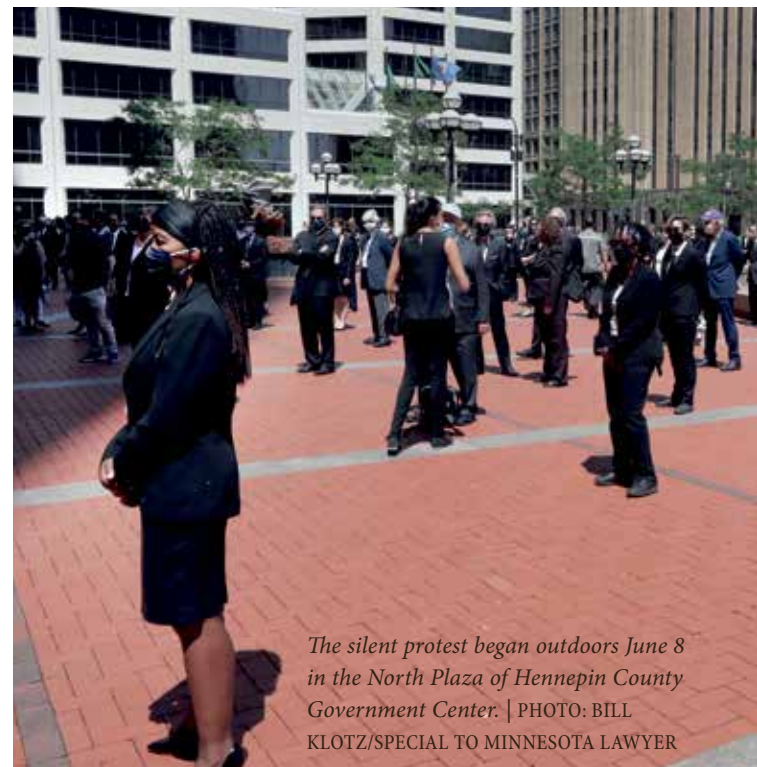
Silent protesters stand June 8 in the atrium of the Hennepin County Government Center. The Minnesota Association of Black Lawyers held the silent protest to coincide with the first court appearance of former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin, who is accused of the murder of George Floyd. | PHOTO: BILL KLOTZ/SPECIAL TO MINNESOTA LAWYER



Thousands of people gather June 2 at the State Capitol in St. Paul to protest the death of George Floyd. | AP FILE PHOTO



University of St Thomas law student Sarah Koziol stands in the Hennepin County Government Center atrium in silent protest on June 8. | PHOTO: BILL KLOTZ/SPECIAL TO MINNESOTA LAWYER



The silent protest began outdoors June 8 in the North Plaza of Hennepin County Government Center. | PHOTO: BILL KLOTZ/SPECIAL TO MINNESOTA LAWYER

have been used to propagate negative stereotypes that people of color are less intelligent, subhuman, and that Black men in particular, are prone to savagery and deserve to die or be killed with impunity. To promote this bias and rhetoric, in cases such as Mr. Floyd's, some historical facts such as Mr. Floyd's criminal history are offered to incite prejudice, distract from important decision-making, and bias the ultimate decision-makers."

'Sadly foreseeable' maneuvers

Such tactics against Floyd were "sadly foreseeable," Greiffenstein said.

"That's spread by the media to households across the country

who are undoubtedly swayed by these arguments that somehow the victim's criminal history or medical history or substance abuse history should dictate how they're treated by law enforcement," Greiffenstein said.

Frank Aba-Onu, president of the Minnesota Association of Black Lawyers, said Floyd's case is a tipping point for seeking change in the way the court system prosecutes police. That some defense attorneys turned the focus on Floyd was more "here we go again," Aba-Onu said, than a surprise.

"When you bring in the victim's conduct that quite frankly has nothing to do

too much of it. And especially with this instance where there was so much of a national storm about what happened, we thought this would be a perfect instance to show what effect this has on Black and Brown folks and how it needs to stop. That was something we thought that our affinity bars would want to be involved in because it's a path forward from where we started back in May."

Aba-Onu disagrees with those who might say that attorneys have to do what they can for their clients and those who would say that people see through such defense tactics.

'No one deserves what happened to Floyd'

"A lot of people don't see through it and use that as their judgment of why this person 'deserved' what happened to them," Aba-Onu said. "No one deserves to have what happened to Mr. Floyd happen to them. But [the defense] bring[s] this up to say they're a 'bad apple.'"

"To me, that is wrong in and of itself but so is the re-victimization of the individual, the family, and the community. It perpetuates to the Black and Brown community that this is what you think of us," he said. "There so much harm that comes from that, even if you take away the biggest part, which is the actual criminal justice system and the trial itself."

In saying that the Minnesota American Indian Bar Association (MAIBA) stands with other affinity bars, vice president Arielle Wagner pointed to a statement the group issued days after Floyd's death, which called for prosecution to the fullest extent of officers who uses

brutality in the United States and live in fear of death and violence at the hands of law enforcement, the MAIBA statement said. "Our communities are subject to use of excessive force and homicidal measures by police officers, often without repercussions."

Minnesota Asian Pacific American Bar Association president Vincent Pham said the organization is "standing in solidarity" with its counterparts to advance diversity, inclusion, anti-racism and equity. While affinity bar associations often collaborate on professional issues, the defense comments about Floyd spurred groups to speak out publicly.

"We're finding that our affinity bar organizations are coming to the forefront more as far as having a voice," Pham said. "I think we're finding that we may need more of a voice this year more than ever."

After the widespread calls for racial justice and social unrest following Floyd's death, the defense comments, "didn't sit right with how we're all viewing the world differently in 2020," Pham said.

"When you think about what is the reason that someone would put that in there, it seems like it's supporting some biases, racial biases there," Pham said. "To me it seems like it shouldn't have a place in a court filing that should be focused on the law and what's important. How do we advance justice here? Those types of statements don't seem to do that. It feels like it undermines the integrity of the justice system."

They also compound families' woes, Greiffenstein said.

"These families that are mourning the loss of their loved ones aren't just mourning; they're also having to essentially reclaim and restore the reputations of their loved ones, which are now being dragged through the mud," Greiffenstein said. "The impact of these tactics, of this strategy is wide, hitting well beyond the four walls of the courtroom." ❧



““

When you bring in the victim's conduct that quite frankly has nothing to do with that incident, that really goes to the heart of what we see as far as the systematic racial issues that are permeating our systems. ””

Frank Aba-Onu, president, Minnesota Association of Black Lawyers

with that incident, that really goes to the heart of what we see as far as the systematic racial issues that are permeating our systems," Aba-Onu said. "We've just seen

"brutal and criminal actions in the line of duty."

"African Americans and Native Americans suffer the highest rates of police



Pictured are, from left to right, Jeanette M. Bazis, Laura Broomell, Amran A. Farah and Jenny Gassman-Pines

Greene Espel PLLP

The Minneapolis firm of Greene Espel is putting its money where its mouth is when it comes to diversity and inclusion.

According to Ethelind Kaba, the firm's marketing manager, about two-thirds of its attorneys are women, people of color or LGBTQ. About a quarter of their attorneys are people of color. Last year Law360 recognized Greene Espel as one of the best 50 firms in the nation for minority equity partners.

That's by design, she said.

"We didn't always reflect the communities we serve that well," said Kaba. "The results we see now come from genuine efforts to do better in hiring, promotion and retention."

Along with hitting hiring targets, the firm has been remaking its summer program, working with Twin Cities Diversity in Practice and client partners to help bring in diverse summer associates and clerks.

Last year Greene Espel organized an event with filmmaker Sharon Rowe for a screening of her film "Balancing the

Scales," a documentary that looks at the history of women lawyers in the United States and their struggles to break through the glass ceiling.

The firm's efforts have also extended to how attorneys are promoted. Greene Espel studied research showing that women lawyers receive more subjective, critical feedback than male attorneys and that diverse attorneys receive less helpful feedback generally.

To help overhaul its review system, attorney Jenny Gassman-Pines assessed Greene Espel's past review forms, identified instances of bias, and trained all our attorneys on how bias can affect feedback.

"Diversity in the practice of law is relatively new," said Kaba. "We're trying to make sure that we're being thoughtful to market in an authentic way."

—Dan Heilman

Greenberg Traurig proudly congratulates
our colleague, Alex Kim, on being named one of
Minnesota Lawyer's 2020 Diversity & Inclusion honorees.



Alex's leadership as President of the International Association of Korean Lawyers is inspiring and has paved the way for diverse lawyers in the Twin Cities legal community and around the globe.

Since GT's inception, we've been committed to diversity and inclusion in the workplace. We're proud to have two lawyers receive this honor in consecutive years.

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Collaborative Legal Community Coalition

Chief U.S. District Court Judge John Tunheim recalls spending a year putting together a scrapbook on Minnesota's past for an elementary school history class. Missing from the state's history was the 1920 lynching of three Black men in Duluth wrongfully charged with rape.

Over a year ago, Tunheim and a few of his colleagues created the Collaborative Legal Community Coalition to begin working on a commemoration of the lynching of Isaac McGhie, Elmer Jackson, and Elias Clayton. "We wanted people to understand this is not simply something that happened in Alabama and Mississippi and Georgia; this happened in Minnesota," he said. "We need to make sure we understand what happened and why the rule of law is so important to keep this from ever happening again."

Gov. Tim Walz, Blackwell Burke P.A. founder Jerry Blackwell, the Clayton Jackson McGhie Memorial in Duluth, and several other organizations agreed to help with the project. Bryan Stevenson, who leads the Montgomery-based Equal Justice Initiative, agreed to speak and allow Duluth to eventually host a replica of the National Peace and Justice Memorial that commemorates lynching victims.

The community coalition scaled back its plans because of COVID, including a visit by Stevenson. Instead, a small group of prominent Minnesota attorneys and political leaders met in Duluth on June 15th at the Clayton Jackson McGhie Memorial, Tunheim said. The district court continues to work on a commemorative booklet outlining the tragic events, and Tunheim wants to showcase the rule of law through reenactments of the trial of Max Mason, who avoided being lynched in 1920 but still served time on a false rape charge. Blackwell worked tirelessly to gain a pardon for Mason, he added.

The Equal Justice Initiative will add a historical marker to the Duluth memorial in October. The lynching story remains relevant in the aftermath of George Floyd's death in police custody. "That incident reminds people that there are some things that haven't changed over the course of history," Tunheim said.

—Frank Jossi

Office of the Minnesota Attorney General

Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison's office presented a daylong continuing legal education program on bias and hate crimes for a simple reason: They're still a problem.

Ellison said he began working with law enforcement, elected officials and religious community members to eliminate bias-motivated crimes as soon as he got inaugurated in January 2019, in remarks to nearly 1,000 online program attendees.

Hundreds of Minnesotans who attended community listening sessions last year throughout the state expressed bipartisan support for the effort, Ellison said.

"We learned two things," Ellison told listeners. "We must hold people who commit hate crimes accountable criminally if we can, civilly if we can. But more than that we've got to build unity between Minnesotans of all backgrounds. We've got to help people see that this kind of behavior cannot be condoned."

Planning for the program began in late 2019, Assistant Attorney General Janice Kimble said. While the lineup of topics and speakers was in place before the police killing of George Floyd in May, that may have increased interest. Nearly 400 people attended last year's in-person program.

Kimble worked to overcome technical challenges, logging extra hours with technology staff to make sure speakers could connect online.

Speakers included attorney Jerry Blackwell, who helped win the state's first full posthumous pardon for Max Mason, an African American man wrongly convicted of an alleged rape in Duluth 100 years ago. Three other Black men were taken from their jail cells, beaten and lynched by a mob in response to the rape allegations, according to the Minnesota Historical Society.

U.S. Attorney Erica MacDonald, state Public Safety Commissioner John Harrington and FBI Supervisory Special Agent Michael Melcher discussed prosecuting hate crimes at the CLE.

"If you don't take a step back and learn a little bit about the fact that bias and hate crimes still do happen even if it's not publicized or even if it's not personally in your neck of the woods, it is still happening," Kimble said.

—Todd Nelson



Assistant Attorney General
Janice Kimble

Uzodima Franklin Aba-Onu

PRIME THERAPEUTICS

Uzodima Franklin Aba-Onu had a busy summer. He helped organize a silent protest held in June by the Minnesota Association of Black Lawyers (MABL) to protest the death of George Floyd during a police arrest.

The legal counsel for Prime Therapeutics and a 2019 Minnesota Lawyer Up & Coming Attorneys honoree assumed the role of president in July after serving as MABL treasurer and vice president. That position adds to a long list of volunteer activities Aba-Onu participates in to advance the cause of diversity, inclusion and fighting systemic racism.

“It is essential to me that we break down the barriers for people of color and open opportunities to them in the legal profession,” Aba-Onu said. “We also have to address the inequities in the system.”

His work with the MABL represents just one aspect of the attorney’s activism. Supreme Court Justice Margaret Chutich and Judge Shari Schluchter appointed Aba-Onu in December 2019 to the 26-member Committee for Equality and to work across Minnesota’s judicial system to promote access to the courts and eliminate bias.

As one of 48 “community builders” selected by the African American Leadership Forum (AALF) to participate in “Collective Impact Workstreams,” he and the economic and development workstream team focused on creating a strategic plan to strengthen Black businesses.

One initiative, “Black Future Fund,” allows for a long-term development of an innovative, flourishing and prosperous Black middle class. One goal is to build Black wealth and “create ways for our community to support them,” he said. “The more business ownership, the more we can control our economic destiny.”

Aba-Onu serves in leadership positions with the Federal Bar Association’s Minnesota chapter, the St. Stephen’s Human Services Board and his own firm’s pro bono, diversity and inclusion and recruiting committees. “I enjoy doing this work because our community has to address these issues,” he said. “If not now, when? If not you, who?”

—Frank Jossi

Catherine Ahlin-Halverson

MASLON LLP

As public interest counsel at Maslon LLP, Catherine Ahlin-Halverson leads the Minneapolis firm's community and pro bono initiatives.

After graduation from Columbia Law School, she began her career at a firm in San Francisco and joined the Maslon firm after she and her husband and daughter moved to the Twin Cities in 2005. She practiced in the areas of complex and class action, and was co-chair Maslon's litigation group from 2011 to 2013.

Ahlin-Halverson says she "has dedicated her career to pro bono work and community initiatives that work to create access to the justice system and the legal community for all people."

In 2016, she became Maslon's public interest counsel to launch Maslon UPLIFT, an after-school mock trial program created for eighth-grade students who reflect the diverse Twin Cities population. Students from St. Louis Park Middle School and Columbia Academy in Columbia Heights participate in the 6-month program, learning from volunteer attorneys about the legal profession, criminal justice, and the court system.

The mock trial program is presented each spring in front of actual Minnesota judges in courtrooms at University of Minnesota Law School and Mitchell Hamline School of Law.

The UPLIFT program, a partnership with the University of Minnesota Law School, is designed "to show kids what they can accomplish. Watching them grow and flourish is extremely rewarding."

In addition to serving as the program director of Maslon UPLIFT, Ahlin-Halverson leads a number of Maslon's pro bono initiatives, represents kids in foster care through the Children's Law Center, and provided successful representation for a client from Nigeria who received asylum over the last year. She also is a member of a team of Maslon attorneys that secured the vacation of a Texas inmate's death sentence, continuing to work for his exoneration.

Ahlin-Halverson also serves as a member of the Federal Bar Association's Diversity Committee.

—Dan Emerson



Holly Dolejsi

ROBINS KAPLAN LLP

For Robins Kaplan partner Holly Dolejsi, having George Floyd killed in her neighborhood, and staying during the increasingly violent protests, gave her a new perspective on diversity and inclusion she didn't expect.

"This is a controversial position, but I think what's happened in the wake of murders is beneficial for Minnesotans," she says. "I didn't feel safe in my home, and it gave me the smallest glimpse into the type of visceral fear that people of color must operate under all the time, throughout their lives."

The recent death of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg was another significant reminder, she says, of the importance of diversity and inclusion work and how this is a fight for everyone to take on, no matter their race, ethnicity, gender, generation or sexual orientation.

"We absolutely must work on each other's behalf," she says. "That's how I've always operated, but now it feels more urgent than ever. This is just the beginning, and we all have to work toward some concrete steps to make things better."

Before this year, Dolejsi was already living that mission, by co-creating the Women Trial Lawyers Conference, an organization focused on fostering referral relationships, networking opportunities and educational programming for women attorneys. She's also chair of the firm's Women of Robins Kaplan committee, which is dedicated to removing structural barriers within or outside the firm that affect gender diversity. The group's next workshop will be about the intersection of women and race, with the theme of how to be anti-racist.

"The legal profession, much like many other industries, needs to open its eyes to the effects of the lack of diversity," she says. "People don't always connect the fact that racial injustice happening outside of firms also have a deep impact within firms. Those are the conversations we're having and will continue to have. I think it's an incredible opportunity, and I feel fortunate to be part of that."

—Elizabeth Millard



Keith Ellison

MINNESOTA ATTORNEY GENERAL

Generosity and inclusion are the guiding values of Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison, according to his official online biography.

In practice, Ellison has increased diverse hiring, welcomed affinity bar associations and served on a Federal Bar Association Diversity Committee panel on cultural competency in the legal profession.

Ellison's July appointment of Luz Maria Frias as deputy attorney general makes her one of the highest-ranking women of color in the Twin Cities legal community.

Minority hiring has risen 15% since Ellison took office in January 2019 through April 2020, the latest data available, and has continued to increase, a spokesman said.

Thirty percent of attorneys and staff are minorities, the spokesman said. According to the American Bar Association, 88 percent of all lawyers are white.

"He is doing a good job of (hiring) and promoting diverse talent to the highest levels of his office in a way that law firms could really learn from," said attorney Sybil Dunlop, who does diversity and inclusion training.

In July, Ellison's daylong continuing legal education program on bias and hate crimes drew an online audience of nearly 1,000, building on his continuing efforts to eliminate those offenses.

Ellison added four "diverse and phenomenal" pro bono attorneys to his prosecution team in the George Floyd case, joining attorneys from his office and the Hennepin County Attorney's Office, Dunlop said.

"I think that is going to ensure that, whatever the outcome, we all have trust in the process knowing that he found a great group of people to prosecute it and that greatness includes the diversity of those people," Dunlop said.

The four are: Neal Katyal, former acting U.S. solicitor general; former federal prosecutor Lola Velázquez-Aguilu; Jerry Blackwell, who helped secure the posthumous pardon of a man wrongly convicted of rape in connection with the 1920 Duluth lynchings; and Steven Schleicher, former federal prosecutor and assistant attorney general.

—Todd Nelson



Athena Hollins

MINNESOTA BAR ASSOCIATION

In past years, Athena Hollins has met considerable resistance when trying to inform those in the legal community about systemic racism and its implications. But not this year.

“This year has been such an insane upheaval for everyone, personally and professionally, and that includes conversations about race,” she says. “Before now, people didn’t want to talk about it, and that’s all changed. To be honest, I’m excited about it.”

As senior director of diversity and foundations for the Minnesota Bar Association, as well as the bar associations for Hennepin and Ramsey Counties, Hollins has been focusing on designing CLEs that touch on topics like systemic racism and implicit bias, as well as the nuances of drafting legislation and lobbying elected officials.

Since the associations are nonpartisan, she feels they’re able to address these topics in meaningful ways designed to bring people of all political leanings together. That’s not an easy task in today’s political climate, but Hollins’ enthusiasm and passion for these topics is infectious, and has been driving valuable, much-needed discussion within the profession.

“I try to address the diversity topic in a way that’s empowering, and prompts deeper thought into what would be more equitable for everyone,” she says. “This is about systems that need to change, and when you can show people where the disparities are, why they’re happening, and the benefits of addressing those, they’re more open to change.”

Hollins doesn’t bring her valuable viewpoint and mission only to the legal profession, though. She’s also running for office, to be the state representative for District 66B in St. Paul, which she’s undertaking as a way to fight for systemic equity at a legislative level. She believes the murder of George Floyd highlights how elected leaders have failed Black and Brown community members, but she’s confident systems can be changed in profound ways.

“Of all the conversations I’ve been having during this crazy time, my best ones really come down to just two words,” she says. “Go vote.”

—Elizabeth Millard



Tisidra Jones

STRONG & STARLIKE CONSULTING INC.

Addressing diversity, equity and inclusion within the legal profession is laudable, but there also needs to be work done at a legislative policy level. That's where Tisidra Jones is making an incredible impact.

In 2017, Jones started Strong & Starlike Consulting, drawing on her experience working in the legal profession as well as in business compliance and inclusion for the Human Rights & Equal Economic Opportunity Department. A stint as director of creative leadership operations and policy at Intermedia Arts was also helpful in giving her the kind of foundation she's needed for what has become a phone-ringing-off-the-hook kind of year.

"Looking at 2020 alone, the shift has been considerable," she says. "The calls began before George Floyd's murder, but then intensified afterward. My hope is that this isn't a fad, that organizations will continue asking the tough questions and making the kind of changes they need to have truly effective policies around diversity, equity and inclusion."

The huge uptick in calls is coming from different types of companies and law firms, and Jones helps them navigate through both internal policies and what can be done with the aid of government entities. Her focus on inclusion efforts for small, minority-owned, immigrant-owned and woman-owned businesses positioned the firm to be especially helpful during COVID-19, as Strong & Starlike works with local organizations like LISC Twin Cities to develop a recovery and relief program that can aid communities and business owners of color.

"We are seeing that in the midst of this pandemic and race issues, people are much more open to understanding this work takes a community, and we all have a role," she says.

—Elizabeth Millard



Alexander Kim

GREENBERG TRAURIG LLP

Diversity and inclusion require people who can advocate for their own group, and people who can be an ally to others. Alexander Kim does both.

Kim spent most of his post-law-school career at Hamre, Schumann, Mueller & Larson, joining in 2006 as an associate attorney. Last year he joined Greenberg Traurig as a shareholder, where he handles patents, copyrights and other intellectual property matters. His extensive scientific background helps him navigate cutting-edge technologies like blockchain, robots, chemicals and considerably more.

“That background helps, so that I understand when an inventor tells me they have a polymer for construction that can bind cement, or a new way to build a rocket thruster for a satellite,” Kim says. “I was always the geekiest kid in the room.”

He was also often the only Asian kid. “I know what it’s like to be the only person in the room who looks different,” he says.

To help bring more Asians into the field of law and to combat stereotypes about Asians, Kim began leading many organizations. He’s a past president of the Minnesota Asian Pacific American Bar Association (MNAPABA) and a co-chair of the national affiliate (NAPABA)’s first annual conference. He’s currently the president of the International Association of Korean Lawyers (IAKL) and is the first lawyer from Minnesota to do so. Kim also serves on the advisory board of the Korean Americans for Political Action (KAPA).

But Kim is also an ally to women in the legal profession. Through speaking, mentoring, and an event he’s helping to organize, Kim works to educate others about the challenges women face. “I’m not a woman, and I will never fully experience what they face,” he says. “But I was shocked at what they have to go through[to succeed in the legal profession].”

—Holly Dolezalek



Adine Momoh

STINSON LLP

As the daughter of West African immigrants, St. Paul native Adine Momoh has “lived and breathed” diversity and inclusion her entire life. An equity partner at the Stinson LLP law firm in Minneapolis, Momoh is a trial attorney focusing on banking and securities litigation, estates and trusts litigation, and bankruptcy. Even with her growing practice, she finds ways to impact the profession, especially with respect to diversity.

She joined Stinson’s Diversity and Inclusion Committee as an associate, and in that role she served as a voice for associate attorneys of color and young women, on issues including recruitment, evaluation, parental leave, advancement and retention.

Momoh recently completed her term as the 100th president of the Hennepin County Bar Association, making history as its first black woman and youngest attorney ever to serve as president.

As HCBA president, Momoh helped bring needed attention to the issue of mental health and wellness in the legal profession, convening a wellness task force and co-sponsoring the first ever bar association-wide Wellness Conference, last January.

“Wellness and well-being are another facet of diversity and inclusion,” Momoh noted. “There has always been a stigma in the legal profession around issues of mental health, and how individuals may cope. We wanted to see what we could do as an organization to do our part.”

She also has influence on a national level. In October, Momoh joined the Federal Bar Association’s National Board of Directors and began her yearlong term as chair of the bar association’s Younger Lawyers Division. She served recently on the board of the Minnesota Association of Black Lawyers, chairing its membership committee.

She also volunteers with various nonprofit organizations committed to increasing the pipeline for attorneys of color and women, including Twin Cities Diversity in Practice, and Minnesota Women Lawyers.

Momoh has also mentored law students, primarily women and students of color, at the three Twin Cities law schools.

In her work, Momoh continues to be guided by a simple principle: “Do well, be humble and give back.”

—Dan Emerson



Sarah Oquist

OQUIST MCFADDEN CONSULTING

In 2018, when Sarah Oquist received a major award for the law firm she co-founded, Sapientia Law Group, she spoke publicly about her experiences and fears in being the only Black person on her high school basketball team and having to play in a city where the KKK is headquartered. When the response was overwhelmingly positive, she set a goal to speak two times in 2019. What she didn't know was that it would change the trajectory of her career.

"When I got up to speak, I realized this is a gift I've been given, it feels like a calling," she says. "People who have limited experience with diversity, inclusion, and race are listening, and they are thinking about what I'm saying. That's powerful. I knew I had to keep saying yes to this."

She'd initially resisted the opportunity to speak on diversity, concerned about being put in a narrow category. Even before the pandemic and the killing of George Floyd, people were experiencing intense frustration, fatigue and pain around systemic racism, she says, and she was worried about being labeled the "angry black woman," an incredibly harmful and pervasive stereotype.

But after every speech and keynote, she had numerous people come up and talk about being inspired, and more informed, and Oquist realized how valuable her perspective on the topic could be. She began putting more sessions together and addressing issues like microaggressions and discrimination. Although the recent protests triggered her childhood and adolescent trauma, reminding her of every difficult and scary experience related to her race, she also recognizes her own privilege in being able to take a step back and focus on self-care.

"That combination of the two people inside me, the trauma-driven person and the one who is privileged to be able to limit my exposure, is at the heart of what I talk about," she says. "That resonates with people, because it inspires conversation around what we can all do to work with who we are and where we're at to create a more inclusive environment."

—Elizabeth Millard



Marcos Ramirez

NEXUM LEGAL

Marcos Ramirez is on an international mission.

He came to the United States in 2007 with a law degree from the Universidad de los Andes in Merida, Venezuela. He also had a postgraduate diploma — roughly equivalent to a certificate here. He was ready to practice law.

Or so he thought. When he learned he had to get another law degree and pass the bar to practice, he dutifully earned a Master in Law and a JD at Mitchell Hamline. He also began researching what was required to practice in other states than Minnesota. Discovering that the requirements were all over the map, “I thought, ‘That doesn’t make any sense!’” Ramirez says.

Today, Ramirez is a member of the Minnesota and Washington, D.C., bars. His law firm, Nexum Legal, helps individual clients with visas, green cards, and other immigration matters, and small business clients with civil litigation. Rather than by the hour, Ramirez bills by the service; by unbundling services and charging flat or sliding-scale fees, he hopes to make his services more accessible and help reduce the justice gap.

Meanwhile, Ramirez has worked for years to convince Minnesota’s legal community to allow foreign-trained lawyers with a Master in Law or LLM to sit for the Minnesota bar exam. That has meant plenty of speaking, such as in CLE sessions. Late last year, Ramirez and a colleague presented on the topic to the Board of Law Examiners.

“Here in Minnesota, we are always telling everybody that we’re open and welcoming,” he says. “Well, let’s put that into practice.”

The move makes sense for Minnesota, Ramirez says; it would benefit companies, law schools, underrepresented communities, and law firms, which would have access to more internationally trained talent.

“The more diverse a law firm is, the more competitive they are,” he says.

—Holly Dolezalek



Lica Tomizuka

FAEGRE DRINKER BIDDLE & REATH LLP

Minneapolis-based Faegre Drinker has long been active in promoting diversity in the legal profession, according to Lica Tomizuka, a partner in the firm's real estate group. For a number of years Faegre has used its L-1 program — which hires first year law students as summer interns — to promote diverse hiring, said Tomizuka, who grew up in Berkeley, California, the daughter of Japanese-American immigrants.

Tomizuka was one of those summer interns, hired by Faegre after her first year at the University of Minnesota Law School. After a second summer as an intern, Tomizuka joined the firm upon graduation.

Tomizuka has served on the nominating and hiring committees at Faegre, is a partner co-chair of the firm's diverse lawyers resource group, and has served on the firm's Diversity and Inclusion Committee since 2015. She was also the firm's Leadership Council on Legal Diversity (LCLD) Fellow in 2013.

Tomizuka also serves on the board of directors of a number of organizations that provide opportunities for diverse members of the community, including Twin Cities Diversity in Practice, Cookie Cart, YMCA of the Greater Twin Cities, YMCA Camp du Nord, MacPhail Center for Music, and the Minneapolis Downtown Council.

She also serves on the advisory boards of the Journal of Law and Inequality and The College Preparatory School. She also volunteered at Free Arts Minnesota for several years, and was also a volunteer coach for the University of Minnesota Women's Club Volleyball Team from 2003 to 2009.

She also represents various civic groups in real estate matters, including those committed to advancing diversity and inclusion such as Cookie Cart and Family Tree Clinic, and has been recognized on the Faegre Pro Bono Honor Roll a number of times for her services to organizations that champion diversity.

Regarding diversity work, Tomizuka emphasizes that even lawyers who are just beginning their careers have contributions to make — as she did. “I view diversity and inclusion work as always a team effort and requires everyone on the team to take a leadership role. It's always gratifying to see the most junior person on a team being intentional and active.”

—Dan Emerson

Judge Richelle Wahi

MINNESOTA'S FIRST JUDICIAL DISTRICT

Richelle Wahi has been a highly regarded judge in Minnesota's First Judicial District for four years. But what people who appear in her court might not know is that she's hearing-disabled. That means she has an affinity for all efforts toward diversity.

"I need to keep an eye on a screen that gives me a real-time feed of the transcription," Wahi explained. "I'm happy to explain to people why sometimes I'm not making eye contact. It's important to treat everyone in my courtroom with empathy, compassion and respect."

Wahi has been an active member of the Minnesota Judicial Branch's Committee for Equality and Justice since 2016. Concurrently, she also has chaired the Access and Fairness Subcommittee and its predecessor subcommittee.

Her duties as chair include writing reports concerning the progress that Minnesota has made concerning diversity and equality. One such report from last year summarized the work that has been done, and that which remains incomplete, from the initial 1993 Race Bias Task Force.

Wahi also wrote the recent Report on Statewide Strategic Performance Measure that each judicial district to maintain 80 percent collection rates on race data. That judicial policy is meant to ensure that the Judicial Branch has sufficient race data to analyze whether persons are treated fairly regardless of their race or ethnicity.

Wahi is clear that while the progress has been nice, there's much yet to be accomplished.

"There's a lot of work yet to be done, but I think the level of awareness brings to the forefront issues that many of us have been working on for years," she said. "That awareness is a meaningful catalyst for change."

"We're seeing unprecedented interest in these issues right now."

—Dan Heilman





ORGANIZATION

Pictured are, from left to right, Spiwe Jefferson, Amran Farah, Mike Essien, Uzodima Franklin Aba-Onu, Jules Porter and Ben Omorogbe

Minnesota Association of Black Lawyers

More than 200 members of the Minnesota legal community showed up in solidarity with the Minnesota Association of Black Lawyers for a silent protest at the Hennepin County Government Center on June 8 to highlight police brutality in the Black community and the death of George Floyd.

The attorneys timed the protest to coincide with a court hearing for Derek Chauvin, one of the police officers charged with murder in the death of Floyd. Attorneys took a knee to commemorate Floyd's death in police custody.

"I think the protest succeeded in calling attention to the problem of police violence against members of the Black community," said Uzodima Franklin Aba-Onu, MABL's president and legal counsel for Prime Therapeutics. "George Floyd's death needs to be a turning point for what needs to be discussed in our community."

Aba-Onu offered praise for MABL members who planned the protest, including past president Amran Farah, at-large board member and webmaster Jules Porter, and attorneys Ben Omorogbe, Mike Essien, and Spiwe Jefferson. Commu-

nications co-chairs Athena Hollins and Jefferson helped draft statements with assistance from Gloria Stamps-Smith, Maya Sheikh-Salah, and Maria Mitchell.

Started in 1995 to promote the interests of Black attorneys, MABL members have served on the Minnesota Supreme Court, the U.S. Court of Appeals and county courts. The organization stays active on social issues, offering a statement on the treatment of immigrant children on the Mexican border and criminal justice reform, and hosting various online events.

Over the past few months, MABL, in collaboration with other organizations, held a judicial boot camp for attorneys seeking to apply for judicial vacancies in Minnesota State District Courts and sessions on how members can support protesters and promote voter rights. "We will continue to be a resource for Black lawyers and to promote equal rights," Aba-Onu said. "We hope the legal community also continues to stay engaged in these important efforts."

—Frank Jossi

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Photo by Sarah Mayer



Pictured are, from left to right, Adine Momoh, Breia Schleuss and Debra Pexa.



ORGANIZATION

Minnesota Women Lawyers

Knowledge is power, but data can hone that power to a keen edge.

Since 1972, Minnesota Women Lawyers has worked to advance women's success in the state's legal profession. But a lack of data blunted its calls for more gender equity. "It's stunning that we didn't previously know the number of women attorneys practicing law in Minnesota," says Debra Pexa, Minnesota Women Lawyers' executive director.

MWL decided to find out, and launched the Gender Data Project in 2010. Among many efforts, MWL contracted with the University of Minnesota in 2014 for a name classification project based on U.S. census data. In 2015, MWL released the first-ever baseline count of women in Minnesota's legal profession.

In 2011, the Minnesota Supreme Court authorized a change to the attorney registration form, allowing attorneys to choose to indicate their gender classification. In 2015, race was added, and responses became mandatory.

Since then, the Annual Report of the Minnesota Judicial Branch has provided reports on attorneys' gender, race, and other statistics.

"These efforts help us to better understand where we are and the progress still to be made in efforts to increase diversity and equity in our profession," says MWL president Breia Schleuss.

The 2018 Annual Report contained another milestone MWL had advocated for: a cross-comparison of race and gender data, showing how many women of color are practicing in Minnesota. Adine Momoh, co-chair of MWL's Equity Committee and leader of the Gender Data Project, says that knowing more will allow MWL to do more about other factors, such as disability, gender, and sexual identity. "Our work will shift in that MWL will need to work with other affinity bars to see how our work can add value to their efforts," she explains.

"It's another big step forward, but our work is really just beginning," Pexa says.

—Holly Dolezalek



Pictured are, from left clockwise, Karin Nelsen, Sam Aintablian and Ashley Engles.

ORGANIZATION



Minnesota Vikings Law Department

Professional sports has long been one of the more diverse industries in America, so it makes sense that the Minnesota Vikings have a social impact department to promote diversity, equality and other causes. The department is led by the team's vice president of legal and social impact, Karin Nelsen.

Nelsen earned her law degree from the University of Iowa, spent three years working in the Seattle area, then moved back to take a position with the Minneapolis-based Larkin Hoffman law firm. Nelsen was then an in-house counsel at Cargill for 18 years. About five years ago, Nelsen was asked about joining the Vikings legal staff, which led to her hiring.

She noted that several months ago the Vikings started one of the NFL's first diversity and inclusion councils, with the goal of making the team's processes and policies more inclusive. The team also appointed its first director of diversity and inclusion, who works with Nelsen on a number of issues.

The council "has helped those of us who are not people of color better understand how they are thinking and feeling. For example, how do we better on-board employees to develop a

better pipeline of candidates for the organization?"

One area we have to continue to improve in is in leadership across teams and leagues. How do we make sure we advance and promote women and people of color in those roles?"

One of the Vikings' major initiatives to promote diversity has been a summer legal intern program to focus on people who may otherwise not find themselves in an applicant pool for summer internships especially in the Twin Cities area." The summer legal interns are typically law students who have finished their second year of school.

Nelsen makes an effort to stay in touch with interns after they leave to provide job referrals and recommendations, and remains an active mentor.

Speaking of diversity, Nelsen takes pride in the fact that of the Vikings' four staff attorneys, three are women and two are people of color. Promoting diversity and inclusion "is a true team effort, and we hold each other accountable for efforts in this space."

—Dan Emerson



Jerry Blackwell and Corey L. Gordon

BLACKWELL BURKE

It was a symbolic gesture, but still a meaningful one.

In tandem with the Clayton Jackson McGhie Memorial, a Jerry Blackwell and Corey L. Gordon led a group of attorneys from Blackwell Burke collaborated with the Minnesota Historical Society, members of the Federal Bar, and other supporters, to successfully secure a posthumous pardon for Max Mason.

Mason was wrongfully convicted of raping a white woman 100 years ago. The posthumous pardon was the first ever in Minnesota history, in commemoration of the 100-year anniversary of Mason's conviction and the brutal lynching of three Black circus workers in Duluth.

The work was all done pro bono. Gordon led the firm's participation in the Duluth commemoration project and co-authored the pardon application with Blackwell, Ben W. Hulse, Charmaine Harris, Ted Hartman, Gene Hummel and Tony Atwal. Spiwe L. Jefferson, past president of the Minnesota Association

of Black Lawyers drafted that organization's letter of support and collaborated with MABL's leadership in its submission.

"Diversity is who we are," said Gordon. "We don't limit it to racial and gender diversity."

In addition to the pardon effort, Blackwell lawyer Jefferson helped organize the MABL silent protest in the wake of the George Floyd killing. More than 200 lawyers turned out in dark suits and masks to stand in silent protest at the Hennepin County Government Center to protest the unjust and unequal treatment of Black citizens at the hands of police. The demonstration was scheduled to coincide with a court appearance by Derek Chauvin, a former police officer charged in Floyd's death.

"Diversity is not just about checking a box for us," said Gordon. "It's about acting. Law firms should strive to have mission statements and policies about these things, but they need to exemplify those policies in how they hire."

—Dan Heilman



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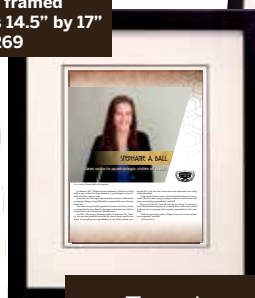


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