Trailblazer: Moy feted for diversity efforts

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By Brandon Vogel

Conversation is the key to Lillian M. Moy's achievements in diversifying the legal profession.

Upon meeting her, people are drawn to her friendly demeanor and boundless energy. As the conversation continues, her passion for causes she deeply cares about comes into focus. By the end, she has recruited another supporter for her work.

For her individual efforts and leadership in expanding diversity, the Committee on Diversity and Inclusion will present its Diversity Trailblazer Award to Moy at the Celebrating Diversity Reception on January 21 during the Annual Meeting.

Champion for diversity

Moy is the executive director of the Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York. When she took the job in 1995, she was one of a few women of color serving as an executive director in a legal services office, according to Harvey Epstein, associate director of the Urban Justice Center.

"Lillian's dedication inspired an industrywide conversation about improving diversity, demonstrated that diversity helps long-term organizational growth and development and educated executive directors about how they can promote diversity in positive ways," wrote Epstein in nominating Moy for the award.

During her 17-year tenure, Epstein said Moy has increased the budget from $1.5 million to $5 million and increased the staff from 21 to 60 employees. Beyond the numbers, Epstein praised her for promoting a more inclusive work environment in legal services offices throughout the state.

Moy created a diversity committee at the Legal Aid Society which initiated the first-ever diversity survey of all legal services offices to measure their staff diversity. Epstein credited that survey with starting a statewide conversation about the diversity challenges facing the legal services community. He said that led to creation of strategic plans aimed at ensuring that all legal services offices reflect the diversity of their clients.

Years later, Moy again surveyed those legal services offices to see how much progress had been made since the initial survey. The results of that survey led to greater discussion about how to promote and retain a diverse workforce.

"Lillian makes us dig beyond what is politically correct and address the real issues that confront all of us as we try to diversify our professional staff, and make sure they have a supportive environment to grow and do the work," wrote Adriene Holder, attorney-in-charge of civil practice at The Legal Aid Society in New York City.

From 1989-1995, Moy was the managing attorney/advocacy coordinator for the Legal Assistance Corporation of Central Massachusetts. She was a staff attorney with the Georgia Legal Services Program from 1981-1989.

Dedicated bar leader

Within the State Bar, Moy is vice-president for the Third Judicial District. She is a past chair of the Committee on Diversity and Inclusion and the Committee on Legal Aid. She also is a member of the Membership Committee and the President's Committee on Access to Justice. She received the State Bar's Denison Ray Program Director Award in 2008.

Barabra Finkelstein, executive director of Legal Services of the Hudson Valley, cited Moy's bar association work and collaborations. She called them a means for Moy to send the message "that a diverse legal profession is not just morally correct, but is more productive and perceptive because diversity, both cultural and intellectual, often leads to better results for clients."

Moy is a member of the American Bar Association's Standing Committee on Legal Aid and Indigent Defenders, the Advisory Committee on New York State Pro Bono Bar Admission Requirement, and Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman's Task Force to Expand Access to Civil Legal Services in New York. She is a founding member of the New York State Diversity Coalition and a frequent presenter on management, diversity and cultural competency.

Moy

She is a graduate of Hunter College of the City University of New York and Boston University School of Law. ◆

Vogel is NYSBA's Media Writer.