

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

SEYMOUR W. JAMES, JR.

Reaching for the Next Level

In keeping with our Association's long-standing commitment to diversity, we recently wrapped up the President's Section Diversity Challenge, initiated by our Immediate Past President, Vincent E. Doyle III. We were thrilled with the enthusiastic and positive response we received from the Sections, and we announced the results of the Challenge at our Section Leaders Conference in May. This year, we will once again reaffirm our strong commitment to enhancing diversity and promoting even more meaningful inclusion and participation by attorneys who reflect the diversity of our communities throughout New York State. We have chosen a new theme as we build upon past efforts: "Reaching for the Next Level."

Thanks to Vince and the many other past State Bar Presidents who have done so much to enhance our diversity over the years, we have an excellent foundation for future diversity initiatives. The President's Section Diversity Challenge is a terrific example of this ongoing work. In fact, we were thrilled to learn recently that the Challenge has been selected for an ABA Partnership Award, which recognizes bar association projects that work to enhance the participation and advancement of attorneys of color and other underrepresented populations.

Our 25 Sections, made up of volunteer attorneys and assisted by State Bar staff, consistently produce high-quality publications and CLE programs, host valuable networking events and provide many other opportunities for attorneys to connect with their colleagues. They are also continuously striving to improve their work by making their membership more diverse

and inclusive. The President's Section Diversity Challenge encouraged the Sections to appoint a diversity team, implement new and additional diversity initiatives, execute their plans and evaluate their results. The Challenge was co-sponsored by the State Bar's Committee on Membership and the Committee on Diversity and Inclusion. With the support of those Committees, as well as the State Bar's Membership Department and the Department of Section Services, the Challenge was designed to help the Sections enhance diversity in their membership, leadership and programs, and to establish a framework for our ongoing diversity efforts.

Section leaders truly embraced the Challenge, and their work has been outstanding. We recently announced the results, and our 10 first-place "Diversity Champions" shared some best practices that aided in their success. One very striking observation is the incredibly wide variety of strategies the different Sections have employed. The Torts, Insurance and Compensation Law (TICL), Environmental Law, Entertainment, Arts and Sports Law, Dispute Resolution, and Commercial and Federal Litigation Sections all hosted diversity receptions, CLE programs and other events, many of which were co-sponsored by multiple Sections as well as minority bar associations throughout the state. Two great examples are TICL's "Strength by Association" seminar series, which encouraged bar association participation and mentoring to improve diversity, and the Commercial and Federal Litigation Section's ongoing "Smooth Moves for Litigators of Color" program. In April, the Smooth Moves



program focused on pursuing a career as general counsel, with a panel titled "Views from the Corner Office: Diverse General Counsels Discuss How to Get There, and How to Win Their Business." The Environmental Law, Labor and Employment Law, Corporate Counsel, Trial Lawyers, Health Law, Commercial and Federal Litigation and Young Lawyers Sections all implemented or continued fellowships and scholarships offered to law students and young attorneys of color. For example, the Commercial and Federal Litigation Section's annual fellowship program places minority law students with Commercial Division judges for a summer internship. Many Sections also worked on improving the diversity of their speaker panels and increasing their membership outreach and recruitment of diverse attorneys.

One consistent theme that we heard again and again in discussing the results of the Challenge was that the Sections welcomed this opportunity to focus on diversity because they recognize that our work is better when it is informed by a wide variety of perspectives. In order to build upon this progress, Membership Committee

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Co-chairs Sherry Levin Wallach and Glenn Lau-Kee have agreed to continue to chair this initiative as we shift our theme to "Reaching for the Next Level."

Diversity is a dynamic goal and an ongoing priority for our Association. To have a lasting impact, we must achieve true inclusiveness, with active participation by our newly recruited

members and leadership that represents a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences. As we continue to focus on enhancing diversity, we must measure our progress and demonstrate quantitative improvement. In the coming year, we will work to show the impact of our continued efforts in this area, track the involvement of our members to determine where we have

been most successful, and focus our energy to promote broader inclusion.

I would like to thank our Sections for all they have done to make the Challenge a success and I look forward to all that we will continue to achieve in the coming year. Together we can build upon this successful initiative and take the Bar Association to the next level. ■

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