Conference of Bar Leaders honors bar associations for innovative programs

FRIDAY

By Brandon Vogel

First-year law students of color in the greater Rochester area, hurricane victims and clergy leaders benefited from recent programs sponsored by local and minority bar associations.

In recognition of their impact on the community, the New York State Conference of Bar Leaders has honored the Monroe County Bar Association (large bar association), Albany County Bar Association (medium bar association), and the Metropolitan Black Bar Association (small bar association) with its 2012 Innovation Awards.

The awards recognize local, ethnic, specialty, minority and women's bar associations for their timely programs. They demonstrate how associations adapt to the needs of their members and the community at large by introducing new programs, ideas and methodologies.

Advancing diversity

Eighty-five law students have found summer internships through the Rochester Legal Diversity Clerkship Program, co-sponsored by the Monroe County Bar Association, the Rochester Black Bar Association and the Greater Rochester Association for Women Attorneys.

Since 2004, the program has provided historically underrepresented students with jobs as summer associates in law firms, law departments and legal services offices for eight to 10 weeks. Twenty students have returned to Rochester to work after graduating from law school.

This past summer, the Monroe County Bar Association held the first Monroe County Legal Diversity and Inclusion Job Fair. Twenty-eight law students from 10 law schools participated, getting a jump start on fall recruitment. The program was successful and is expected to be an annual event.

Hurricane heroes

Through its Hurricane Heroes Program, members of the Albany County Bar Association have assisted more than 100 victims of the flooding from Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee in Albany, Greene, Schenectady, Schoharie and Ulster counties.

The bar association held a well-attended CLE program, "Primer for Handling a Flood Victim," which covered FEMA, tax issues and insurance matters. The association also worked with Stewart's Shops to raise awareness of their ongoing assistance to hurricane victims. Volunteer attorneys and staff members traveled to affected areas and let residents know that they offered free legal assistance.

Protecting churches

The Metropolitan Black Bar Association's Law and Religion Committee sponsored a four-panel seminar on issues affecting clergy, "How to Protect Your House of Worship from Liability," in October 2011.

Panelists, including retired Court of Appeals Judge George Bundy Smith, offered practical tips for religious leaders and the attorneys who represent them.

Topics included: "Proper Protection is Priceless – Insurance and Church Liability Issues;" "When the Tax Man Cometh: Not Everything is Tax Exempt;" "Whose Property Is It? Copyright and Trademark Laws;" and "Separation of Church and Other Ventures: Creating a 501(c)(3); Community Development Corporations and Joint Venture Partnerships."

Large bar associations have more than 2,000 members. Medium bar associations host 500 to 2,000 members. Small bar associations have fewer than 500 members. ◆

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