

**DIVERSITY** Volunteer lawyer groups

# Minority groups form with eyes on diverse judiciary

**by Alana Roberts, DBR.** Voluntary lawyer groups have been organized or revived to address the needs of diverse attorneys in South Florida. A major goal of the Palm Beach County Hispanic Bar Association and the Gay and Lesbian Lawyers Association of South Florida is to get more diverse representation on the bench.

The Bar's business law section also created a diversity committee with an eye toward increasing the number of ethnic and racially diverse attorneys on the section's executive council. Section leaders say it's not enough that The Florida Bar has embarked on an overall effort to improve diversity.

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# LEGAL REVIEW

## EVENTS

### Today

**Dade County Defense Bar Association:** Luncheon and presentation on "State of the Courts," with Miami-Dade Circuit Court Judges Joseph Farina and Joel Brown, noon, Hyatt Regency, 400 SE Second Ave., Miami. Cost: \$45 members, \$50 nonmembers, \$5 more at the door. Call (305) 789-7598.

### July 16

**South Palm Beach County Bar Association Young Lawyers Section:** Happy Hour, Back to School — School Supply Drive, 5 p.m., Blue Martini, 6000 Glades Road, Boca Raton. Cost: \$15 members, \$20 nonmembers, Free for judges. Call (561) 482-3838.

**Palm Beach County Bar Association Young Lawyers Section:** Summer Intern Happy Hour, 5:30 p.m., O'Sheas, 531 Clematis St., West Palm Beach. Free for members, \$25 judges and summer interns. Call (561) 687-2800.

**Broward County Bar Association Young Lawyers Section and Emerge Broward:** Meet and Greet, 6 p.m., YOLO, 333 E. Las Olas Blvd., Fort Lauderdale. Free for members, \$10 guests. E-mail: ashely.sawyer@akerman.com

## PEOPLE



Haile



Callison

**Gregory A. Haile**, an associate with Berger Singerman, has been named chairman of the 17th Judicial Circuit Grievance Committee.

**Orion G. Callison III**, a former partner with Panza Maurer & Maynard, has opened his own firm, the Callison Law Firm. The firm will be located in Miami

DIVERSITY Volunteer lawyer associations reorganize

# MINORITY GROUPS FORM WITH EYES ON DIVERSE JUDICIARY

by Alana Roberts

alana.roberts@incisivemedia.com



MELANIE BELL

Adrian Alvarez, president of the Palm Beach County Hispanic Bar Association, plans to lobby for more Hispanics on the JNC in a county where two of 52 judges are Hispanic.

For Louis Conti, newly elected chair of The Florida Bar's business law section, it's not enough that the Bar has an equal opportunities section dedicated to improving diversity within the organization.

In one of his first acts as chair of the 5,000-member section, Conti created a diversity committee to find ways to encourage more minority and women lawyers to participate in the section.

The new committee is the latest of at least three voluntary lawyer groups formed to better meet the needs of diverse lawyers. The Palm Beach County Hispanic Bar Association and the Gay and Lesbian Lawyers Association of South Florida were

recently resurrected after years of dormancy. Both hope to see greater diversity in the judiciary.

Conti, a member of Holland & Knight's public companies and securities group in its Tampa and Orlando offices, said the business law section's 100-member executive council has very little participation by racial and ethnic minorities, which is something he hopes the new committee will improve. The council currently has 21 women and eight minorities.

"The leadership of the business law section has

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

**Diversity committee of the Business Law Section of the Florida Bar**

Contact: Valerie Yarbrough, (850) 561-5630 or vyarbrough@flabar.org

www.flabuslaw.org

**Palm Beach County Hispanic Bar Association**

Contact: Adrian Alvarez, (561) 615-5701, aalvarez@larenlawfirm.com

www.pbchispanicbar.com

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# DIVERSITY: GALA launches after three years of being dormant

been representative of the majority of the established Bar — middle-aged white guys with occasionally middle-aged white women stepping into leadership roles,” he said. “It’s only recently that we started embracing trying to create opportunities for others in leadership to step forward.”

Committee co-chair Jason Murray, a litigation partner in Carlton Fields’ Miami office, said it’s important for sections to improve their diversity in addition to overall Bar efforts.

“I also have this conversation within law firms when I tell my own firm it’s not enough to focus on the overall firm and the numbers,” he said. “You start looking at how is diversity looking in each office and in each practice group.”

But Murray, who is black, said a major barrier to getting more diverse participation in the section is the misconception that the group has nothing to offer minority attorneys and is only for lawyers at large firms. He said other Bar sections have attracted more diverse participation.

Conti said the section needs to market itself to lawyers.

For Adrian Alvarez, who helped restart the Palm Beach County group, it’s important to market Hispanic attorneys to the community. The association, which had been dormant for two years, will promote the services of Hispanic attorneys,

## BY THE NUMBERS

52

Palm Beach County judges

2

Hispanic judges in Palm Beach County

16 percent

Percentage of Hispanic in Palm Beach County

but membership is open to others.

He said when he first began practicing two years ago he noticed the need for an organization to address the needs of Hispanic attorneys and litigants. Alvarez is a two-year litigation associate at Bruce E. Lorens & Associates in West Palm Beach.

“We want to make Palm Beach County more comfortable and create a support system for Hispanic individuals,” he said.

Alvarez, president of the newly revived Hispanic bar association, said the group will work to get Hispanics on the Palm Beach Circuit Judicial Nominating Commission. There are only two Hispanic

judges of 52 in the county, which has a Hispanic population of 16 percent.

“We’re also going to be supporting individuals moving into positions that will ultimately lead to the judiciary,” Alvarez said. “Having Hispanics on the JNC would be important.” One of nine JNC members is Hispanic.

The group also will provide pro bono legal services and translation services for area legal aid agencies. Alvarez said the group has attracted 25 members so far and he expects to draw 200 to 300 members.

The Gay and Lesbian Lawyers Association of South Florida hasn’t run a membership drive. But Elizabeth Schwartz, a Miami Beach family law attorney who is leading the reorganization, said the group had about 100 members in its prime and has been dormant for at least three years.

She said the move to revitalize GALA was triggered by the passage last November of Amendment 2, which added a ban on gay marriage to the Florida Constitution. The measure “galvanized our community and jostled some of us out of our complacency,” Schwartz said. “We realized how important it is to al-



Schwartz

ways have a presence.”

She also said gay and lesbian attorneys and law students need a group to represent them at such events as the annual minority mentoring picnic organized by attorney John Kozyak and his Coral Gables firm Kozyak Tropin & Throckmorton. She said the group wants to mentor gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students and wants to encourage more openly gay attorneys to seek judicial positions.

Kozyak said he would welcome the group’s presence at the picnic, which is expected to garner more than 2,000 participants in November.

“I am delighted that GALA is planning to have a visible role this year,” he said.

Conti said involvement in the business law section is a good way for young minority and women lawyers to build mentoring relationships and their reputations in the Bar.

“We think we have a lot to offer to lawyers around the state, yet we have about 100 members on our executive council that is predominantly nonminority,” he said. “We have gotten better with gender diversity. We have a ways to go yet in dealing with other aspects of increasing diversity.”

Alana Roberts can be reached at (305) 347-6648.

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