

# THE DAILY RECORD

WESTERN NEW YORK'S SOURCE FOR LAW, REAL ESTATE, FINANCE AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCE SINCE 1908

## GRAWA PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

# GRAWA committed to diversity in our legal community

By **HEIDI SCHULT GREGORY**  
Daily Record Columnist

What does diversity mean to you?  
What does diversity mean in the Rochester legal community?  
Is Rochester doing enough to attract a diverse legal workforce?  
Those questions and more will be addressed during a panel discussion at from noon to 2 p.m. on Jan. 15 — Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s actual birthday — at the Rubin Center for Education, 1 W. Main St., fifth floor.

The Greater Rochester Association for Women Attorneys (GRAWA) together with the Rochester Black Bar Association (RBBA) and the Monroe County Bar Association (MCBA) are sponsoring the two-hour CLE, entitled "Realizing the Dream: Diversity in the Legal Community."

A committee consisting of members from the three bar associations, worked hard over the course of the past few months planning and preparing for the panel discussion. The program is an effort by the three associations to keep the issue of diversity at the forefront and to promote healthy discussion regarding diversity issues, especially those facing our local legal community.

The moderator and chairman is MCBA President T. Andrew Brown. Our panelists represent a cross section of the legal community and include me, Harter Secrest & Emery LLP Managing Partner Maureen Alston; Clay Arnold, in-house counsel for Bauch & Lomb Inc.; Maria Herrero-Jaarsma, law clerk to the Hon. Michael A. Telesca; RBBA President Rashondra Jackson and Thomas Richards, corporate counsel for the City of Rochester.

GRAWA strives to cultivate a legal community in which inclusion and acceptance are common and respect abounds. GRAWA shares that vision with the RBBA and the MCBA, and our members hope that programs such as the upcoming one are not only productive and well attended, but will be continued year after year. Without an open dialogue, diversity is just a concept or an empty word. The local bar associations appreciate the need for more discussion in order to effect positive change, foster a better understanding of diversity and enhance the legal community's commitment to a diverse workforce.

To many, diversity means more than simply the color of one's skin or one's gender. Diversity includes religion, ethnicity, sexual

orientation and other differences, including geographical, cultural and generational. Essentially, diversity represents, celebrates and highlights any and all differences.

Look around — our local community at large is very diverse. Many view Rochester's diversity as a significant asset and source of strength. Why shouldn't our legal community be representatively diverse?

In order to better serve our clients, understand their needs and grow as individuals and lawyers, embracing and fostering a diverse legal community is, in GRAWA's opinion, a necessity. By welcoming different perspectives, we enhance our collective work environment and expand our collective reach.

As Mahatma Gandhi once said: "You must be the change you want to see in the world." If Rochester's legal community wants a more diverse workforce, initiatives must be developed and efforts undertaken to attract and retain minorities and others who will help to foster such an environment.

The MCBA's Summer Minority Clerkship Program is an excellent example of one such productive and positive diversity initiative. The program, co-sponsored by GRAWA and the RBBA, began in 2004 as an effort to address growing concern among local legal employers about the lack of diversity within the bar. The program places first-year law students from throughout the country with a variety of legal employers in Rochester — law firms, legal service providers, corporations and more — typically for an eight- to 10-week period. It introduces them to our region's culture and legal community, and encourages their relocation here upon graduation or later in their career.

Last summer, 13 minority law students clerked at area law firms, companies and legal service providers, including Boylan, Brown, Code, Vigdor & Wilson LLP; Eastman Kodak Co.; Harris Beach PLLC; Harter Secrest & Emery LLP; Hiscock & Barclay LLP; the Monroe County Public Defender's Office; Nixon Peabody LLP; Phillips Lytle LLP; Trevett Cristo Salzer & Andolina PC; Volunteer Legal Services Project of Monroe County Inc.; Ward Norris Heller & Reidy LLP; The Wolford Law Firm LLP; and Woods Oviatt Gilman LLP. Many of those employers have hosted clerks since the program's inception and believe

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strongly in the program's success.

The program, indeed, is successful year after year because some return to work for a second summer or end up accepting positions as associates within our area.

We are fortunate to practice law in a community where three local bar associations are committed to, and work hard to foster

diversity and enhance our work environment. Be a part of the dialogue by joining us on Jan. 15 to discuss how we can continue to realize greater diversity within our legal community.

*Heidi Schult Gregory is a member of the Pittsford-based law firm of Harris Beach PLLC and serves on the Health Care Providers Industry Team as well as the Business & Commercial Litigation Practice Group. She is GRAWA's 26th President.*