

Speciality bars put focus on outreach

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By **MATT CHANDLER**

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Two Buffalo organizations formed to advance their members' standing in the Western New York legal community are celebrating more than a half-century of combined service with award dinners next week.

The Minority Bar Association of Western New York will mark its 27th annual Scholarship Dinner Wednesday at the Buffalo Niagara Convention Center, and the Western New York chapter of the Women's Bar Association of the State of New York will hold its 25th anniversary installation and awards dinner Sept. 24 at the Embassy Suites Hotel.

Natalie Grigg, an attorney with Steven J. Baum PC, will be installed as association president at the Women's Bar dinner.

"The 25th year is such a big landmark year," she said. "It's flattering to be in this position at this time and to look back on where we started 25 years ago and where we've come in those 25 years.

"Twenty-five years ago, I don't think women enjoyed many of the liberties or received the same sort of respect that women do today," she said. "Gone is the day when women had to wear a skirt to court."

Making connections

One Women's Bar member says the regular networking opportunities the organization provides have given her a chance to get better perspective on other firms and on practice areas outside of her own.

"I joined the (Women's) Bar Association because I didn't know many attorneys, much less women attorneys," said Susan Mariott, an associate at Phillips Lytle LLP who relocated to Western New York after graduating from Pace University School of Law in 2007.

Minority Bar of Western New York President Jessica Lazarin said the Scholarship Dinner is an opportunity to highlight how the association's membership is progressing in its outreach efforts in Western New York.

"Minority Bar is all about increasing the number of minority attorneys in Western New York," Lazarin said. "We would like our population to reflect the greater population, and to do that, we really have to impact the community one person at a time."



Minority Bar Association of Western New York President Jessica Lazarin says one to key increasing the numbers of minority lawyers in Western New York is keeping talented college and law-school graduates in the region.

Jim Courtney/Business First

A series of new initiatives with the Buffalo City School District will see members of the Minority Bar working to influence students potentially interested in a career in law.

"We would like to implement things like a speaker series or other educational programs that aren't necessarily (designed) to teach the students but to give them the idea that they can become an attorney," said Lazarin, an immigration staff attorney at the ECBA Volunteer Lawyers Project Inc.

"We are looking at going into schools and not lecturing (students), but we want the students to hear from minority attorneys who can tell them, 'This is how I did it,' and hopefully turn on that light and get on track."

Aiming at diversity

Lazarin sees the need to increase the numbers of minority attorneys in Buffalo, but says the group doesn't project specific goals in that regard.

"I know a lot of us feel like we are still really behind where we would like to be," she said. "The problem is, we lose a lot of our students. We've got a lot of local talent at (the University at Buffalo Law School), and they end up leaving the area for other jobs."

Lazarin sees signs of hope.

"I personally do feel like the (UB Law) students are getting a fair opportunity, especially since a lot of the firms that maybe wouldn't have looked at minority applicants before are seeing that private corporations are really pushing this issue," she said.

"They want the demographics of their employees to look like the demographics of their customer base."

And the honorees are ...

Two area bar associations will be presenting awards at dinner receptions next week. The slate of honorees at the Minority Bar Association of Western New York's annual scholarship and awards dinner Sept. 23 at the Buffalo Niagara Convention Center consists of the following:

- The Belle Center, President's Award
- Ruthe Ashley, president and CEO of California All, Trailblazer Award
- Sundra Ryce, president and CEO of SLR Contracting and Service Company Inc., Business Person of the Year Award
- Ken Sroka and E. Roger Stephenson, co-creators of the Urban Leadership Learning Community at Canisius College, Education Award
- Chenoa Maye, University at Buffalo Law School student, John L. Hargrave Scholarship Award
- Tasha Moore, regional director of the New York State Division of Human Rights, Legal Service Award
- Joseph Hanna, partner at Goldberg Segalla LLP, Community Service Award
- J. Miles Gresham, UB Law student, Marie Nesbitt Promise Prize Award
- And two awards will be presented at the Women's Bar Association of the State of New York Western New York chapter installation dinner Sept. 24 at the Embassy Suites:
- Audrey Czesak, founder of Trinity Title and Abstract Corp. and president of The Everywomen Opportunity Center Inc., M. Dolores Denman Lady Justice Award
- Annie Deck-Miller, managing editor and general manager of the Buffalo Law Journal, President's Award