

Guest Column for CBA Newsletter -- 580 words

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BRIDGES: An Organization You Should Know About And The Lawyers and Judges Who Have Helped To Make This "A Just Community"

In his initial CBA president's brief, my good friend, Phil Schworer implored lawyers— young and those more “seasoned” to get involved in the CBA and other worthy community organizations. Upon my appointment to the court, and subsequent move to Cincinnati nearly 14 years ago, one of the first steps I took was to join the CBA. I have met some of the finest professionals from every walk and had some of the most enriching experiences in my career through my work with the CBA and other community organizations seeking to improve the lives of Greater Cincinnatians. As a member of the board of directors of the nonprofit organization **BRIDGES for a Just Community**, better known to some of you by its former acronym, “NCCJ,” let me share with you why I think BRIDGES is one such organization that you as lawyers should become better acquainted.

It is no secret to anyone that our society is diversifying. Locally, our city is 43% African American and mirroring national population trends, the fastest growing groups in our region are Hispanics and Asians. Today, the majority of start-up businesses in our area are minority and women-owned, and we are witnessing more culturally diverse talent entering our profession each year.

As members of the bench and bar, we want and need to be responsive to this growing diversity. We certainly want to practice law and have our courts provide services that are also culturally competent. We likewise want our organizations be able, whether private or public, to reflect the diversity of our clients. We want our workplaces to be welcoming environments for the diverse graduates of our law schools. And, most assuredly, we want to take advantage of the many professional and economic benefits of diversity. Certainly our clients and the community are expecting us to embrace diversity in the 21st Century, and rightly so.

There are a variety of qualified organizations and consultants available to members of our profession, ready to advise us on ways to embrace diversity for achieving our professional and business objectives.

Since 1944 BRIDGES has been our community's leading human relations organization. Its mission is to *bring people together to achieve inclusion, equity and justice for all*. Over the years some of the leading members of our profession have been active in this organization, among them are my mentors, Hon. William A. McClain, Hon. Nathaniel R. Jones, Hon. John Andrew West and Hon. S. Arthur Spiegel. Also, deserving honorable mention are Harris K. Weston, Hon. Melba Marsh, Daniel J. Hoffheimer, Michael W.

Hawkins, Jack C. Rubenstein, Myron L. Dale, Gloria S. Haffer, Wm. T. Robinson III, Jerome S. Teller, the late Hon. John W. Keefe and the late Hon. Robert A. Kraft, to name just a few. Our profession has always contributed leadership to BRIDGES and there is every reason why members of the bar should continue this rich association.

BRIDGES measures the progress towards inclusion, closeness and fair treatment among eight different social groups in the biennial survey *BRIDGES Progress Report on Human Relations in Greater Cincinnati*. Leading area civic organizations trust BRIDGES as the regional leader in building inclusion and diversity – to this end, BRIDGES intercedes in crisis situations; provides cultural assessments, training and consulting to companies, schools and nonprofits; and serves as an organization of conscience through its public policy and social issue position-taking. In my opinion, and the opinion of many, BRIDGES has had a profound impact on the quality of inter-group relations in our community.

For those in our profession looking for resources to help further their diversity aims, BRIDGES is an experienced and trusted resource. BRIDGES services include introductory education on the core competencies for practicing equitable leadership for incoming associates; advanced training on diversity & inclusion for individual attorneys and firm management teams; speakers on social issue & cultural topics of interest; and, cultural assessments designed to create multi-cultural, inclusive workplace environments.

The issue of diversity has arrived in the mainstream. I urge you to find out more about BRIDGES for a Just Community – a prominent organization in our midst that is ready to help advance diversity and inclusion throughout our distinguished profession. For more details, please visit the BRIDGES website at www.BRIDGEScincinnati.org.