



FORECAST 2012



Black Bar Group ‘Galvanized To Serve’

COMMUNITY SERVICE AND MENTORING REMAIN HIGH PRIORITIES

By **BRYAN WATSON**

As we usher in 2012, the George W. Crawford Black Bar Association is reflecting on recent achievements and optimistically looking forward to the possibilities of the coming year. Crawford kicked off its bar year last April with the installation of the current board. Since then, we have been working diligently to provide quality programming and build on the strong tradition of excellence that our members have come to expect.

Our theme for this bar year is “Galvanized to Serve, Committed to Lead.” This theme succinctly captures the board’s resolve to abide by the enduring tenets of leadership and service in all that we do. Very early on, we identified several areas on which we would focus throughout the year. Chief among these were service to the community and student mentoring. I am pleased to report that we have made significant strides on both fronts.

In furtherance of our community service objectives, we launched “Crawford in the Community,” a focused initiative involving several projects that are specifically designed to connect with and contribute to the community in meaningful ways. Crawford’s Community Investment and Public Issues committee, co-chaired

Bryan Watson, an associate in Wiggin and Dana’s Labor and Employment Department, is president of Connecticut’s George W. Crawford Black Bar Association.

by Pia Pyles and Alexis Highsmith, has undertaken several programs to ensure that we achieve our goals.

One such program is the Homelessness Experience Legal Protection program. HELP allows volunteer attorneys to visit homeless shelters and assist individuals with legal issues. Occasionally, organizations “sponsor” the program by making their attorneys available for a period of time. Crawford sponsored the month of September 2011. Each Tuesday during the month, Crawford attorneys visited Hartford-area shelters and provided much-needed advice on matters ranging from social security to divorce, criminal to probate law. We were pleased to have the opportunity to provide this valuable service and eagerly look forward to sponsoring the program again.

On Oct. 19, 2011, Crawford collaborated with the New Haven County Bar Association to host the Legal Lines program in New Haven. The program allowed members of the public to call in and receive advice on legal questions. Matters that required further consultation were referred to the NHCBA’s referral service.

The calls came in quick succession for the entire two-hour duration of the program and many callers expressed appreciation to the volunteer Crawford attorneys for providing the service.

Recognizing the economic hardships that many continue to face, we launched the Thanksgiving Basket program to assist needy families. Specifically, we provided the families with baskets containing a turkey,

potatoes, vegetables and other ingredients to prepare a meal. We delivered baskets to a total of six families: three in Hartford and three in New Haven. Because of the generous donations we received from

our members, we were also able to provide grocery store gift cards to an additional 12 families so that they could purchase what they needed to prepare their Thanksgiving dinner.

High School Mentoring

Regarding student mentoring, we have had a very effective year. In addition to our standard law student mentoring programs, we developed pipeline programs to mentor high school students. The goal of these programs was to not only introduce the students to the legal profession, but also to encourage them to pursue higher education. To that end, the Student Mentoring committee, which is co-chaired by Latonia Williams and Tokunbo Akinbajo, conducted several impactful programs at various locations throughout the state. For example:



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- On May, 27, 2011, we co-sponsored a Law Day program with the other affinity bar associations at the Law and Government Academy at Hartford Public High School.
- On Aug. 19, 2011, Crawford representatives attended Quinnipiac University School of Law's orientation program and met with incoming law students.
- On Aug. 27, 2011, Crawford representatives attended an orientation program for the University of Connecticut School of Law's Black Law Students Association.
- On Oct. 6, 2011, Crawford representatives conducted an exam writing workshop at Quinnipiac University Law School. This was the third installment of the highly successful workshop program, which is intended to provide 1L's with valuable exam-writing tips as well as general advice about handling the rigors of law school.
- On Oct. 13, 2011, Crawford joined with the other affinity bar associations to co-sponsor the "Mentoring from the Bench" program at the University of Connecticut Law School. Attendees received valuable advice from three state court judges and were able to interact with them during the reception that immediately followed.
- On Nov. 18, 2011, Crawford held a mentoring session at Bloomfield High School in Bloomfield, Connecticut. Crawford volunteers met with students to discuss the legal profession and provide general counseling on their other career interests.

Looking Ahead

We are proud of our achievements in community service and student mentoring. But we also understand that there is always room for growth. Therefore, in the coming months we will continue to work diligently to plan and execute programs in both areas. We will also conduct various programs to inform and inspire our members, as well as address other ongoing concerns. The following is an overview of some of the programs we have coming up this year:

- On Jan. 19, we will collaborate with the Massachusetts Black Bar Association to host a networking reception in Springfield, Mass. We are looking forward to this event, which will mark the first time that Crawford collaborates with an out-of-state bar association.
- On Jan. 26, our Professional Development and Entrepreneurship committee will present a program entitled "Alternative Legal Careers." A guest speaker will describe several non-traditional attorney roles and provide career counseling on how to pursue those positions. We will conduct the program during our membership meeting in Stamford.
- In February, we will host a Black History Month program. Similarly, in March we will conduct a program to commemorate Women's History Month.
- On March 22, we will partner with the Greater Hartford Urban League, Young Professionals to host a "Political Entrepre-

neurship" event. The program is primarily intended to provide information about the procedural intricacies of running for public office in Connecticut. Panelists from various spheres of the political arena will lead a discussion about their background and experiences. Immediately following the panel discussion will be a Q&A session and then a networking reception.

- On April 13, we will partner with the other affinity bar associations to co-sponsor a Connecticut Bar Foundation symposium highlighting the history and accomplishments of attorneys of color in Connecticut.
- On April 26, we will hold our Annual Dinner at the Marquis Ballroom in Hartford. During the event, we will honor our Visionary and Trailblazer award recipients and award several law student scholarships. Plans are already well underway, and we are looking forward to a wonderful event.

Crawford embraces the challenges of the new year with humble acknowledgment of our achievements to date, candid recognition of the fact that our journey continues, and deep gratitude to our members and friends for their support. We look forward to maintaining strong relationships with our partners in the Connecticut Bar Association and the other affinity bar associations. And above all, we remain, "Galvanized to Serve, Committed to Lead." ■