

MSBA in brief

MINNESOTA STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

June, 1991

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CALENDAR

JUNE

MSBA COMPUTER LAW COUNCIL

12:15 P.M. - June 19
MSBA Large Conference Room
Minnesota Bar Center
Minneapolis

MANAGING PARTNERS ROUND TABLE

Noon - June 20
MSBA Large Conference Room
Minnesota Bar Center
Minneapolis

"Interpersonal Office Dynamics"
(Groups VI and VIII)

JUDGES CONFERENCE AND TAX SEMINAR

2:30 P.M. - June 20
Minnesota Club
St. Paul

Progress and highlights of state tax legislation, with panel discussions by judges and attorneys. Sponsored by MSBA Tax Section.

MSBA PRACTICE OF LAW COMMITTEE

4:00 P.M. - June 20
Minnesota Bar Center
Minneapolis

POLITICAL ASYLUM TRAINING SEMINAR

8:30 A.M. - June 21
Hamline Law School
St. Paul

Sixth annual seminar; CLE credits available

MSBA CIVIL TRIAL CERTIFICATION COUNCIL

8:00 A.M. - June 25
MSBA Large Conference Room
Minnesota Bar Center
Minneapolis

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Court Rejects Petition to Report Pro Bono Work

Five short paragraphs from the Minnesota Supreme Court on May 22 set back the Bar's initiative to require attorneys annually to report their performance of pro bono service.

The Court denied an MSBA petition that would have required Minnesota attorneys to complete a form at the time of license renewal stating how many hours of pro bono work they had provided during the previous year.

"This is something the bar was not ready for."

In denying the petition, the Supreme Court order stated that "this court unreservedly reaffirms the obligation of members of the legal profession to support and participate in pro bono activities," but stated that "a majority of this court is not persuaded that mandatory pro bono reporting would appreciably advance or assist in the discharge of that obligation."

The petition was part of a package of proposals suggested by the Legal Assistance to the Disadvantaged (LAD) Committee to help meet the legal needs of the poor. Supporters said the mandatory report would have yielded data vital to improving the delivery of legal services, and would have encouraged attorneys to examine their individual pro bono efforts.

"The [LAD] committee is disappointed, but this is not a major setback," said Catharine Haukedahl, one of the petition's signers. "The other proposals did not hinge on the petition, so we can go forward on everything else."

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Former Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze (third from left) speaks with Minnesota business leaders at a May meeting in Minneapolis. Discussions focused on clearing the way for U.S. companies to establish business ties with the Soviet Union. The event was hosted by the Minneapolis law firm of Dorsey & Whitney and Northwest Airlines. Pictured from left to right: Tom Moe, managing partner, Dorsey & Whitney; Walter Mondale, partner, Dorsey and Whitney; Shevardnadze; and Harry Coulter, interpreter. Photo by Jeffrey P. Grosscup.

Program Creates Opportunity for Minority Attorneys, Firms

Minority lawyers seeking business from large corporations have all too often faced closed doors. The Minnesota Minority Corporate Counsel Program is helping to unlock some of those doors.

"We want to provide opportunities for minority lawyers to be considered, just as others are," said Glenn Oliver, program cochair. "In the past, there's been a myth that corporations don't want minority lawyers working for them." The program attempts to debunk that myth by demonstrating how minority firms, as well as individual minority lawyers, can provide quality legal services, he said.

Under the program, participating corporations and government agencies agree to increase the number of minority lawyers retained locally. They also agree to ask that their

retained majority law firms assign work to the firm's minority lawyers, and to refer conflict of interest work to minority law firms.

Majority firms agree to hire more minority lawyers, and to enhance career opportunities for their current minority lawyers, who all too often "are never taken to client meetings or brought into big cases," Oliver said.

Majority firms also agree to refer conflict of interest cases to minority

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Minorities

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firms, and to enter into joint ventures and cocounsel relationships.

Modeled in part after the American Bar Association's Minority Counsel Demonstration program, the Minnesota program was endorsed by the MSBA Board of Governors in May 1990. The program is a project of the Minnesota Minority Lawyers Association, which has formed a joint steering committee with representatives of the MSBA Board of Governors and the executive directors of the MSBA and Hennepin County Bar Associations.

Some 60 minority lawyers from both minority and majority law firms now participate in the program. Over the past several months, program representatives have garnered participation from 18 corporations and one government agency.

"The corporate community was very receptive" when contacted by these representatives, said Jarvis Jones, program cochair. While some individual corporations have yet to commit to the program, "very few said no overnight," Jones said.

"We're finding that corporations

are already ahead in this game," he said. "Many of them have already encouraged their [law] firms to retain or refer work to people of color," and the program provides support to meet that goal, he said.

"In the past, some corporations have said they would be interested in working with minority lawyers, but just didn't know where they were," Oliver said. The program maintains a directory of minority lawyers with resumes and background information, making it easy to find an attorney with appropriate experience, he said.

"We are enthused about the program," said Gordon Eid, senior legal officer at IDS Financial Services Inc. After initial discussions with program representatives, Eid said IDS was alert to the possibilities of working with minority lawyers, and will consider minority firms for future legal needs.

Executives at one other corporation were "almost waiting for us to show up," said Ray Faricy, a St. Paul attorney and member of the Board of Governors who assisted in contacting participants.

Faricy said Control Data executives indicated they had been looking for ways to bolster opportunities for minority lawyers, and said they would support the program fully.

"Most corporations sense that society needs persons of all races to be involved," he said. "They're not looking for accolades, but recognizing their responsibilities."

While initial responses have been encouraging, Oliver and Jones said the effort to secure corporate participation will continue. "There are a lot of corporations in this area," Oliver said. "This is just a start."

Part of the effort involves presenting minority lawyers with the right expertise. "We don't just give them a name and a number," Faricy said. Instead, the program encourages corporations to seek minority attorneys with the same background and skills as majority lawyers.

And because minority law firms often have lower overheads, they can offer quality legal services at a lower rate than many majority firms, Oliver said.

Program leaders met recently at the MSBA convention to discuss progress to date and to discuss future plans. In addition to seeking more corporate participants, the program will actively recruit government agencies.

"Minorities have been excluded for a long time," Oliver said. "We're not pointing a finger, but stating a fact, and trying to find a solution."

Good Company

Current corporate and government participants in the Minnesota Minority Corporate Counsel Program include:

Ault Inc.
Bemis Company Inc.
Cargill Inc.
Control Data
Ecolab Inc.
First Bank Systems
General Mills Inc.
Graco Inc.
Honeywell
IDS Financial Services Inc.
Jostens Inc.
Minneapolis Community
Development Agency
Norwest Corporation
Pillsbury/Grand Met
Piper Jaffray & Hopwood Inc.
Saint Paul Companies
State Farm Insurance
Company
Tennant Companies (second-
tier participant)
U.S. West