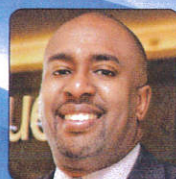


New York Law Journal
Diversity
Initiative Honorees

2015



Defense Association Of New York

BY LEN MANIACE

AFTER THREE DECADES of attending legal conferences, Gary Rome knew all too well that there were too few women and minority defense litigators—and even fewer among the equity partners of their firms.

The same was true for government agencies and the insurance companies that often found themselves defending lawsuits, said Rome, president of the non-profit Defense Association of New York (DANY), a group that serves defense attorneys across the state through continuing legal education seminars and its legal journal, *The Defendant*.

So when Rome took the helm in June 2014, this lack of representation was high on his priority list.

"If you want to make a difference in diversity you have to take a practical approach," he said. "Are we just going to talk about diversity, or are we actually going to train diverse attorneys and teach them what it takes to obtain clients, what it takes to climb the ladder?"

Working with Rush & Sabbatino and other firms, DANY launched Career Empowerment for Diverse Attorneys last fall. The 10-month program provides participants with training in leadership and rainmaking skills, as well as the benefits of close mentoring by senior litigators.

The program features seven monthly training sessions that run three hours each, followed by three monthly panel discussions with experts from different realms of defense law. The first class, which began in September 2014, has 25 participants; a majority are women, one-third are lawyers of color and about 10 percent identify as LGBT.

Faced with an industry culture that doesn't necessarily see these lawyers as leaders, it's important for diverse attorneys to secure these skills for their careers to progress, said Claire Rush of Rush & Sabbatino.

"Because they tend to be caretakers, women are guided to career paths that will not enable them to be rainmakers," said Rush, who is married to Rome.

The program teaches lawyers how to develop a business plan, something not taught in law school but increasingly important. It also includes a Myers Briggs personality test, which can help attorneys as they work with the program's business coaches to create a career advancement plan.

Through the training sessions and mentoring, participants learn how to develop contacts and networks that will allow them to bring new business into their firms, said Francesca Sabbatino, Rush's partner. That network extends to other firms and especially to insurance companies, which, with huge payouts at stake, are the source of much defense work.

"It's all about relationship building, because you don't get invited to participate unless you are on the radar of insurance companies," Sabbatino said.



NYLJ / RECK KOEHN

With its educational mission, DANY is well situated to make a difference on diversity in New York and to work with other bar organizations to do the same, said Rome, a managing partner at Barry, McTiernan & Moore.

"I guess if I ran for mayor or governor, I might be able to do something different," he said. "But I think as president of the defense association, it's a good start."

DANY plans to follow up with participants over the next five years to measure the program's effect. It is also exploring expanding its initiative by partnering with affinity bar groups to sponsor the program in 2015-2016.

The cost of the DANY diversity initiative has been largely underwritten by law firms and vendor sponsors as well as the New York State Insurance Fund, which provided space for the monthly training sessions.

Law firms that signed on to sponsor include Ahmuty,

Francesca Sabbatino, Claire Rush, Patricia Zinke, president Gary Rome, Lawton Squires and James Fiedler of DANY

Demers & McManus; Barry, McTiernan & Moore; Cozen & O'Connor; Cullen & Dykman; Faust Goetz Schenker & Blee; French & Casey; Havkins Rosenfeld Ritzert & Varriale; Herzfeld & Rubin; Lewis Brisbois Bisgaard & Smith; Morris Duffy Alonso & Faley; Russo & Toner; and White Fleischer & Fino. Vendors include Jay Dietz & Associates, PM Investigations, Diamond Reporting, Ringler Associates, National Physicians Review, DTI, Harper Video Services and Exponent.