

Diversity Program's Business Development Symposium

by Marian Cover Dockery

On May 2, the State Bar of Georgia Diversity Program launched its second annual business development symposium. Participating companies and municipalities, including Cox Communications, City of Atlanta, United Parcel Service, Genuine Parts and Fulton County, greeted more than 30 minority and women attorneys who were selected by the participants' in-house counsels. During the symposium, held at the Bar Center, the attorneys, who were from both majority- and minority-owned firms, capitalized on this unique opportunity to market their skills to company representatives for future business opportunities.

The registration was free for members of the State Bar of Georgia Diversity Program, but all other attorneys' firms were required to pay a fee, which was determined by the size of their firm. Participating companies who were not members of the Diversity



Photos by Sarah I. Coole and Johanna B. Merrill

Rick Rufolo, Vice President, Legal, UPS, greets Charlena Thorpe, patent attorney for Alston & Bird. Fulton County's Willie Lovett (not pictured) and City Attorney Beth Chandler and Deputy Counsel Jerry DeLoach (not pictured) also met with attorneys during the symposium.

Program or not government municipalities paid a registration fee to participate as well.

Program Objective

The objective of the program was to "level the playing field" for women and minority attorneys by affording them opportunities to meet in-house counsel. This was beneficial for all firms, since the selec-

tion process is not limited to attorneys who work only at minority firms. The program also afforded companies and municipalities opportunities to identify a population of attorneys who they want to meet, but cannot easily identify. Companies are now seeking more diverse outside counsel, and this is one way for these entities to achieve this goal.

The Selection Process

More than 50 attorneys registered online this year, completing applications that the company representatives reviewed prior to making their selections. The executive director of the Diversity Program had no input into the selection process. In-house counsel chose attorneys from both minority and majority firms as well as from large firms and solo practices. Company representatives used their own selection criteria, which included an attorney's area of practice, experience, and in some cases, familiarity with a candidate as well as their firms.

These meetings offered no guarantee for future business. Last year, attorneys did secure work as a result of the meetings and we expect the same results this year; however, attorneys did not apply with the expectation that they would be selected, nor did they expect to secure business immediately. Instead, this was an opportunity to develop a relationship with a prospective business client who in the future may consider one of these talented individuals when their skills are needed for legal work.

Expansion of Future Programs

Next year, the Diversity Program will, previous to launching the online registration, present a panel of company representatives at the State Bar offices, who will meet with attorneys outlining what they look for when reviewing applications. This will also create a forum for attorneys to ask ques-



Chris Galla, Associate Counsel for Genuine Parts Company, poses with Kwame Brown, attorney with Seyfarth Shaw before their meeting at the Diversity Symposium. Attorneys also met with the City of Atlanta, Fulton County, UPS and Cox Communications.



Kwame Brown of Seyfarth Shaw greets Sherrod Dixon of Huff, Powell & Bailey while Eric Burroughs, 2007 law graduate of the University of Tennessee and Gerald Wells of DLJ Piper look on before meeting with Cox's in-house counsel, Marcus Delgado (not pictured).

tions relative to the selection process. This will enhance not only the marketing of this new program, but will also help prospective applicants develop a better understanding of the program's objectives. Be sure to visit our website at www.gabar.org in November 2007 when we announce the details of the 2008 program.

Networking Reception

Following the meetings, attorneys and representatives engaged in casual conversation at a networking reception. Steering Committee members of the Diversity Program also joined the group to discuss upcoming events including the Summer Associates

and Judicial Reception, which Kilpatrick Stockton will host in June (date to be decided). Also, on Sept. 26, the State Bar of Georgia Diversity CLE and Luncheon, attended by almost 300 attorneys in 2006, will be held at the Bar Center. GBJ



Marian Cover Dockery is an attorney with a background in employment discrimination and the executive director of the State Bar of Georgia Diversity Program. For more information on the Diversity Program, go to www.gabar.org/programs/georgia_diversity_program.