

2008 High School Pipeline Project

by Marian Cover Dockery

On May 27, the State Bar of Georgia Diversity Program partnered with the Leadership Institute for Women of Color Attorneys, Inc., (LIWOCA) and Atlanta's John Marshall Law School (JMLS) to launch the High School Pipeline Project for Minority Students. This summer program targets high school students and has two primary objectives: improve students skills in grammar, writing and speech to assist them in college and law school; and provide mentoring sessions with members of the judiciary and attorneys who can inspire, educate and motivate students to consider law as a career.

A recent report by Columbia University revealed a disturbing decline in applications of minority college students to law school. At a time when diversity is a priority for law firms and law offices, this trend must be reversed with the help of the Pipeline project.



Photos by Marian Cover Dockery

Winners of the written and oral competition at Sutherland. (Left to right) Brianna Bogan, 3rd place, oral; Danielle Hayes, 1st place, written and oral; Rodtanae Richardson, 3rd place, written and oral; and Chelsey Parks, 2nd place, written and oral.

The 2008 Pipeline students included 13 10th-12th graders and three college freshmen. The following Georgia and Illinois high schools were represented: South Atlanta School for Law and Social Justice, Columbia; South Cobb Magnet, Pebblebrook; Cahokia (Cahokia, Ill.); Cedar Grove, Stephenson; DeKalb Early College Academy and Greater Atlanta Adventist Academy.

From May 27 through June 6, the 16 students had a curriculum that kept them involved from 8:45 a.m. to 4 p.m. Atlanta's John Marshall Law School hosted a majority of the events which were instructed by an Atlanta City School teacher, JMLS professors and attorneys from Atlanta firms. There were academic courses and workshops that instructed students on etiquette, image building, budget and credit management, the college application process, how to finance a college education, resume writing and interviewing skills.

During the afternoon sessions, students visited law firms and the corporate law offices of companies including Equifax, Georgia-Pacific and Cox Communications. The host law offices provided the Pipeline participants with catered lunches and held informative mentoring sessions with law partners, general counsels, associates and summer law clerks. Students enjoyed one-on-one mentoring sessions at Alston & Bird LLP and Arnall Golden Gregory LLP. Group mentoring sessions were conducted at Adorno & Yoss, Cox Communications and the City of Atlanta. At Equifax, students learned credit and budget management skills from Rick Goerss, chief privacy officer. Goerss presented a mini-course entitled "Credit 101." He explained what credit is, how to handle credit and how to maintain a good credit record.

The Pipeline syllabus also included visits to City Hall, the Court of Appeals of Georgia, the Supreme Court of Georgia and the State Bar of Georgia.

While at Nelson Mullins Riley & Scarborough LLP, the students were introduced to Nekia Hackworth who related her humble beginnings in South Atlanta. As a student at Therell High School, Hackworth participated in the mock trial program where Anita Wallace Thomas served as a judge. Because of her academic achievements, she was accepted to Harvard Law School. Later Hackworth inter-



Pipeline students visit the offices of Arnall Golden & Gregory LLP for a mentoring session and lunch. (Left to right) John Love, Jeremy Carnes, Rashaud Bell, Travon Riggins, Cierra Davis, Tianna Conway, Chidonna Stephens, Bianca Mahoney, Rodtanae Richardson, Ciara Carnes, Danielle Hayes, Brianna Bogan, Kerry Moses and Chelsey Parks.

viewed with Nelson Mullins Riley & Scarborough. Thomas, a partner at the firm, remembered Hackworth's outstanding oral presentation that set her apart from the other candidates. She shared with the participants the importance of always putting your best foot forward because contacts that you make today can be important to you in the future.

At the State Bar, students showcased their acting abilities by assuming the roles of jurors, bailiff, attorneys and witnesses during the "Journey Through Justice" program, led by Marlene Melvin.

Two judges from the Court of Appeals of Georgia had an impact on the students; the Hon. John Ruffin and the Hon. Yvette Miller, exceeded the students' expectations with their warmth, humor and genuine concern for their future. Judge Miller advised them to stay out of trouble, stay focused on their goals and study hard in school. While visiting the Court of Appeals of Georgia, Judge John Ruffin entertained the participants with some of his war stories. He told a story that occurred early in his career involv-

ing a judge in South Georgia who ruled against him. These rulings forced him to appeal cases to the higher courts, and ultimately, he argued before the Supreme Court of Georgia. This invaluable experience taught the Pipeline students that what one may perceive as an obstacle may become a stepping stone.

The program concluded at Sutherland with an oral and written competition judged by: Jim Johnson, counsel at Sutherland; Gregory Fatovic, associate general counsel at Lockheed-Martin; and Jadine Johnson and Deepthy Kishore, summer associates at Sutherland. Sutherland presented certificates to all students who completed the program. Danielle Hayes, South Adventist Academy, won both competitions and was awarded \$200 by the LIWOCA. The three college freshmen, Rodtanae Richardson, Atlanta Christian College; John Love, Georgia Perimeter; and Cierra Davis, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, each received scholarships in the amount of \$1,000. Arnall Golden Gregory LLP also awarded one student a summer internship.

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Pipeline Students visit Judge John Ruffin's courtroom. (First row, left to right) Rodtae Richardson and Chelsey Parks. (Second Row, left to right): Brianna Bogan, Cierra Davis, Danielle Hayes, Chidonna Stephens, Judge John Ruffin, TiAnna Conway, Latisha Belgrove, Tamika Beatty, Travon Riggins and Kerry Moses.

One student who had never met an attorney prior to the program wrote:

"This experience inspired me in more ways than anyone could ever know. I enjoyed being exposed to different types of attorneys within the field of law. The best part of this program for me was learning how to become a better writer, as well as speaker. I truly believe you all want us to succeed. I know this because you invested precious time and money for this purpose."

For more information about the High School Pipeline Project designed to encourage minority students, contact Marian Cover Dockery at mariand@gabar.org. 



Marian Cover Dockery is an attorney with a background in employment discrimination and the director of the State Bar of

Georgia Diversity Program. For more information, go to www.gabar.org/programs/georgia_diversity_program/.

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