

PBA's 2007 Diversity Summit Celebrates 15th Anniversary of the Martin Luther King Jr. Summer Internship Program

On both October 22, 2007, the evening before the Pennsylvania Bar Association's 2007 Diversity Summit, and during the luncheon at the Summit the next day, friends of diversity and legal aid came together to celebrate the 15th Anniversary of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Summer Internship Program. In an exciting development, the Summit (held in Philadelphia) was televised to four other locations in the state, where bar leaders also convened to discuss diversity: Erie, Stroudsburg, Pittsburgh and Mechanicsburg.

The MLK Program is the diversity pipeline of the Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network, the umbrella organization for providing civil legal aid to the neediest among us. The goal of the celebration was to give the MLK Summer Internships and Fellowships the kind of prestige and secured funding that are enjoyed by such regional and national fellowship programs as the Independence Fellowships and Skadden Fellowships. Among the highlights of the 15th anniversary celebration:

- The inspirational opening reception was hosted by Philadelphia Mayor John Street, congratulated by Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice Ron Castille and First Judicial District President Judge Darnell Jones, and generously sponsored by the Independence Foundation.
- The Tuesday luncheon of the Diversity Summit program, hosted by the Pennsylvania Bar Association and the Pennsylvania Bar Institute, was incredibly well attended, and the messages of pride in the MLK Programs and importance of diversity to the legal profession were powerfully delivered by keynote speaker Juan Williams of National Public Radio, PBA President Andy Susko, and law student Rasheeda Phillips.
- An eloquent video of the MLK Program was debuted at both events and is now on its way to law school career placement offices across the state.
- A web-based searchable database of minority legal talent is in its final stages of development, thanks to Drexel University's Information Resources and Technology Department, and will soon have the resumes of students on line and ready for the exclusive use of Legal Aid programs and those law firms and corporate law departments that have agreed to contribute \$5000 this year and next to support the MLK Fellowship Program.
- **And more than \$250,000 was raised to help ensure the continuation and vibrancy of the MLK Fellowship Program!** A copy of the Thank You that ALM printed in the Legal Intelligencer and the PA Law Weekly is attached.

Much of the Celebration is now available on the MLK Website:

http://www.palegalaid.net/mlk_program.htm

Drexel's SVP and General Counsel Carl "Tobey" Oxholm III, who chaired the 15th Anniversary Celebration Committee since February, summed up the entire effort: "We cannot imagine how this Celebration could have turned out better, for Legal Aid and its MLK Programs, or for the Pennsylvania Bar Association and its Diversity Summit. The importance of recruiting and retaining minority attorneys is once again on the front burner for our profession, and together we are creating new ways to achieve those goals. All of us who care about legal aid for the poor thank those law firms and corporate legal departments for their support of the MLK Fellowships."

PBA President Andrew Susko thanked Oxholm for the leadership he had demonstrated. "If all the leaders of our law firms and corporate law departments were to make just one-tenth of the effort he made, there is no doubt in my mind that the profession would be far more diverse in very little time. All it takes is making diversity a priority. It has been ours for many years, and now working with Legal Aid and those who attended the Summit, we will be able to continue those efforts with even greater visibility, energy and success."