

Sarasota County Bar Association Diversity Committee

By: Louis M. Ursini, 12th Circuit Representative, YLD Board of Governors

Formed in 2003, the Sarasota County Bar Association Diversity Committee's mission is to encourage a diverse legal community truly representative of the diverse population of Sarasota County by promoting dialogue among Bar members concerning the benefits of inclusion, by educating lawyers and the public about diversity policies and practices, and by creating programs to foster cooperation between members of the local legal community and people of diverse races, ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds.

The past three years, the Committee has been very active in designing, implementing, and promoting various programs to promote inclusion and diversity within the Sarasota legal community. The Committee has established an Outreach Initiative which is a proactive program designed to reach out to high school students and law students about the benefits of engaging in the legal profession in Sarasota County. The Committee has engaged in panel discussions with local high school students and each semester presents a panel discussion before diverse student bar associations at law schools throughout Florida. The panel discussions before law schools also include an invitation for students to submit their resumes to the Committee's resume pool to share with potential employers in Sarasota. The Outreach Initiative further includes an active effort to engage law firms to commit to review the resume pool when considering candidates. This year, the Committee also secured the St. Petersburg Bar Association's fine exhibit on inclusion and diversity which was on display at the county courthouse for the month of June.

The Committee is also proud to announce its Diversity Summer Clerkship Program beginning the summer of 2007. The program is designed similar to a scholarship program in which diverse law students complete an application and essay for the Committee's review. A

select number of applicants will be interviewed by various law firms in Sarasota County, which have committed to hire a summer clerk from this pool of applicants. Furthermore, the Committee has created a stipend in addition to the clerk's pay to defray the cost of living in Sarasota. The program will provide two of the hired clerk's with a \$5,000 stipend.

The Committee is also considering a number of new programs for the upcoming year, which include an informational and financial workshop related to funding support, recruitment and common issues facing minority owned law firms in Sarasota County.