

Promoting Racial Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusivity within the Bar

We Are "REDI" for Lasting Change

BY JESSICA BROWN



In last month's Message, I collaborated with leading lawyers Annie Martínez and Christine Hernández, who described how local attorneys and judges are leading efforts toward a diversity-focused CLE requirement. This month, I continue the focus on racial justice, equity, diversity, and inclusivity (REDI) by shining the spotlight on four talented, energetic, and committed lawyers: Christine, as well as Patricia Jarzowski, Jon Olafson, and Michelle Sylvain. These lawyers, along with many other committed change agents in our community, are leading important REDI initiatives, both within the CBA and beyond.

REFOCUS 2020 Strategic Plan

Equity, diversity, and inclusivity are not new priorities for the CBA. The CBA's REFOCUS 2020 Strategic Plan (Strategic Plan),¹ introduced in spring 2016, makes diversity one of seven key areas of focus. Specifically, the "E" in REFOCUS stands for our objective to "Engage Under-Represented Populations."

To meet this objective, Bar leadership are instructed to "[e]ngage under-represented and statewide populations by improving and ensuring their inclusion at all levels of the CBA . . ."² As the Strategic Plan explains, "To truly represent the profession, the CBA must reflect it as to gender, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation and identity, and other traditionally

under-represented populations. The newer generation of attorneys knows institutions that are diverse and inclusive, and they will tolerate nothing less."

By 2016, the CBA had begun to make progress with diversity in leadership but recognized that "continued progress depends on a diverse membership and leadership pipeline. . . . For the CBA to be diverse and inclusive, sustained efforts are required. These include knowing where we are, addressing barriers, valuing and welcoming diverse people, and providing training to avoid implicit bias."³

The Strategic Plan was intended to guide the CBA through June 30, 2020. But in January 2020, the CBA Executive Council (EC) extended the Strategic Plan through June 30, 2023, noting that it continues to represent the Bar's priorities. Engaging diverse and statewide populations will likely always be a core goal of the CBA.

Patricia Jarzowski: EDI Joint Steering Committee Chair



To help implement the "E" objective, the CBA and the DBA formed the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusivity (EDI) Joint Steering Committee (JSC). Former CBA President Patricia Jarzowski, principal with her own personal injury law firm, the Law Office of Patricia Jarzowski, P.C., chairs the JSC. Other JSC members are attorneys John Baker, Catherine

Chan, Courtney Holm, Ryann Peyton, Melissa Schwartz, Mario Trimble, and Judge Mariana Vielma, as well as CBA Staff Liaison Emy López and CBA Executive Director Amy Larson.

The JSC first started meeting and working to enhance EDI within the Bar in mid-2018, and it has continued to do this important work for the past two-and-a-half years. After preparing the first-ever "EDI Action Plan," the JSC formed four teams to advance the plan's four key elements:

1. building a leadership pipeline;
2. messaging around promotion and outreach;
3. implementing tools to succeed in EDI goals across the CBA and DBA; and
4. creating accountability and transparency.

Under Patricia's leadership, JSC members chair each of these four teams, collaborating with diverse and dedicated bar members, including past presidents of the diversity bar associations, CBA and DBA past presidents, and judges.

Much of the work to implement the EDI Action Plan is underway. For example, the EC has begun to more systematically attend and promote diversity bar programs and events; collaborate on joint projects with the Presidents' Diversity Council, which comprises leaders of all the diversity bar associations in Colorado; and highlight diverse leaders in publications and articles (like this one). The EC is also building a diverse leadership pipeline, which involves the following:

- recruiting CBA members from traditionally under-represented populations to apply for leadership opportunities within the Bar;
- promoting the pipeline and Bar leadership specifically to diversity bar leaders, including their dynamic and talented past presidents;
- making the leadership appointment process transparent, simple, and encouraging;
- promoting the pipeline and openings at Bar events;
- using a new leadership application form that makes clear the CBA's commitment to diversity; and
- adding to the pipeline based on responses to a September 2020 leadership survey.

The CBA Nominating Committee will soon begin to interview and select candidates for 2021–22 leadership positions. The committee will choose a president-elect from Region 1 (the DBA) based on the current presidential rotation process specified in the CBA bylaws, as well as four vice presidents, one each from Regions 1; 3 (Boulder County, Larimer County, Thirteenth Judicial District, and Weld County bar associations); 5 (El Paso County, Fremont/Custer, Heart of the Rockies, and San Luis Valley bar associations); and 7 (Continental Divide, Ninth Judicial District, Northwest Colorado, and Pitkin County bar associations). The president-elect will serve a one-year term and each vice president will serve a two-year term on the EC.

As the 2016–17 CBA past president (the fifth woman to serve in this role in the Bar's then 119-year history), Patricia is chair of this year's CBA Nominating Committee. She is also a past president of the Colorado Women's Bar Association (CWBA), a past board member of the National Conference of Women's Bar Associations, a multiyear member of the 17th Judicial District Judicial Nominating Commission, a 2018 recipient of the University of Denver (DU) Sturm College of Law's "Law Stars" Professionalism Award, and a 2015 recipient of the CWBA Foundation's "Raising the Bar" Award. Patricia also mentors numerous diverse attorneys in our community, both formally through the Colorado Attorney Mentoring Program (CAMP) and informally through her personal commitment to speak with anyone who reaches out to her for guidance.

The JSC's innovative work "has launched Colorado as an emerging contemporary leader on the national stage."⁴ JSC member and CAMP Director Ryann Peyton—herself a tremendous leader in our community and chair of the JSC's Leadership Pipeline team—agrees, and credits Patricia for much of that success: "Every so often, a great leader emerges within the profession with the necessary combination of drive, cooperativeness, and impeccable work product that she grabs your attention and emboldens your trust. When you meet Patricia Jarzowski, you know immediately that she is that leader."

Ryann further notes that wherever Patricia goes "she elevates and innovates." As JSC chair,

"Patricia has been instrumental in motivating committee members, engaging stakeholders to lay the groundwork for the committee's success, and providing the necessary vision for the committee's work." Ryann is confident that "without Patricia's involvement, this initiative would be nowhere near as robust and successful as it has been. Because of Patricia, the CBA and DBA are poised to become national leaders in the implementation of meaningful diversity, inclusion, and equity efforts within bar associations."

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CBA delegate to the ABA, former EC member, and Continental Divide Bar Association leader Courtney Holm agrees, observing that "Patricia is a thoughtful, deliberate, and inspirational leader." Courtney has worked with Patricia on both the JSC and the EC when Patricia served as president. She notes that Patricia "devotes a great deal of time and energy to her teams. Patricia is determined to remove the barriers that prevent access or participation in the bar association. She recognizes that a

CBA "REDI" TIMELINE

Fall 2015: CBA Past Presidents Charley Garcia and Loren Brown create the Presidents' Diversity Council, a collaboration between bars and bar leaders to bring about diversity and inclusion within the legal profession.

Late 2015: The Trust and Estate Section becomes the first CBA section to form a committee dedicated to EDI. Other sections follow in its footsteps.

Spring 2016: The CBA's REFOCUS 2020 Strategic Plan makes diversity one of seven key areas of focus.

Summer 2018: The EDI Joint Steering Committee begins its work to enhance EDI within the Bar, creating the CBA's first-ever EDI Action Plan.

Late 2019: The Greater Colorado Task Force is formed to eliminate barriers to participation for members practicing outside the Denver metro area.

Early 2020: The CBA Executive Committee extends the Strategic Plan through June 30, 2023, noting that it continues to represent the Bar's priorities.

Summer 2020: The newly formed REDI Committee begins implementing the CBA's goals related to racial justice, equity, diversity, and inclusivity. The CBA adopts a revised mission and EDI policy.

Fall 2020: The CBA joins forces with the Presidents' Diversity Council to make an EDI CLE requirement mandatory.

group with different perspectives works more productively and to a better final product than a homogenous group. Patricia is leading the charge to energetically modernize the systems in our legal arena, so keep your eye on her and listen for the bugles."

Patricia grew up in Omaha, Nebraska, but she is very drawn to the ocean. Surfing is one of her favorite activities, and her favorite aroma is the tropical smell of Oahu when exiting the airport. We are so fortunate to have Patricia's leadership and energy at the Bar.

**Jon Olafson:
REDI Committee Chair**



As noted, EDI has long been a priority for the CBA. And this year, racial justice has catapulted to the forefront of the CBA's EDI objectives, partially in response to the

tragic and wrongful deaths of Black men and women that led to worldwide protests last spring.

Recognizing in July 2020 that the Bar and our broader legal community are "REDI" for lasting and systemic change, the EC formed the REDI Committee, a standing committee chaired by EC member and Lewis Brisbois partner Jon Olafson. Other REDI Committee members are CBA President-Elect Joi Kush, CBA Immediate Past President Kathleen Croshal, and EC members Kyle Aber, Judge Edwin Felter, Judson Hite, Judge Amanda Hopkins, Zaki Robbins, Robin Rossenfeld, Spencer Rubin, Bonnie Schriener, and me, as well as CBA Staff Liaison Jessica Lindzy and CBA Executive Director Amy Larson.

Under Jon's leadership, the REDI Committee has drafted (and the EC has approved) (1) revised mission and values statements that emphasize the Bar's commitment to racial justice, equity, diversity, and inclusivity; (2) a second external statement regarding the CBA's commitment to racial justice and racial equity (the CBA had issued a statement of solidarity with the Sam Cary Bar Association under Kathleen Hearn Croshal's leadership in the spring); and (3) a policy on EDI and racial justice that makes the REDI Committee a standing committee of the EC and makes the REDI Committee's report

"Jon has been a self-motivated and enthusiastic leader of the CBA Executive Council, in particular its permanent standing committee on racial justice, equity, diversity, and inclusivity."

and proposed action items a standing agenda item at all regular EC meetings. The EC has also approved CBA's collaboration with the diversity bars through the Presidents' Diversity Council to make an EDI CLE requirement mandatory.

The REDI Committee is also considering what bylaws changes may be appropriate to reflect the EC's commitment to permanent, meaningful, and institutional change, for recommendation to the CBA Board of Governors. And it is working with the JSC to implement the EDI Action Plan and to encourage EC members to complete their Ambassadorial Task Lists and their Individual Leadership Action Plans (ILAPs), two tools to assist our leaders to create a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive organization.

More specifically, the Ambassadorial Task List encourages EC members to select several actions that best meet their interests and talents to help the CBA meet its REDI goals. The actions include (1) adding three to five potential leaders to the CBA leadership pipeline; (2) suggesting three leaders to be highlighted, with regard to REDI, in one of CBA's many publications; (3) introducing, suggesting, attending, and/or guiding CLE topics and content related to REDI; (4) micro-volunteering with a diversity bar or advancing a CBA REDI initiative; (5) promoting

and attending a diversity bar-sponsored event or program; and (6) using social media or another form of networking to showcase the CBA's REDI initiatives.

Similarly, the ILAP asks EC members to select at least three items to complete from a menu of EDI options. Options include

- developing a mentoring relationship with an attorney, law school graduate, or law student from a diverse background;
- speaking with an attorney from an under-represented group about the benefits of bar membership;
- attending one or more conferences, programs, or CLE seminars on diversity-related topics;
- writing an article about diversity, inclusivity, and equity for a bar publication;
- learning about how non-diverse men serve as diversity, inclusivity, and equity allies by visiting White Men as Full Diversity Partners⁵; and
- contributing to a diversity organization (e.g., the Center for Legal Inclusiveness (CLI)⁶ or Diversity Lab⁷).

As part of our commitment to racial justice, we encourage all our members and sections to support social justice organizations with both their time and their donations. And we welcome anyone within the Bar to use the ILAP to inspire and record their accomplishment of these and other EDI objectives.⁸

In addition, the REDI Committee hopes to encourage increased awareness and understanding about racial justice issues through challenging conversations, education, and a change in narrative. At Jon's urging, the entire REDI Committee undertook the ABA's 21-Day Racial Equity Habit-Forming Challenge.⁹ The REDI Committee's feedback about the Challenge was overwhelmingly positive, in part because we adopted Jon's suggestion to have an "accountabilibuddy" with whom we each could discuss the readings, podcasts, and exercises, such as the popular Harvard Implicit Association Tests.¹⁰ Based on its positive experience with the Challenge, the REDI Committee encouraged the rest of the EC and the CBA's sections to undertake the Challenge as well. Anyone who is still reading this President's Message is encouraged to try it, too.

GETTING TO KNOW OUR DIVERSITY LEADERS

Random Questions with Patricia, Jon, Michelle, and Christine

1. Dog person or cat person?

PJ: Dog.

JO: I am for SURE a dog person! I got my first dog when I was 27 and have had a dog ever since. They are family!

MS: Dog person. I'm allergic to cats!

CH: Dog person (though I have a black Chihuahua and a black cat).

2. Sweet or salty?

PJ: Sweet. And if I were stranded on a deserted island and could only eat one thing, it would be chocolate chip cookies.

JO: Both. I don't have a sweet tooth—I have sweet teeth! But who can say no to pretzels or BBQ Baked Lays?

MS: I like both, but I'm a sunflower seed rather than a candy person.

CH: Sweet.

3. Beach or mountains?

PJ: Beach, but any day on the water—river, lake, or ocean—is a good one.

JO: Yes. I like it all. I even like the plains!

MS: Mountains. My childhood dream was to live in the mountains due to all the childhood trips to mountains from Denver.

CH: Beach.



Patricia and her dog Brandi enjoy a day on Standley Lake.



Michelle with husband Keith and pup Celestine.

4. Olympic medal, Academy Award, or Nobel Peace Prize?

PJ: Nobel Peace Prize.

JO: All are amazing accomplishments and the result of years of hard work. I admire that type of dedication.

MS: Academy Award—I love film!

CH: Academy Award.

5. Favorite holiday tradition?

PJ: Meeting our friends for bowling on Christmas after all the festivities are winding down.

JO: This is a tough one. I like carving pumpkins, making Christmas cookies, and dying Easter eggs. All of them were important and fun traditions in my family.

MS: Lights!

CH: Just having the family together (extra points if it's snowing and there's a fire going).

6. Favorite pizza?

PJ: My wife Emily Anderson's homemade prosciutto, grilled onions, mushroom, olive oil, and mozzarella.

JO: Pepperoni with basil and onion!

MS: Sausage.

CH: Margherita with artichokes

7. Favorite childhood book or movie?

PJ: Nancy Drew novels.

JO: Without a question, *The Wizard of Oz* and anything by Dr. Seuss!

MS: *Mary Poppins*.

CH: *The Princess Bride*.

8. What would be your first-choice superpower?

PJ: Flying.

JO: Probably flight. I've always had a fear of heights when I'm not standing on solid ground, so it would push me to challenge and overcome my fear!

MS: Flying or invisibility.

CH: Mind reading.

9. Favorite sport as a spectator?

PJ: Boston Red Sox at Fenway Park.

JO: College football. Besides the actual sport, I love the traditions that come along with it.

MS: Football—I was a Broncos cheerleader.

CH: Baseball (Yankees).

10. Favorite sport as a participant?

PJ: It's a tie between surfing and fly fishing.

JO: I like the “life sports”—hiking, camping, paddleboarding, etc.

MS: Volleyball.

CH: Skiing.

11. What's the scariest movie you've seen?

PJ: *Jaws* when I was young. It's a wonder I still love to surf.

JO: When I was a young kid, my sister was a counselor at a camp where the *Friday the 13th* movies were filmed. When she returned home, she made me watch *Friday the 13th, Part 2* to show me where she worked. Looking back, I would have preferred to have waited for the roll of film to be developed!

MS: *The Exorcist*.

CH: *The Exorcist*. I hate the part when she goes up the stairs backward.

12. What one accomplishment are you most proud of?

PJ: Helping others succeed.

JO: This is a difficult question. I was raised in the Upper Midwest. We are taught to not be proud or to brag. With that said, I am proud that I continue to live one of my core ideals by being involved in my community and profession.

MS: Graduating from law school and creating one of the first Self Represented Help Centers in Durango.

CH: Having three kids and being a working mom and still enjoying my crazy life!



Top: Jon paddleboards along the Front Range.
Bottom: Teen Titans Hernández.

Jon's accountability buddy concept is just one example of his creativity and commitment to these topics. Jon also is a driving force behind the Colorado LEADS (Leaders Engaging About Diversity and Solidarity) video series, a collaborative project between the CBA's Labor and Employment and Civil Rights sections and the Sam Cary Bar Association. The videos are short and informational and address topics such as workplace policies and procedures that promote REDI and "Know your Rights" with regard to Fourth Amendment considerations, police powers, and limitations; First Amendment considerations and free speech; employees' lawful off-duty conduct and protestor rights; and how to constructively discuss REDI topics in our communities. These videos will be made available to Bar members and attorneys and members of the public at no cost. And they, as well as a racial justice book club concept, are progressing as a direct result of Jon's energy and passion.

EC/REDI Committee member Robin Rossenfeld agrees that Jon has the passion to lead, explaining, "I really got to know Jon when I joined the EC REDI Committee this summer. I knew he was passionate about REDI issues from the moment he opened his mouth on the topic. I was honored when he invited me to be his 'accountability buddy' for the 21-Day Racial Equity Habit-Forming Challenge. It requires a lot of trust in the other person to have an open exchange about the issues raised in the Challenge. We quickly developed a friendship, which allowed us to share experiences and views on a deeply personal level. And from those discussions, I know how deeply committed he is to making the legal system more responsive to and respectful of the diversity of our membership and the people we serve."

And EC/REDI Committee member Zaki Robins observes, "Jon has been a self-motivated and enthusiastic leader of the CBA Executive Council, in particular its permanent standing committee on racial justice, equity, diversity, and inclusivity. He has been a driving force in ensuring that the REDI Committee's objectives are thoroughly discussed so that they may be effectively implemented, while remaining respectful of all viewpoints and working to

integrate the voices of all relevant stakeholders. When the REDI Committee's initiatives are ultimately successful, Jon's hard work and vision will be a key reason why."

Fortunately, Jon's energy is seemingly boundless and thus allows him also to have a robust employment litigation practice at Lewis Brisbois, where his colleagues note that he is generous with his time and provides opportunities for others to succeed and show their worth. Jon also serves as the Board of Governors representative for the CBA Labor and Employment Section, a member of the JSC's accountability and transparency team, a Bar Fellow with the Colorado Bar Foundation, the president of the Board for the Denver Philharmonic Orchestra, a director on the Board of the Nathan Yip Foundation, and the chair of the Admissions and Membership Committee of the University Club of Denver.

Jon grew up in a small town in central Minnesota. With a population of just 4,000, it was the biggest town within 45 miles. He also has lived in North Dakota, Texas, and New Mexico. As a child, Jon wavered between wanting to be a meteorologist, a surgeon, and an attorney. He eliminated surgeon from the list when he realized he did not enjoy the sight of blood, but he remains fascinated by the weather. He also says if he could ensure success as a singer, he might choose that as a profession since "it would be fun to sing beautifully and inspire with that talent and dedication." But he loves being an attorney and knows he chose the right career for him.

We expect to benefit from Jon's CBA leadership and enthusiasm for a long time to come.

Michelle Sylvain: ADR Section Chair



In addition to promoting EDI at the CBA governance level, the JSC and REDI Committee are working with the CBA sections to advance these objectives. The CBA has 30 sections, most of which function a bit like small bar associations, with their own executive councils, bylaws, and the like. Some CBA sections were focused on EDI before the JSC's work began.

In fact, the Trust and Estate Section, under the guidance of then-chair Melissa Schwartz, was the first section to create a committee dedicated to EDI. Melissa started quite a trend. Now almost all the sections are developing formal structures to support and promote diversity and diverse lawyers. A number of other section leaders have made substantial contributions to EDI efforts, including Michelle Sylvain, founder of Sylvain Law & Mediation Firm, LLC, and her outstanding team.

Michelle is chair of the Alternative Dispute Resolution Section and was the first woman of color to chair a CBA section. She also represents the Bar's geographic diversity, as she lives and works in Eagle, 30 miles west of Vail. Michelle not only reflects the Bar's diversity, however—she works to ensure that EDI is embedded in everything the ADR Section does. From its website to the monthly newsletter, its programming and projects, its collaboration with other sections and the diversity bars, and Michelle's succession planning, Michelle "works to live" EDI. The theme for her tenure, *Belonging*, emphasizes a sense of connection—a commonality—that accepts and rises to the challenge of where we are at this time in history. According to Michelle, "Belonging means helping the world see that our beliefs and dreams are more integral to what is 'us' than surface traits we cannot control."

Michelle strives to effect change and encourages attorneys and other ADR practitioners to use their uniquely powerful positions to end discrimination against oppressed and marginalized groups. She says that *Belonging* is built on four components: connection, compassionate empathy, responsibility, and action. "Those four legs support radical problem solving," she explains. "That is the kind we need today."

Michelle's leadership philosophy is to "establish a great team and set them free." She of course gives them the resources they need and supports them, but she relies heavily on the "incredible team" on the section's Executive Council, which includes Vice Chair Wesley Parks, Secretary Holly Panetta, Treasurer Jim Carr, and Chair Emeritus Marianne Lizza-Irwin. She also has "awesome" committee chairs: Adam Foster and Melora Bentz, who co-chair the section's EDI Committee; Judge Mariana Vielma, who

chairs the Communications Committee; C. J. Larkin, who chairs the Legislative Committee; and Wesley Parks and REDI Committee member Robin Rossenfeld, who co-chair the Programs Committee.

And that team, under Michelle's leadership, is doing great work. Like the CBA EC, the ADR Section's Executive Council is working on expanding and diversifying its leadership pipeline. Michelle is committed to finding qualified diverse members of the bar to act in leadership roles, noting that 43% of her current leadership team is ethnically diverse. Also like the CBA EC, the ADR Section adopted an ADR Section Mission Statement reflecting its commitment to EDI:

The ADR Section . . . values its diverse community, is committed to the advancement of equity in the practice of ADR and strives to remove barriers for success within the ADR Section and the greater Colorado legal community for underrepresented groups.

This mission was advanced during the ADR Section's annual conference, held in late October 2020. The ADR Section touted its timely theme, *Promoting Belonging as Dispute Resolution Professionals*, as "central to our joint experience as practitioners and humans (especially as we endure the global pandemic and social and political unrest)." With an agenda focused on understanding diversity and belonging in practice, the future of ADR, how business is changing, and communication skills for conflict, the goals of the conference included challenging participants' thinking, expanding and improving their skills, and virtually connecting them with colleagues. Nationally recognized speaker and diversity consultant Ellie Krug served as keynote speaker. This transgender leader presented on "Grey Area Thinking," a general human inclusivity training that provides a toolset to better understand and welcome diverse humans.

Likewise, under Wesley Park's and Robin Rossenfeld's leadership, in November 2020, the ADR Section hosted a free CLE diversity event, "Practicing During a Culture Movement." Michelle moderated this fascinating discussion with panelists LaQunya Baker, Elie Zwiebel, Joe Whitfield, and Laura Wolf. These diverse speakers and Bar leaders explored ways private citizens, ADR practitioners, and other attorneys can best

take part in movements for change within our communities during, and beyond, moments of considerable collective action. The panel shared their insights and advice about how to initially engage, how to remain engaged, and how to disengage from a personal and professional standpoint. Their experiences provided valuable insight about leadership, true allyship, and a path forward.

Another ADR Section initiative is its statewide Resolution Corps, a pilot program for virtual mediation practitioners. Michelle worked with Wesley Parks and Holly Panetta to visualize and

“Michelle has been a gentle mentor, encouraging me as I explore these issues in my own practice and treating me with respect when I take the occasional missteps.”

help initiate this online dispute resolution panel soon after the COVID-19 outbreak. Resolution Corps provides a referral list on the ADR Section website for virtual-mediation practitioners. Wesley and Holly continue to lead this effort along with seven ADR Section Advisory Council Members: Beth Ornstein, Amber Hill Anderson, Elle Byram, Charles Greenacre, Gregory Garner, Marianna Lizza-Irwin, and Glynna Baker. The co-chairs and Advisory Council manage and oversee the mediator referral list.

As part of its effort to ensure geographic diversity, the ADR Section also partners with

the Remote Mediation Program. This program currently works with the Fifth Judicial District to provide pro bono mediators in the mid-mountain area of the state. The Remote Mediation Program anticipates expansion to Boulder, Garfield, Gunnison, and Pitkin counties. Michelle describes Wesley and Holly as "the secret sauce" in this program's success.

Michelle explains that both Resolution Corps and the Remote Mediation Program are "exhilarating parts of our commitment to enhancing access to justice throughout Greater Colorado. Our theme of *Belonging* envisions our Section as a diverse and inclusive statewide connection in which members feel connected, encouraged, inspired, and empowered to resolve conflict by bringing conflict resolution within the reach of all."

In addition, Adam Foster formed a Mediation Circle in conjunction with CAMP. Melora Bentz recently joined as co-chair, bringing fresh ideas as a newer practitioner. Each quarter, a group of eight to 10 participants mentor one another on issues such as marketing their work and practicing in an inclusive way. The leadership team also ensures that their monthly newsletter reflects images of people of color in addition to content relating to EDI; it has instituted an ambassador program to welcome new members and help them feel included in meetings; and it has surveyed members to ask for demographic information and ideas for how they can feel even more included.

Finally, also under Michelle's and Adam's leadership, the ADR EDI Committee web page connects practitioners to a treasure trove of helpful resources. For example, the site currently links to numerous magazine articles on diversity in ADR, as well as an NPR podcast on the history of housing segregation.¹¹

According to Wesley Parks, Michelle is a natural leader and mentor. In addition to noting her contributions to the ADR Section's diverse leadership pipeline and the Resolution Corps initiative, Michelle has assisted Wesley's efforts to increase "student involvement in ADR Section programs, such as at the annual ADR Conference, where law students have been presenting the last three years. She is the driving force behind the great work that is happening in the ADR Section."

Robin Rossenfeld agrees, stating, “During Michelle’s tenure as chair of the ADR Section, she has made the creation of our EDI Committee a priority. She has encouraged us to create a variety of programs that support discussions about EDI issues within our section membership and the parties we serve as dispute resolution professionals and which meet the goals of the CBA’s Diversity and Inclusivity Action Plan.” In addition, Robin points out, “The EDI Committee has a mentorship program for persons new to an ADR practice. It has a book/media club, which provides an opportunity for our membership to interact in a less formal setting and discuss EDI issues in an open conversation.” For Robin personally, “Michelle has been a gentle mentor, encouraging me as I explore these issues in my own practice and treating me with respect when I take the occasional misstep.”

In 2018 Michelle founded her law and mediation firm, which specializes in helping parties resolve legal disputes without engaging in needless litigation. Previously, she was a staff attorney for the Colorado Judicial Department, a regional access manager for the Colorado Department of Transportation, an associate law professor at the Washburn University School of Law, and an assistant attorney general in the Employment and Civil Rights Unit for the State of Colorado. She is also a writer and communications coach with Sylvain Dubois, LLC, which provides training and coaching to managers to connect the power of words and problem-solving aspirations with core values. And she currently serves on the Recruitment and Support team to the Diversity on the Bench Coalition, an important community-wide EDI effort led by Patricia Jarzowski and Denver County Court Judge Gary Jackson. The Diversity on the Bench Coalition is a joint initiative of the CBA and Colorado Judicial Institute that seeks to ensure that Colorado’s state court bench reflects the diversity of Colorado’s population.

Michelle also has served as an advisory board member for *Colorado Lawyer*; vice president and co-secretary of the Continental Divide Bar Association; Membership Committee co-chair for the CWBA; CWBA at-large representative and Southwest Chapter President; co-founder of the Colorado chapter of the

National Black Women’s Bar Association; board member for the United Way of Eagle River Valley; member of the Greater Vail Valley and statewide Direct Services Grantmaking Committees for the Women’s Foundation of Colorado; and founder/publication editor for *The Catalyst*, a monthly publication for Colorado Black Women for Political Action. In addition, Michelle graduated from COBALT, the CBA’s leadership training program, and she serves as a local bar representative for the Continental Divide Bar Association to the CBA Board of Governors.

Michelle is a native Coloradan who grew up in Denver. She now resides in the Colorado Rockies with her husband and two Airedales. If she had to live elsewhere, she would choose California or Hawaii. But fortunately for the CBA, Michelle has no plans to relocate.

Christine Hernández: Presidents’ Diversity Council Leader



Finally, as mentioned above, the CBA has been working with the Presidents’ Diversity Council toward a mandatory EDI CLE requirement for Colorado. The CBA created the Council, but the DBA and diversity bar leaders, in conjunction with other community leaders, have taken the reins and are moving this CLE initiative forward. Some of the main drivers are DBA President Kevin McReynolds, DBA President-Elect Tyrone Glover, Sam Cary Bar Association President Scott Evans, Colorado Hispanic Bar Association (CHBA) President Annie Martínez, CLI Executive Director Sara Scott, CWBA Board members Jennifer Carty and Ruth Moore, and the DEI Subcommittee of the Colorado Supreme Court’s Continuing Legal Education Committee. All these leaders deserve a spotlight for their EDI efforts, but Christine is being highlighted for her tireless EDI efforts in 2020.

By the time this Message is published, Christine will be rolling off the Presidents’ Diversity Council, having completed her tenure as CHBA immediate past president. But she intends to continue working informally with the council on the mandatory EDI CLE effort.

Her work includes collaborating with Scott Evans to navigate technical capabilities and logistics with the Office of Attorney Regulation Counsel, another critical partner in this effort.

Christine is also a member of the Diversity on the Bench Coalition. In that role, Christine is partnering with Ryann Peyton to lead a team tasked with educating and reinforcing for Judicial Nominating Commissions why diversity on the bench matters and how to make systemic changes and process improvements that will help reduce the impact of implicit bias.

In addition, Christine is working with the CHBA on a related effort to promote the appointment of Latinxs to the bench. State court judges Adam Espinoza, Isabel Pallares, Mariana Vielma, and Juan Villaseñor are involved as well. They will coordinate with the Diversity on the Bench Coalition but expect to focus on the pipeline for Latinx judges by promoting law school to high school and college students¹² and offering programs to educate Latinxs about pathways to the bench. They will also reach out to specific Latinx attorneys to encourage them to apply for judicial vacancies. And they will pair newly appointed judges with experienced judges to ensure mentoring regarding, for example, judicial performance and retention issues.

Christine also serves on the law student working group of the Colorado Supreme Court Task Force on Lawyer Well-Being that Justice Monica Márquez is leading. I discussed this Task Force in my November President’s Message,¹³ where I also noted the connection between well-being and EDI that consultant Patty Powell wrote about in her own *Colorado Lawyer* article.¹⁴ Christine got involved with the Task Force to make sure that law students and attorneys of color have a voice, for instance with regard to feelings of exclusion and isolation that may impact their well-being as attorneys.

Christine has used her own voice to speak out and educate attorneys about EDI issues. She has written two posts for the CWBA’s blog, *The 1891*: “Anti-Hate/Anti-Racism Parenting: Teaching Your Children to be Anti-Racist Through Self Identity,” and “Tales from the Trenches: Celebrating Diversity.” She has also led several diversity seminars for the American Immigration Lawyers Association and has

“Christine is so actively engaged in the legal community, including serving as a chair of the immigration section of the Hispanic National Bar Association, that I have no idea how she does it all.”

spoken about the importance of diversity on the bench at the Colorado Judicial Conference.

Christine has also served as a mentor for the Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network, and she is a member of the CBA, DBA, Hispanic National Bar Association, CWBA, American Immigration Lawyers Association, Colorado Criminal Defense Bar, and the DU Latino Alumni Committee. She also co-chairs the Colorado Lawyer Committee's Racial Justice Task Force. And she is leading the Immigration Pod of the Alliance of Latinx Leadership and Policy. In that role, she is working with the Biden Administration, with a goal of filling 20% of presidential appointments with Latinxs. She does all of this on top of her day job at Hernández & Associates, a criminal and immigration law firm that she founded with her husband Arnulfo Hernández.

According to Annie Martínez, “Christine in all the years I have known her has prioritized EDI in all her endeavors, particularly the equity part. Diversity and inclusion without equity is simply performative, and she knows this. Her continued efforts on this front will be a significant part of making the Colorado bar more equitable

and just.” Kevin McReynolds agrees, noting that “Christine is an incredible partner for the DBA. She was one of the first to help create active agendas as we revamped the Presidents’ Diversity Council [meetings] last year where she demonstrated such broad engagement and creativity that I was thrilled when she agreed to join the DBA’s Board of Trustees. She has also been instrumental in the Council’s work with the CLE Rules Committee in creating a proposed EDI education requirement. Christine is so actively engaged in the legal community, including serving as a chair of the immigration section of the Hispanic National Bar Association, that I have no idea how she does it all.”

Not surprisingly, Christine has been recognized as *Law Week’s* “Barristers Best for Immigration”; a “Lawyer of the Year” by *Law Week Colorado*; a “Top Latino Lawyer” and one of the “Most Powerful Latinas in Law Business” by *Latino Leaders Magazine*; and a “40 Under 40” by the Hispanic National Bar Association. She also received the Chris Miranda Outstanding Lawyer award from the CHBA.

Christine grew up in Richmond, Virginia, and attended the American University in Washington,

D.C., graduating magna cum laude with a focus in international business. But she came to Colorado to attend the DU Sturm College of Law. We are fortunate she did, as she is making remarkable contributions to our legal community.

Conclusion

I am so honored to have the opportunity to collaborate with these four tremendous leaders to help advance the CBA’s EDI mission and values. As mentioned, we are fortunate in Colorado to have many, many leaders working toward these efforts, including the many lawyers named and quoted in this Message as well as “Big Law” diversity stars Katie Reilly, founder of the Denver Law Firm Coalition for Racial Equity, and Spencer Rubin, chair of the CBA YLD and creator of the nascent Colorado Diverse Attorney Community Circle. I wish I could feature all of them, but hopefully readers have enjoyed hearing about what Patricia, Jon, Michelle, and Christine are up to on behalf of the Bar and our broader community. I am so grateful to them and everyone else who is helping us move toward a better, stronger, and more diverse community of lawyers. CL

NOTES

1. CBA Strategic Plan Refocus 2020, <https://www.cobar.org/For-Members/Committees/CBA-Strategic-Plan-Refocus-2020>.
2. *Id.*
3. *Id.*
4. Jarzowski, “Meet the CBA and DBA’s New Diversity and Inclusivity Steering Committee,” 48 *Colo. Law.* 52 (Feb. 2019).
5. <http://wmfdp.com>.
6. <https://centerforlegalinclusiveness.org/donate-to-cli>.
7. <https://www.diversitylab.com>.
8. Email jlindzy@cobar.org to receive a copy of the JSC’s ILAP.
9. “The Challenge invites participants to complete a syllabus of 21 short assignments (typically taking 15–30 minutes), over 21 consecutive days, that include readings, videos or podcasts. It has been intentionally crafted to focus on the Black American experience. The assignments seek to expose participants to perspectives on elements of Black history, identity and culture, and to the Black community’s experience of racism in America.” https://www.americanbar.org/groups/labor_law/membership/equal_opportunity.
10. <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>.
11. <https://www.cobar.org/For-Members/CBA-Sections/Articles>.
12. See, e.g., <http://lawschoolyeswecan.org>.
13. Brown, “Leading the Way to Attorney Well-Being: Lawyers as Leaders,” 49 *Colo. Law.* (Nov. 2020), <https://cl.cobar.org/departments/leading-the-way-to-attorney-well-being>.
14. Powell, “The Link Between Well-Being and Inclusion,” 49 *Colo. Law.* 19 (June 2020), <https://cl.cobar.org/departments/the-link-between-well-being-and-inclusion>.