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## The Ripple Effect of Diversity

A “ripple effect” is defined as “a spreading, pervasive, and usually unintentional effect or influence.”<sup>1</sup> The image that often comes to mind is seeing a person drop a pebble into a still pond and then seeing the numerous ripples spread from that point.

One of the many reasons why I am proud to be an active member of the Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association is because the CMBA is a staunch supporter of diversity in the legal profession. With programs that encourage high school students to explore their interest in the legal profession on one end of the spectrum to programs that help minority and women lawyers move up the career ladder on the other end of the spectrum, the CMBA continues to be nationally recognized for its diversity pipeline initiatives. Despite the current economic climate or perhaps because of it, these diversity programs are thriving.

According to the Minority Corporate Council Association (MCCA), minorities and women have advanced in Fortune 500 companies. In 2000, approximately 2% of general counsels in Fortune 500 companies were minorities.<sup>2</sup> In 2010, the numbers increased to about 9%.<sup>3</sup> In 2000, approximately 8% of general counsels in Fortune 500 companies were women.<sup>4</sup> In 2010, almost 19% of general counsels in Fortune 500 companies are women.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, these statistics show that Corporate America continues to value diversity despite the economic climate. In

fact, these numbers seem to suggest that companies view diversity as an imperative in order to stay competitive.

In addition to the growth and success of the CMBA’s diversity programs, this past year has also seen the revitalization of the Asian American Bar Association of Ohio (AABA). The AABA was founded in 1992 by a group of dynamic Asian attorneys, many of whom have been honored as Trailblazers by the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association. Recently, through the leadership of a dedicated group of Asian attorneys, which include some of the original founders, the AABA has not only been revitalized but has seen a substantial amount of growth and activity. Although the AABA was only revitalized in mid-2010, the group has already held several events including a reception with Al Ratner of Forest City Enterprises and co-sponsored the 2010 County Executive Candidates Forum in AsiaTown. The AABA has also partnered with the Norman S. Minor Bar Association to welcome newly admitted minority attorneys.

The CMBA is a strong partner with the AABA and has encouraged young attorneys who are members of both organizations to participate in the CMBA Connections Program, which hosts members-only luncheons with prominent leaders such as Cleveland Mayor Frank Jackson. The AABA also has liaisons within many of the CMBA sections and committees in order to look for opportunities to collaborate. On May 12th, the

AABA and the CMBA Criminal Law Section will host a joint CLE reenacting some of the key portions of the judicial proceedings arising out of the brutal murder of Vincent Chin. Please mark your calendars and join us for this dramatic re-enactment.

Future AABA events include participating in a Legal Aid Society Brief Advice Clinic as well as mentoring Asian law students at Cleveland Marshall College of Law and Case Western Reserve University. More information can be found online at: [www.aabaohio.org](http://www.aabaohio.org). Recently, the Asian law student chapters at both local law

schools have begun to work together on a joint event with Curtis Chin, renowned producer of the documentary "Vincent Who?".

Suffice it to say that the first pebble has been dropped into the still pond and the ripple effect of diversifying the legal profession has started.

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<sup>1</sup> Merriam Webster Dictionary

<sup>2</sup> MCCA Creating Pathways to Diversity From Lawyer to Business Partner: Career Advancements in Corporate Law Departments.

<sup>3</sup> MCCA 2010 Fortune 1000 Minority General Counsel Survey

<sup>4</sup> MCCA "Women General Counsel in the Fortune 500: Taking Risks and Setting the Standard for Success," MCCA Diversity & The Bar, May 2000.

<sup>5</sup> MCCA 2010 Survey of Fortune 500 Women General Counsel