

Focus on Diversity

For more information on items in this section, visit www.lsba.org/diversity.

Deadline is April 13 for 2015 Suit Up for the Future High School Program


The Louisiana State Bar Association, in partnership with the Just the Beginning Foundation and the Louisiana Bar Foundation, once again will host the 2015 Suit Up for the Future High School Internship Program this summer.

This program is available to incoming high school juniors, seniors and recent graduates interested in the legal profession. Students participate in a three-week legal institute, during which they attend an abridged law school session, field trips to law schools and

courts, and an internship consisting of shadowing at area law offices and courts.

Eligible students (students entering the 11th or 12th grade in the fall of 2015, or entering their first year of college) interested in attending the 2015 session should complete the online application at the web link below.

The application deadline is April 13. Students will receive notification of class acceptance by May 15.

For more information, go to: <https://www.lsba.org/diversity/hsinternapp.aspx>. 

“Freedom Riders” exhibit at Louisiana Bar Center

The Louisiana State Bar Association is hosting “The Freedom Riders,” a traveling exhibition developed by the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, in partnership with American Experience and funded through the National Endowment for the Humanities. The exhibit can be viewed from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. through March 27 at the Louisiana Bar Center, 601 St. Charles Ave., New Orleans, in the conference room hallway. To view the online exhibition, go to: www.gilderlehrman.org/sites/default/files/swff/freedomRiders/index.html. To listen to the audio file, go to: www.gilderlehrman.org/freedomriders/audio. 




In honor of Black History Month, the Louisiana State Bar Association’s Diversity Committee and the Young Lawyers Division’s Diversity Committee hosted a free CLE, “Inspiring a New Generation of Civil Rights Leaders,” on Feb. 19 at the Baton Rouge offices of Adams and Reese, L.L.P. A reception sponsored by Adams and Reese followed the seminar. Seminar speakers included, from left, U.S. Attorney J. Walter Green, Middle District of Louisiana; U.S. Attorney Stephanie A. Finley, Western District of Louisiana; and U.S. Attorney Kenneth A. Polite, Jr., Eastern District of Louisiana. They engaged young lawyers in a thoughtful discussion involving their role in civil rights cases.

Louisiana attorney is recipient of 2015 Herman Sweatt Award

James M. Williams, a partner in the Metairie law firm of Gauthier, Houghtaling & Williams, is one of the recipients of the 2015 Herman Sweatt Award, presented by the National Bar Association (NBA).

The award, which recognizes legal and social activist pioneers, will be presented at the NBA’s Midyear Conference and the 35th annual Gertrude E. Rush Awards Dinner. The conference is March 26-29 in St. Louis, Mo.

Williams practices in the area of civil litigation with a concentration in the areas of catastrophic personal injury and business litigation.

The Sweatt Award celebrates the legacy of Heman M. Sweatt. Award recipients must demonstrate the courageous spirit embodied by Sweatt, show leadership in the community/profession and a commitment to human and civil rights, be a model of excellence in legal education and show perseverance in the law, public policy and social activism. 

THIRD IN THE DISABILITY-RELATED SERIES!
Session 3: SSI/SSDI Law & the Solo Practitioner
Friday, April 17, 2015
Shreveport Bar Center
www.lsba.org/CLE



in the SPOTLIGHT

Transcendent Legal

Strong advocates for diversity and change in the legal community, Michelle D. Craig and Jade B. Russell live by the quote, “To whom much is given, much is required.” Both agree that their paths to the opening of their new law firm, Transcendent Legal, was not serendipitous, but instead was destined.

Craig and Russell met in 2002 while clerking at Jones Walker, L.L.P., in the summer of their 2L year. They became fast friends and, while their paths would lead them in different directions in the early part of their careers, they reunited years later to eventually launch Transcendent Legal, the first legal tech startup in this region.

After their 2L clerkship, Craig became an associate at Jones Walker. While there, she worked with the recruiting committee and championed diversity-related issues. At the same time, Russell joined Sidley Austin in Chicago and also devoted her time to diversity-related matters. In February 2007, both Craig and Russell returned to New Orleans to join Adams and Reese, L.L.P. While there, they both worked closely and tirelessly to recruit, retain and support the population of minority candidates in the legal profession. In 2010, Russell became the general counsel at Harrah’s Hotel and Casino, and Craig became the first black female partner in the Adams and Reese New Orleans office.

Both attorneys advocated to not only improve diversity in the legal profession but also to achieve a more inclusive and diverse workforce in the community. As founding members of the Urban League Young Professionals, they helped fill the need for a pipeline of young professionals in New Orleans. In their spare time, they spoke on panels, wrote articles and arranged events that gave a voice to young professionals, particularly minorities, whose numbers were dwindling in their respective fields.


In 2011, Craig and Russell co-founded Diversitea Divas, an organization that pro-

vides an intimate forum for professional women to network with and mentor college-aged young women. In that forum, the professionals are encouraged to tell their mentees the “truth” about their respective professions. They discuss the good and the bad and the triumphs and struggles of their professions and their lives. The goal is to provide meaningful connections from one generation to the next. The organization has grown to more than 100 members and continues to impact the lives of the mentees in significant ways.

In October 2014, Craig and Russell partnered to form their newest endeavor, Transcendent Legal. Headquartered in New Orleans, Transcendent Legal is the first model of its kind to innovate the practice of law in the Gulf South region. That innovation arises from three key components: 1) a focus on the client-lawyer partnership, 2) an efficient state-of-the-art web platform, and 3) a diverse legal team that analyzes the legal and business needs of the client from their unique perspectives. Russell’s experience as in-house counsel and Craig’s experience as outside counsel convinced them that these tools used collaboratively create a stronger, more solid client-lawyer relationship and provide much better legal outcomes.

“Diverse legal professionals offer unique perspectives to solve challenging problems and the new technology offers a more efficient way to solve those problems. It just makes sense to combine the two,” Craig said.

For Craig and Russell, it is exciting because as lawyers they are no longer working to change a system that already exists. Instead, they are doing what they do best — creating a new paradigm that focuses on making efficiency, excellence and inclusiveness the drivers for success.

For information about Transcendent Legal, go to: www.transcendentlegal.com. For more information about Diversitea Divas, go to: www.Diversiteadivas.org. 




Martinet Society Baton Rouge Chapter receives 2015 Guardian of Diversity Award

The Baton Rouge Chapter of the Louis A. Martinet Legal Society, Inc. is the recipient of the 2015 Guardian of Diversity Award.

The Martinet Society is founded on principles of diversity and the promotion of legal scholarship in Louisiana. Named after Louis André Martinet, the first African-American graduate of Straight University Law School, now Dillard University, in 1876, Martinet’s objectives were to encourage interchange of ideas, promote legal scholarship, advance the science of jurisprudence, promote the administration of justice, and uphold the order and ethics of the courts and the profession of law. The Martinet Society is an all-encompassing diverse society composed of men and women attorneys and attorneys of varying religions, creeds, ages and national origins.

In an effort to extend its reach in the community, the Baton Rouge Chapter frequently collaborates with other bar associations, local law schools, high schools and elementary schools. In so doing, the Chapter is able to promote diversity in the Baton Rouge community and has been recognized nationally for its efforts.

In 2011 and 2012, the National Bar Association (NBA) awarded the Baton Rouge Chapter with the Affiliate Chapter of the Year Award. This award is presented to NBA affiliates who champion diversity and scholarship in their local community. In keeping with its founder’s original creed, the Chapter continues to pursue diversity and collaborate with various organizations for the betterment of the Baton Rouge community and to promote diversity in the legal profession. 

The “In the Spotlight” section highlights diversity achievements and ground-breaking diversity accomplishments, primarily of signatories of the LSBA’s Statement of Diversity Principles. If you have recommendations for attorneys, judges or legal organizations that should be considered for future articles, call or email Tricia Pierre, (504)619-0129, tricia.pierre@lsba.org.