

NEWSLETTER

DIVERSITY MATTERS

EDITOR'S NOTE

“ What's Going On ”

-Marvin Gaye

As we all reflect on 2022 and set goals for 2023, one of our goals should be to renew our commitment to WG's DEI Strategic Plan. Although we all can easily (and quickly) become overwhelmed by never-ending to-do lists and responsibilities related to work, family, friends, and community, the mission of our WG and its Diversity Committee continues. In 2020, many of us recall that people were beginning to critically discuss race and privilege in the United States in an open and honest context. People were listening and having honest conversations that for so long had been treated as divisive and for many non-BIPOC (black, indigenous, and people of color - used to refer to members of nonwhite communities) individuals, perhaps a sense of embarrassment or guilt. Because many non-BIPOC individuals were becoming aware of the past while working for equality, there was a sense that we were evolving as a country and moving towards a more harmonious future.

In 2021, despite the promise of 2020 (and lessons learned), racial inequality, and discrimination, once again, became features of American normalcy. During 2021, a Texas politician sent a letter to education officials around the state with a list of approximately 850 specific books he claimed may violate a state law that limits how teachers can talk about race, sexuality, identity and human or civil rights. White high school students in Portland were found to have engaged with others around the country in an online mock “slave trade” of their few Black classmates.



Kenneth Sharperson

Partner and Director of
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

EDITOR'S NOTE CONTINUED...



In Davis County, Utah, the U.S. Justice Department investigated what was described as a pattern of school teachers and administrators ignoring racial harassment, bullying and outright discrimination against the district's few Black and Asian students. The investigation revealed persistent failures to respond to reports of race-based harassment of Black and Asian-American students by district staff and other students. Sadly, shortly after the agreement, a

10-year-old girl, Isabella "Izzy" Tichenor, died by suicide, and her family reported that she was harassed and teased, both because she was autistic and because she was Black, and was called the n-word by other students. In addition, antisemitism and Islamophobia are on the rise as evidenced by recent events in 2022.

While there is a thought process that suggests that things must get worse before they get better, but this vacillation is a dramatic pendulum swing that denies daily humanity to the groups that are being attacked. As a DEI leader, it has me asking, "what is going on?" Even still, we must continue our efforts to improve the world and our law firm through intentional acts and we encourage all of you to participate. In 2023, we will be instituting some programs to engage many more of you in our efforts and we encourage you to participate in all our initiatives, trainings, and programs.

In this edition, you will read about our 2022 success in the DEI space, a new WG DEI initiative to be implemented this year, some of the country's most celebrated Hispanic attorneys, our recent DEI training programs, and hear directly from and about some of our DEI committee members.

WEBER GALLAGHER'S DEI COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Cheryl Binosa	Kristin Kostrub	Dawn Nicholson	Michael Scott
Geralyn Brown	Matthew Laver	Elizabeth Okakpu	Laura Seider
Kathleen Devlin	Andrea LeRoy	Dineth Quinones	Kenneth Sharperson
Paul Fires	Valerie Lyons	Ralph Richardson	Kayla Vaks
Joi Fowler	Kelsey McCullough	Kimberly Rod	Tracy Walsh
Andrew indeck	Carolyn Mirabile	David Rosenberg	Scott Wilson
			John Zurzola

CELEBRATED HISPANIC ATTORNEYS WHO MADE HISTORY



DENNIS CHAVEZ

Dennis Chavez was the first American-born Hispanic senator elected to the U.S. Senate representing New Mexico. For more than 27 years, Chavez used his seat to defend the oppressed and uphold their rights. Throughout his career, he led with a strong civil rights agenda and introduced several civil rights reform bills such as the Fair Employment Practices Commission Bill which aimed to end racial discrimination in the workplace.



MIRIAM NAVEIRA DE MERLY

Miriam Naveira De Merly's career is a journey of breaking boundaries as both a female and Hispanic woman in the United States. She was born in Santurce, Puerto Rico, and obtained her law degree from the University of Puerto Rico. Naveira De Merly went on to become the first known Hispanic woman to argue before the U.S. Supreme Court. She is also the first woman to serve in the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico and its first female Chief Justice.

SONIA SOTOMAYER



Sonia Sotomayer was appointed to the Supreme Court in 2009. This appointment made her the first Hispanic woman to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court. Sotomayer previously worked in the Manhattan district attorney office and later moved to private practice, where she eventually became a partner. On November 27, 1991, Sotomayer was nominated to the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York.



STEPHEN N. ZACK

Photo from bsflp.com

Stephen N. Zack became the first Hispanic president of the Florida Bar in 1989 and he became the American Bar Association's first Hispanic president in 2010. Zack initially came to the United States as a refugee from Cuba and has spent his career fighting for the rights of others. He specializes in public interest litigation and is notably known for famous trials including Bush v. Gore and suits on behalf of the victims of Jeffrey Epstein.

WEBER GALLAGHER'S DEI COMMITMENT AND ACTION PLAN GOALS PROGRESS REPORT SUMMARY

IN 2022, WEBER GALLAGHER:



- **Expanded** the number of DEI internal learning and development programs
- **Exceeded our goal** of hosting an internal DEI social event once per quarter
- Increased hires of diverse individuals - **33% of new hires in 2022 were diverse**
- Worked with **six higher education institutions** on recruiting diverse attorneys and staff
- Appointed partner Kenneth Sharperson to serve as the firm's **first DEI Director**
- Leadership was recognized with a **Philadelphia Business Journal Diversity Business Award**
- Initiated its DEI Employee Demographic Survey with nearly a **60% response rate** so far
- Breakroom initiative was profiled by Law360 in a **Lens on Law Firm DEI feature**
- Summer law clerk program was a **predominantly diverse group**

Law360 Feature Profile

NO TOPIC IS OFF LIMITS AT FIRM'S DEI-FOCUSED 'BREAKROOM'



Midsize law firm Weber Gallagher Simpson Stapleton Fires & Newby LLP launched a virtual break room in 2020 to address diversity, equity and inclusion topics and current events head-on during the tumultuous period following the murder of George Floyd.

**Please note, a Law360 account is required to access this article.*

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AN ENRICHING EXPERIENCE

By: Keanna Seabrooks, Associate, Pittsburgh

During law school, I was fortunate enough to study abroad in Northern Ireland. While this was not my first time traveling abroad, it was the first time that I was traveling and living in a foreign land for an extended period of time away from my family and friends. Admittedly, I was afraid but took the plunge anyway. Today, I can say this was one of my most

coveted traveling experiences and I am forever grateful to have been afforded the opportunity to see and be in such a beautiful place that has a rich history and amazing people. Here are a few things I learned:

Self-Discovery

I have always loved the outdoors – I grew up hiking, riding ATVs in the mountains, swimming, canoeing, pedal boating, camping, etc. As such, being outdoors was not new to me. However, on this trip, I discovered my love for nature and the beauty of the world in its natural form, without all of the noise that I was so accustomed to. It was the first time that I had actually been present in nature for no particular reason (i.e., reaching the top of a mountain before sunset, racing friends on ATVs, canoes, etc.) and really had a moment to reflect on this amazing opportunity and what I desired from this experience and every experience in a new city, state, country, and continent thereafter.

Gratitude

During a conversation with several locals, I inquired about homes and buildings that appeared to have been bombed and the varying presence of people throughout the city. It was at this time that I learned of Brexit, a war that I was completely unaware of, for the first time. In one breath, I was astonished to learn how the citizens of Dublin were immediately impacted by it (i.e., large sections of the city still in rubble from bombings that occurred years prior, families that fled for better lives, some people still in search of their families after returning a year prior, etc.) because it was a European city and things like this just didn't happen in Europe. In another breath, I was in awe at their willingness to share their stories, gratefulness for the current state of things, and hope for a better future. Learning about Brexit made me realize that I knew very little about the world outside of the U.S., that I needed to seek knowledge beyond what I saw on the news, and, most importantly, that war is real and very close to those around me. It also made extremely grateful that I had never personally experienced war nor the very grave consequences of it.

We are much more alike, than we are different

As a self-starter, I immediately took it upon myself to explore the lay of the land upon arriving to Dublin. Of course, I got lost but found myself at a local restaurant that led to a refreshing conversation with a group of the waiters. To keep it short, we were very fascinated with one another's accents and ended up talking for hours about the U.S., Ireland, our cultures, politics, places I should visit while in Dublin, shopping, etc. Though it may seem trivial, this brief encounter along with several subsequent encounters made me realize that I continuously meet people of various ethnicities, backgrounds, walks of life, etc., who share a great





AN ENRICHING EXPERIENCE CONTINUED

deal of the same interests, perspective, beliefs, and values as me and many people I know. Of course, there are always outliers, but I have learned that we are much more alike than we are different.

While I could continue, I think it's best to end with this. My trip to Ireland was an enriching, eye opening experience that promoted personal development through heightening levels of awareness and discovery of self and others. It reignited my desire to travel and taught me that some of the greatest pleasures in life are as simple as being one with nature, knowing and having peace, and connecting with others. And, for that, I am forever grateful.

WEBER GALLAGHER'S DEI ACTION CHECKLIST

In 2023, Weber Gallagher is rolling out this initiative firmwide. This checklist only contains a few examples of how to get involved and educate yourself on diversity. We encourage you to explore other activities or contact Kenneth Sharperson, if you have any suggestions on how Weber Gallagher can better improve its DEI efforts.

ACTION CHECKLIST

- Join Weber Gallagher's Diversity & Inclusion Committee and actively participate.
- Recommend a diverse attorney or staff person for employment at Weber Gallagher.
- Write an article about diversity and inclusion for Weber Gallagher's diversity newsletter, Diversity Matters!
- Attend one (1) or more conferences, programs, or CLE seminars on diversity-related topics.
- Attend one (1) or more program(s) sponsored by Weber Gallagher's Diversity Committee.
- Participate in "The Breakroom," a small group discussion fostering a safe place to share your thoughts and experiences while learning about your colleagues.
- Read an article or book about diversity and inclusion.
- Develop a mentoring relationship with an attorney, law school graduate, or law student of a diverse background.
- Mentor a high school student, college student, or paralegal interested in pursuing a career in law.
- Learn about the impact of subtle, unconscious, and implicit bias by visiting Project Implicit at <http://www.projectimplicit.net> and take one of the surveys.



MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. DAY

Martin Luther King Jr. Day (officially Birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr., and sometimes referred to as MLK Day) is a federal holiday in the United States marking the birthday of Martin Luther King Jr. It is observed on the third Monday of January each year. Born in 1929, King's actual birthday is January 15 (which in 1929 fell on a Tuesday). The holiday is similar to holidays set under the Uniform Monday Holiday Act. The earliest Monday for this holiday is January 15 and the latest is January 21.

King was the chief spokesperson for nonviolent activism in the Civil Rights Movement, which protested racial discrimination in federal and state law. The campaign for a federal holiday in King's honor began soon after his assassination in 1968. President Ronald Reagan signed the holiday into law in 1983, and it was first observed three years later. At first, some states resisted observing the holiday as such, giving it alternative names or combining it with other holidays. It was officially observed in all 50 states for the first time in 2000.

“ We must use time creatively, in the knowledge that the time is always ripe to do right. ”

Martin Luther King, Jr.

In November, we celebrated Native American Heritage Month.

Native American Resources

[Native American Heritage Month](#)

[A History of Native Voting Rights](#)

[The National Museum of the American Indian Native Knowledge 360 Educational Resources](#)

[Celebrating Native American Heritage Month: Dos and Don'ts](#)



WRITER'S CORNER



Good News for Zoomers: The Benefits of a Remote Courtroom

By: Krizia Rivera, Associate, Bedminster

Zoomers, while not losing the decorum and respect for the courtroom, should see Zoom litigation as preseason football, or a warm-up for the regular season—for the day we all go back to the courtrooms.

Krizia Rivera recently contributed this article to The Legal Intelligencer.

READ MORE



'Stress, Drink, Leave' Study Highlights Risk Factors to Young, Female Attorneys

By: Adrianna Yanez, Associate, Philadelphia

The purpose of the study is expressly to examine an under-researched part of the attorney experience by systematically investigating specific factors and their impact on mental health, alcohol use and attrition in the legal profession.

Adrianna Yanez recently contributed this article to The Legal Intelligencer.



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MEMBER SPOTLIGHT!

ELIZABETH OKAKPU

Associate, Philadelphia

As a former Assistant City Solicitor for Philadelphia's Labor & Employment Unit, what were some of the types of matters you handled for the City of Philadelphia?

I handled both Labor and Employment matters in almost every department within the City of Philadelphia before various administrative boards and commissions, and in arbitrations, mediations, and state and federal court. Most of my cases were on behalf of the Phila. Police Department, Phila. Fire Department, Dept. of Prisons, and the Streets Dept. The labor matters involved issues alleging violations of the collective bargaining agreements between the City and its unionized workforce. Frequent labor issues: unfair labor practices, wrongful discipline, and class actions seeking to have a "class" of civil service positions allocated into a union or reallocated from one union to another. Employment cases frequently involved: sexual harassment, hostile work environment, gender/race/national origin discrimination, and retaliation.

What DEI initiatives were in place at the Philadelphia Law Department that we should know about?

In 2022, I was a co-chair of the Law Department's DEI committee until I joined Weber Gallagher last December. Every year the committee puts on a DEI focused CLE during the Law Department's two-day department-wide CLE presentations. Additionally, the committee regularly brings in DEI speakers from the legal community to engage the law department. The committee also assists executive leadership with incorporating DEI specific questions/surveys for self-reporting of new hires and to be used in exit interviews. More recently, the committee was in the process of reviewing and approving a handbook/guidance on diverse and inclusive language.

What attracted you to practice employment law?

I find employment interesting because it involves the way people treat each other in what should be a professional setting, differences in employee vs. employer perception, and how seemingly subtle issues can snowball to become out of control. The subject matter is so varied and because it involves people, often requires the ability to manage personalities on top of doing the legal work. The work is rarely dull.

I was also attracted to how employment law allows me to practice in various forums and experience all aspects of lawyering. I am able to practice at the administrative, state, and federal levels, and can work on a matter from its inception as an internal complaint, through settlement, or in those rare instances, to its conclusion at trial.

As an employment law specialist, what do you see as the biggest impact of DEI initiatives on the workplace?

DEI initiatives are bringing more awareness to the workplace and promoting conversations about issues that either have traditionally been ignored or only minimally discussed. DEI initiatives help to update the workplace to be more inclusive of life for the modern employee, and can provide safe spaces for those seeking guidance, solidarity, or simply to feel "seen" in instances that would historically have resulted in an "othering." The legal profession can sometimes be very slow to change, but DEI initiatives provide tools, pathways, and measurable goals for improvements.

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT CONTINUED

What do you enjoy about working at WG?

There is a great congenial spirit here. It feels like there's a village around me that wants me to succeed here long term. I have had many attorneys stop by my office to say hello or reach out via email. I also appreciate how it feels like several groups are working together to make us all successful. The Marketing and IT teams have been instrumental in making my transition from public service into private practice feel relatively seamless.

What piece of advice would you give young attorneys?

I am still a young attorney myself, but three things I have learned and practice are: 1) be open to and reflect on criticism/feedback because there is always something to learn, even when it does not feel good in the moment; 2) always be polite and professional to everyone you meet; and 3) turn off the feature on your smart watch that sends text messages from your phone or say excuse me before checking the message. I know it is convenient, but I don't think people realize how long they spend looking at their wrists when a message comes in. It can come off incredibly rude in conversation to do what looks like "checking the time."

What do you like to do outside of work?

I enjoy yoga, reading, cooking, and listening to podcasts.

PRO BONO 
GIVING BACK AND MAKING AN IMPACT

OVER THE PAST YEAR WE HAVE

DONATED
586.2 
HOURS



To more than 10 organizations

A 6% increase over 2021

WE OPENED
20 
MATTERS

Since January 2022

WEBER GALLAGHER'S PRO BONO MOVEMENT

We work with a wide range of organizations on pro bono matters, including:

Legal Services of Northwest Jersey
KIND

SeniorLAW Center

Philadelphia VIP

National Veterans Legal Services Program

Jewish Family & Community Services of Pittsburgh

Recent DEI Training Programs **at WG**

Taking Charge of Your Legal Career: Building a Roadmap for Your Success in Law

January 2023

This program featured a discussion with Google senior counsel Michael Costa who discussed his journey and provided insight on professional networking, business development, and in-house counsel relationships.

WATCH NOW



Creating an Inclusive Workplace

November 2022

An inclusive workplace is one where people with all kinds of differences and disabilities feel welcome and valued for their contributions. This program covered inclusion building blocks, including educating leaders, celebrating employee differences, listening to employees, holding effective meetings, communicating goals, and measuring progress.

WATCH NOW



Bridging the Generation Gap in the Workplace

October 2022

When generations recognize and respect their differences, they stay open to the opportunity to learn from each other. This program covered multi-generational workplace success strategies and tactics, including creating space for different communication styles, implementing collaborative training, encouraging flexibility, avoiding stereotyping, providing mentorship, and fostering belonging,

WATCH NOW



How to Become a Culturally Competent Attorney

August 2022

This program explored some of the skills and competencies necessary to successfully lead in a diverse and changing country, focusing on creating and maintaining a respectful, productive workplace for people of all kinds. Topics covered included:

- Understanding the importance of cultural competence and awareness
- Having a greater awareness of the unique backgrounds that impact and enhance individual experiences in our firm
- Taking practical steps towards creating a more genuinely inclusive work environment that respects the dignity and value of all persons, no matter their diverse viewpoints, beliefs, backgrounds, practices, or immutable characteristics
- Leveraging the value of genuine cultural differences to deliver excellent and innovative services to a wide range of clients or customers
- Employing practical tools and memorable strategies, both for your own benefit and when interacting with colleagues, clients, or customers

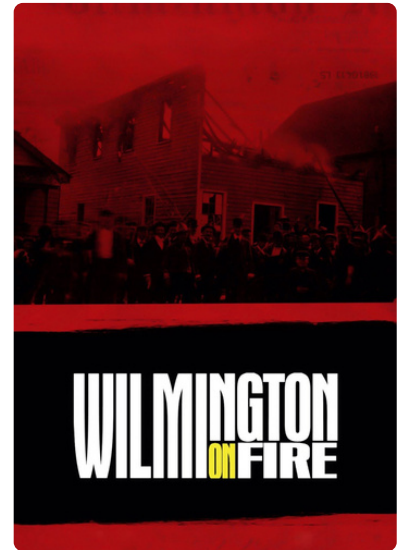
WATCH NOW



DID YOU KNOW WILMINGTON ON FIRE

In the 30 years after the civil war, African Americans in former Confederate states like North Carolina were slowly setting up businesses, buying homes, and exercising their freedom. During this time frame, Wilmington, North Carolina became a large and prosperous port, with a growing and successful black middle class. African Americans, however, still faced daily prejudice and discrimination - banks for instance would refuse to lend to black people or would impose punishing interest rates. Wilmington was even home to what was thought to be the only black daily newspaper in the country at that time, the Wilmington Daily Record.

In the 1890s a black and white political coalition known as the Fusionists - which sought free education, debt relief, and equal rights for African Americans - won every state-wide office in 1896, including the governorship. By 1898 a mix of black and white Fusionist politicians had been elected to lead the local city government in Wilmington.



This sparked a huge backlash. North Carolina's Democratic Party decided to embark on a white supremacy campaign to try to drive Populist and Republican politicians out of office during the 1898 election. The campaign used speeches, propaganda cartoons, and the threat of violence to create support for white supremacy.

On November 8, 1898, New Hanover County's Democrats used threats and intimidation to stop African Americans from voting. Pro-Democratic Party election officers tampered with the returns. Because of these tactics, Democrats swept the election. On November 10, 1898, two days after the contested election, a mob of armed white men marched to the office of The Daily Record, the local African American newspaper, and set it on fire.

After burning The Daily Record offices, a violent mob then took to the streets, and on the Northside of town, attacked African Americans. An unknown number of African Americans died. Other people, white and Black, were "banished" from the city. On the same day, local elected officials were forced to resign, and were replaced by white supremacist leaders.

This event was once referred to as a "riot," but history has confirmed that this was a white supremacist massacre and a coup d'état.

The link to the documentary trailer: <http://wilmingtononfire.com/about>