

Affiliate Spotlight: National Bar Association—National Focus

By Francine Bailey

Founded in 1925, the National Bar Association is the oldest and largest national association of African American attorneys and judges. The NBA was founded with just twelve members. Since then, the NBA has grown both in size and scope, continuing to focus on its mission: “to advance the science of jurisprudence regardless of race, sex or creed and to protect the civil and political rights of citizens and residents of the United States.”

The Young Lawyers Division of the NBA was formed in 1973 by Junias Williams, who chaired the YLD for three years and is also a Past President of the NBA. The NBA YLD’s goal is to assist young lawyers in their practices and professional development. To be a member, an attorney must be 36 years of age or younger, and/or in practice for six years or less.

The Affiliate spoke with immediate NBA YLD Past Chair, Eric Mathias. Eric has been active in the NBA YLD since 2003. During his tenure as Chair, he instituted an election protection challenge that encouraged members to participate in election protection activities. This, of course, was in addition to the YLD’s continuing programs to provide training for young lawyers. Last year, the NBA YLD presented four CLE programs, including one at the NBA Annual Convention. Typically, topics focused on young lawyers and their professional development. For example, during the year’s Congressional Black Caucus, the NBA YLD hosted a training program on resume and cover letter writing. Another program was entitled “How to Make the Best of Your Summer,” a program that discussed the “do’s and don’ts” of working during your summer clerkship.

As with many organizations, the focus of the NBA YLD changes with each bar year. *The Affiliate* spoke with this year’s incoming Chair, Lora Whitticker. Lora has been involved with the NBA YLD since 2005, when she attended the NBA convention in Orlando, Florida. Since then, she has risen in the ranks to become the incoming Chair for the upcoming bar year.

Lora’s focus this year will be on “building relationships that last a lifetime.” Recognizing that the YLD is the future of the NBA, she hopes to focus on networking and establishing the relationships that will promote networking and professional development. In that regard, Lora intends to have specific CLE courses and programming at each of the NBA conferences this year. In addition, she plans to have an intensive course on networking and relationship building at the YLD retreat to be held in May 2010 in Aruba.

The NBA YLD is a great organization for young African American attorneys to network and be involved. This national organization concentrates its efforts on a growing group of attorneys and typically focuses on community service and mentoring law students. Many of these mentorship activities center around interactions with the National Black Law Students Association (NBLSA). This connection makes sense for the NBA YLD, given that many NBLSA students are the future of the NBA.

Strong Ties Between the Young Lawyers Divisions of the NBA and ABA

The NBA YLD has always had strong links to the ABA YLD. That relationship became formal when the ABA devised a diversity plan—a part of which included creating a national affiliate representative position. The ABA’s national affiliate representatives (which include representatives from the NBA, the Hispanic National Bar Association, The National Asian Pacific American Bar Association, and the National GLBT Bar Association) are generally responsible for maintaining open lines of communication among these groups. Mathias believes there are many opportunities out there to connect each of the YLD divisions, including the several cross-sponsorships that have been devised. Because both the ABA YLD and the NBA YLD share a national scope, there are sure to be many future projects and opportunities that will bring the two organizations together.

Keeping Young Lawyers Actively Involved in the Digital Age

When *The Affiliate* asked Eric and Lora about engaging members, they each indicated that online social networking has been an extremely valuable tool. Members are able to learn about the activities and upcoming events of the NBA YLD through the active Yahoo! Group page, as well as through Facebook and the NBA website.

Like all organizations, the NBA YLD often faces challenges keeping members focused. To do so, the leadership tries to engage members in ways that include allowing members to participate without creating a strain on financial or time resources.

The NBA YLD has a busy year planned, filled with conferences, continuing legal education programs, and networking opportunities. *The Affiliate* wishes the Young Lawyers much success for the year and the future. We look forward to the myriad of collaborative opportunities between the two nationally focused groups!

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