

American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division
The Affiliate

Affiliate Spotlight: Dade County Young Lawyers Do It All

By M. Vittoria “Giugi” Carminati

What if a local affiliate single-handedly organized (1) a super lawyers’ mock trial competition, (2) regular CLEs, (3) professionalism and ethics seminars, (4) social events, (5) an annual fundraiser, (6) monthly recreational outings for foster children, (7) an e-mentoring program, and (8) sports events?

In addition, what if the same group provided (1) internships and mentoring for young women, (2) one-on-one bar passage tutoring for minority law students, and (3) musical instruments to children with disabilities? What if the local affiliate in question were a county affiliate of 1,900 members, rather than a state affiliate?

The short answer: the Dade County Young Lawyers Section (DCBA/YLS) boasts seven membership projects and six public service projects. Here are only a few of them.

Membership Projects

The Super Lawyer Mock Trial

The Dade County Young Lawyers Section organizes a “Super Lawyer Mock Trial.” The name of the event is self-explanatory. Trial attorneys compete in a mock trial competition with real judges and real jurors. Young lawyers are given the opportunity to watch. As Joshua Hertz, President of the DCBA/YLS, describes it: “There is just no other way to say it. It is just very cool! These are some of the best local attorneys around, and we get to watch them as if they are in a real trial.” The event usually takes place once a year.

Lunch with the Judges

Once a month the DCBA/YLS organizes a lunch with local judges. The set-up is ingenious because it is so simple and yet so effective. The event takes place at the Banker’s Club in downtown Miami. “A very fancy place. Just a beautiful venue,” says Joshua Hertz.

The group picks three different judges from different divisions each month. The event is limited to thirty people and three tables. Each table, as you probably guessed, has ten attendees and one judge. The meal consists of three courses. For every course the judge gets up and moves to the next table.

Joshua Hertz explains: “This gives young lawyers, especially young lawyers in large firms who don’t really go to court, the opportunity to network with judges.” Lawyers have the opportunity to ask questions in an informal setting. This fantastic networking opportunity in a beautiful venue with good food costs \$35.

Sporty Lawyers

Interestingly, what makes money for the DCBA/YLS are sports events. The DCBA/YLS organizes, among other sports events, a softball tournament, a bowling night, and a kickball tournament. The Sports Committee, charged with overseeing these events, plans two major events a year. Each spring, it organizes a softball tournament and recruits nonprofit legal employers and law firms to create teams. The cost is \$50 per person. The tournament is a one-day, all-day event. The Committee also organizes a kickball tournament using the same framework. Just recently the Dade County Bar won its first kickball tournament. More importantly, the event raised over \$3,000 that will help fund some of the child services programs.

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Funding the Section

Joshua Hertz explains that the DCBA/YLS funds all of its programs, in large part, with the proceeds from its “Bids for Kids.” This is, in Joshua Hertz’s words, “the premiere fundraiser.” The organization can make anywhere from \$20,000 to \$30,000. The evening usually takes place at a fancy hotel in downtown Miami, brings together 200–300 lawyers and judges, and features gaming, a silent auction, and heavy appetizers. Hotels, restaurants, travel companies, and others donate stays, meals, and trips. For example, at one silent auction attendees could bid on a first-class trip to Peru. If gambling, rather than bidding, is your thing, you can win chips by playing blackjack, poker, or roulette. The chips then can be exchanged for raffle tickets. At the end of the evening, the DCBA/YLS raffles off prizes.

Public Service

Empowering Children with Disabilities

The Committee on Empowering Children with Disabilities plans and executes a yearly fundraiser to purchase instruments for children with disabilities. The Committee selects a local school to donate the instruments to. The local program, in turn, provides music therapy to children with disabilities.

The Horizons Committee

The Horizons Committee works to secure summer internships for underprivileged teenage girls. In preparation for the girls’ internships, Committee members serve as positive role models for these motivated young women for a year and plan seminars to hone their skills and talents. Lastly, Committee members coordinate events that help the young women become aware of the various professions available to them.

Kids Club

The Kids Club plans monthly recreational and educational outings for local foster children. The program aims to foster long-term mentoring relationships between attorneys and at-risk children.

Minority Bar Passage Project

The Minority Bar Passage Project assists local law students to prepare for the essay portion of the Florida Bar Exam. Each law student is paired with a practicing attorney who acts as a tutor and mentor during the six weeks leading up to the exam. The Committee recruits participants and tutors. In addition, the Committee develops the program into a one-night-a-week, six-week series. Last year the Committee matched fifty students with mentors.

The DCBA/YLS is to be congratulated for its ability to improve the lives of so many people and, therefore, improve the quality and image of the legal profession as a whole. So indeed, more than a congratulation, we should extend a thank you.

M. Vittoria “Giugi” Carminati is an Assistant Editor of The Affiliate and a Litigation Associate in the Houston, Texas, office of Weil, Gotshal Manges LLP.
