

LEGACY IN THE MAKING: THE LAS VEGAS LATINO

BY JOCELYN A. CORTEZ, ESQ.

LATINO BAR
ASSOCIATION
MEMBERS



Alex De Castroverde



Arlene Rivera



Enrique Acuña



Jose Valenzuela III



Mariteresa Rivera-Rogers



Romeo Perez



LBA members in Judge Gloria Navarro's courtroom, From left to right: Arlene Rivera, Sophia Medina, Jose Valenzuela, Judge Gloria Navarro, Carmen Amen, Alex De Castroverde, Judge Valorie Vega, Elizabeth Estrada, Siria Gutiérrez, Judge William Gonzalez, Mariteresa Rivera-Rogers, Enrique Acuña, Jocelyn Cortez, Sylvia Tiscareño, and Romeo Perez.

Photo courtesy of the Latino Bar Association.

The Las Vegas Latino Bar Association (LBA), in its inception and evolution, embodies the dynamism of the growing bar of Hispanic attorneys in southern Nevada. Since its foundation 14 years ago, the LBA has grown as a professional organization that not only supports its members in their trajectory of success, but also one that serves as a valuable resource for the Hispanic community. Because it is imperative to have a bar that reflects the diversity and nuances of its community as a whole, the LBA also aspires to cultivate mentorship for practitioners and future attorneys alike.

Formed at the turn of the millennium in 1999, the LBA followed in the footsteps of an earlier group of Hispanic attorneys, which existed in the valley during the 1980s: the Latin-American Bar Association. Seizing the opportunity to assemble Hispanic practitioners anew, the LBA was formed as an affiliate of the Hispanic National Bar Association. The LBA's purposes are manifold: to advance the standing of Hispanics in the legal profession, to serve the public interest, to promote reform in the law, to facilitate the administration of justice, to preserve the high standards of professionalism among Hispanic attorneys, and to cooperate with other professional and community organizations in furthering these purposes.

The LBA has continued to move forward as a result of the palpable growth in numbers of Hispanic practitioners since its formation. The LBA's membership, and no doubt the Nevada bar as a whole, has also benefited during the last few years, from a steady flow of graduates from the William S. Boyd School of Law at UNLV. Approximately 26 percent of the LBA's members are alumni of our home-state's law school. In 2014, the LBA will be able to boast of its first Boyd alumnus, Siria Gutierrez, taking the office of president.

The LBA has been called upon to not only provide professional enrichment for its growing membership, but to respond to issues that the Hispanic community faces on a daily basis. In March 2012, the LBA hosted its first cross-community cocktail mixer, during which members of local Hispanic organizations, including cultural associations, foreign consulates, Spanish-language press and religious organizations met with LBA members. During the event, several community members expressed their concern regarding the widespread, unauthorized practice of law within Las Vegas' Spanish-speaking population – mainly perpetrated by notarios

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(notaries). To be sure, this is a yet-unquantified epidemic wherein individual non-attorneys cost numerous people their legal rights (and sometimes more), usually practicing in the arenas of immigration law, bankruptcy law, family law and real estate/loan modification law. In June 2012, the LBA hosted a round-table discussion with members of the State Bar of Nevada and the Attorney General's office in order to increase awareness of this predatory problem, disseminate information about how different state agencies are handling the problem, and to determine how the LBA can best facilitate an information exchange between the bar and the vulnerable portions of the Hispanic population in Las Vegas.

In addition to continuing its work raising awareness of the notario issue, the LBA encourages its members to participate in various community activities. For instance, many LBA members participate in the Ya Es Hora! ("It is time") citizenship campaign workshops; these offer free-of-charge assistance with naturalization applications to qualified legal permanent residents, including review by an immigration attorney. LBA members also serve as the top tier in La Voz's Huellas pipeline mentorship program. Another area of focus for the LBA is the scholarship fund it will establish for Hispanic students wishing to pursue careers in the law.



Chief Deputy District Attorney Brian Rutledge and State Assemblywoman Lucy Flores at an LBA event.

Photo courtesy of the LBA.

In addition to cultivating stronger ties outside the legal community, the LBA wants to increase its engagement throughout the bar, participating in events with groups, such as the Nevada Justice Association and other ethnic minority bars. In 2010, alongside the Asian Bar Association, the Las Vegas chapter of the National Bar Association and the South Asian Bar Association, the LBA hosted a judicial candidate meet-and-greet. Most recently, in December 2012, the LBA partnered with the Las Vegas chapter of the National Bar Association to host a joint holiday mixer and toy drive.

The LBA has experienced momentous growth and maturity in its first 14 years and, no doubt, will continue to do so. To become part of this dynamic organization, please e-mail latinobarlv@gmail.com. The LBA hosts an event every third Thursday of the month, alternating between speaker-centered luncheons and cocktail mixers. Please also visit our website at <http://latinobarlv.com> and find us on Facebook. ■



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