



FOCUSING OUR EFFORTS ON TOMORROW, TODAY

BY ADRIAN D. THOMPSON

When I began my term as CMBA president in July 2022, one of my primary goals was to harness the strengths of our robust bar community to tackle head-on the legal challenges facing Cleveland and Northeast Ohio.

The list is long. It includes advocating for the rule of law in our communities, increasing access to justice across the region, and helping shape our response to significant social issues: voting rights issues, including Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act, perhaps the most powerful remaining provision of the 1965 landmark civil rights law; election disputes and denialism; reproductive health and reproductive rights; the noticeable increases in violence and hate crimes across the nation; and race-conscious admissions programs, just to name a few.

All this at a time when the profession is facing significant challenges, most notably around the importance of inclusion in boardrooms, courtrooms, and workplaces nationwide, decreasing law school enrollment coupled with increasing tuition costs that exacerbate challenges for students from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds, technologies and artificial intelligence that are disrupting the practice of law, changing business models, and more.

The CMBA has stepped up to help address some of these issues. *Legacy150*, marking the 150th year of the CMBA, gives us all the chance to reflect on our accomplishments of the past, while also looking forward, continuing the tradition of guiding our local bar's future lawyers and leaders while increasing access to justice in Northeast Ohio. The crown jewel of *Legacy150*, the

Cleveland Legal Collaborative (CLC), is designed to address those two specific needs.

For the Northeast Ohio community, the CLC will provide high-quality, affordable legal services to those who do not qualify for assistance from the Legal Aid Society but still lack access to justice. It's a new, broad-reaching initiative to keep more people from falling into the justice gap.

To achieve this, the CLC will engage newer lawyers in two-year paid fellowships where they connect with seasoned lawyers who will mentor and teach them to balance their practice, manage clients, and develop new business.

It's a win-win situation: meeting the needs of Northeast Ohio's next generation of lawyers while providing expanded access to justice community-wide through an effort that exemplifies the CMBA's rich history and commitment to Northeast Ohio's legal, business, and civic communities.

In addition, *Legacy150* is setting the stage for the CMBA to continue advancing our core value of conscious inclusion through expansion of workforce development programs like The 3Rs, Ohio and Cleveland Mock Trial Programs, Louis Stokes Scholars, Minority Clerkship programs, and more. It will also allow the CMBA to further assist those organizations and individuals who see value in equity, inclusion, and diversity through the Racial Equality and the Law Workgroups and the Racial and Gender Equity Toolkit.

However, it would not be a 150th anniversary celebration without a party. On June 24, the CMBF will host *Rock the Bar* at the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, the biggest party in Bar history. Attendees will enjoy live music, entertainment, and food and drinks as they honor recipients of the once-in-a-

lifetime *Legacy150* Awards: Living Legacies and Legacies in the Making.

Naturally, I cannot take credit for the *Legacy150* year-long celebration merely because it started during my presidency. Countless members, CMBA and CMBF leaders, and CMBA staff contributed to nurturing the seed of an idea — how to mark the CMBA's milestone event and shape the next 150 years of the Cleveland and Northeast Ohio legal community while promoting the rule of law, creating opportunities for the membership to give back to the community, and inspiring the next generation of legal and business professionals — into the vibrant and exemplary initiative it has become.

In particular, it was only through the dedicated leadership and practical guidance of CMBA CEO Becky Ruppert McMahon that *Legacy150* came to fruition. In addition, CMBF President Larry Zukerman, CMBF Officers and Directors, CMBA Officers Judge John Russo, Jennifer Himmelein, Dr. Tami Bolder, Dennis Medica, Awatef Assad, the Board of Directors, Section and Committee Chairs, and the CMBA staff also deserve recognition for their efforts.

It has been an honor and a privilege to serve with this distinguished group and to lead the CMBA this year. I look forward to seeing you on June 24 at the Rock Hall or Rock & Roll Hall of Fame.

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