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Walking Together on the Path to Unity

by Gwynne A. Young

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Born with cerebral palsy, Timothy A. Moran zooms around in a power chair, and, because he is unable to write, he uses Dragon Naturally Speaking computer technology to dictate and complete pleadings for his clients.

Now in a solo practice in Oviedo, he began his career volunteering for legal aid, calling pro bono a duty and privilege.

Logging more than 600 hours of pro bono work for more than 150 low-income clients, Moran was honored with this year's Young Lawyers Division Pro Bono Service Award. At the Supreme Court ceremony, he told of one client duped into paying a mortgage on a poorly built mobile home on land she no longer owned. Working with Community Legal Services of Mid-Florida, Moran was able to reverse the defected deed and get her land back free and clear.

After all of the paperwork was signed, his client said, "Mr. Moran, does that mean I can plant my tulips where I want?"

"Yes, ma'am," Moran told her.

Moran has said "yes" to being fully involved in The Florida Bar.

The 35-year-old Moran, whose practice focuses on foreclosure defense, is a member of the YLD, as well as the Real Property, Probate and Trust Law Section. His Bar participation keeps him abreast of current developments in real estate law so that he can better serve his clients.

"The legal profession is one that embraces diversity, and, as such, my disability has not been a barrier," Moran said. "In short, our profession has allowed me to be different while making a difference."

Moran is one face of diversity at The Florida Bar.

Allow me to introduce you to another: Tara Rao, born in Madras, India, came to the United States when she was three, and speaks Tamil and Kannada, her native language, as well as English and conversational Spanish.

Now, she communicates fluently with leaders of The Florida Bar after meeting former Bar President Scott Hawkins while he was crisscrossing the state campaigning for the office. Hawkins told Rao he had never heard of the South Asian Bar Association of Florida, where she served as vice president. She invited him to attend a board meeting in Tampa. Hawkins, in turn, appointed Rao to the Bar's Special Committee on Diversity and Inclusion, where she still enthusiastically serves.

"I have to say, initially, I didn't know how to get involved with the Big Bar," said Rao, who also serves on the Hillsborough Association for Women Lawyers Diversity Committee.

"I didn't know how to fit in and how to get an appointment and how to get active."

A sole practitioner in Lutz — handling estate planning, probate, guardianships, and business planning — Rao recently became a RPPTL fellow. She considers her RPPTL fellowship to be a scholarship that gives her a grant to attend meetings and go to conferences, and she is assigned a seasoned attorney who introduces her to other section members and answers her questions.

"Just sitting on the sidelines, you have no right to complain," Rao said. "Not only do you have a voice, but you are able to give back. It helps you personally and it helps you professionally."

These are two diverse lawyers of 93,895 members of our very diverse Florida Bar.

As of June 1, 35 percent of our members are women. From Pensacola to Key West, our state is geographically diverse, and so are the practice areas of our lawyers. A significant number of our members — 15 percent — are government lawyers, and that's why we added a government lawyer as a liaison to the Board of Governors. Currently, Ward Griffin, who works at the U.S. Commodity Futures Trading Commission in Washington, D.C., is serving in that capacity.

One objective of the Bar's strategic plan is to encourage and promote diversity and inclusion in all aspects of the legal profession, legal education, and in the justice system — affirming our commitment to a diverse and inclusive environment with equal access and equal opportunity for all.

Earlier this year, the Bar hired Arnell Bryant-Willis as its first diversity initiative manager, and she is working on the Bar's inclusion effort. The Bar's focus on inclusion goes far beyond ethnicity and race to also encompass practice area and geographic diversity; sole practitioners; women; persons with disabilities; and the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender community.

The Special Committee for Diversity and Inclusion, chaired by Kevin McNeill, helps administer the Voluntary Bar Association Diversity Leadership Grants.

Over the past three years, the Bar has given \$150,000 in grants — with individual grants up to \$1,500 and up to \$3,000 for voluntary bars working together — for projects that encourage diversity, diversity training, and dialog among lawyers.

I encourage voluntary bars to apply for these grants. The next application deadline is February 16, 2013. To read previous successful grant recipients and for more information, go to the Voluntary Bar Center page on the Bar's website: www.floridabar.org.

You may have seen the Bar's new diversity initiative logo unfurled at the Annual Convention in June and on the front page of the July 1 Bar News: A path leads upward over multi-colored squares, and the words proclaim: "Inclusion. . . The Path to Unity."

There's no great mystery in what it means to be inclusive. Simply put, it means feeling comfortable about trusting people, even though we have our differences. It means learning and broadening our perspectives by listening to the voices of others. It means giving people a chance to fully participate in the Bar and in our legal profession.

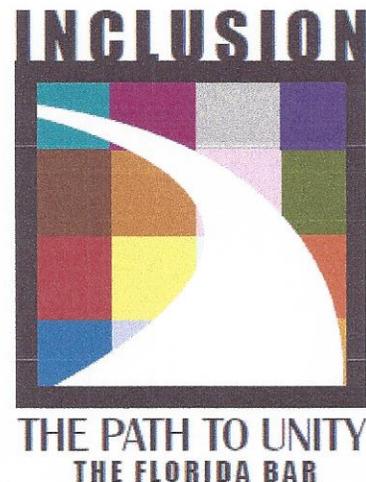
It's walking together on that path to unity.

You've probably heard the Florida Lottery's slogan to entice you to peel off a dollar from your wallet and take a chance at winning millions: "You can't win if you don't play."

Well, I say something similar when it comes to being appointed to one of The Florida Bar's many committees: If you don't apply, we can't appoint you. And, I assure you, the odds of winning are a whole lot better.

Bar President-elect Gene Pettis will be making the Bar's next 500 or so committee appointments. We both encourage *all* of our members to apply — beginning December 1 until the deadline of January 15, 2013.

There are many other opportunities for Bar involvement, including working on grievance committees, where members are appointed



by your local BOG representatives. And everyone is welcome to become involved in one of the Bar's 22 sections, as well as the YLD for our newer members.

Who really wins when we have diverse members in the Bar's leadership roles? We all win. It's not "us" versus "them." We're all in this legal profession together, and we want to include everyone who wants to participate fully in the activities of The Florida Bar.

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