The Lee County Bar Association's Diversity & Inclusion Committee's "Diversity: The Art of Thinking Independently Together"

The Lee County Bar Association President **– Mr. Matthew Roepstorff, Esq.**
***Lee County Bar Association's Diversity & Inclusion Committee Co-Chairs*:**
Ms. Ita M. Neymotin, Regional Counsel for the Office of Criminal Conflict & Civil Regional Counsel, Second District Court of Appeal
Hon. Kathleen A. Smith, Public Defender, 20th Judicial Circuit
Lee County Bar Association's Diversity & Inclusion Committee Members: **Ms. Kelly L. Fayer, Esq., Past President, Lee County Bar Association; Ms. Lauren Baugh, Lee County Bar Association Executive Director; Mr. Henry Lee Paul, Esquire, Past Member of the Supreme Court Commission on Professionalism; Mr. Jeffrey W. Hurcomb, Partner at Roberts, Reynolds, Bedard, & Tuzzio, PLLC.**

The Lee County Bar Association's Diversity & Inclusion Committee presented "Diversity: The Art of Thinking Independently Together" on June 26, 2020. The fabulous speakers at this program shared their own personal experiences and their views on the importance of increasing diversity and inclusion.



The Honorable Judge Devin George provided opening remarks for this program. She introduced the Honorable Senate Majority Leader Kathleen Passidomo.





The Honorable Senate Majority Leader Kathleen Passidomo was interviewed by Florida Senator Aaron Bean. She discussed the key issues of diversity within our government as well as the Florida Senate. Senator Aaron Bean explained that Senator Passidomo has a unique perspective having served in The Florida House previously, and serving in The Florida Senate currently. She explained the importance of respecting opinions from people of different backgrounds and how to communicate without using social media outlets. Senator Passidomo concluded her presentation by giving very valuable advice to young attorneys.



Ms. Dori Foster-Morales, Esq., Florida Bar President spoke about the Florida Bar's strategic plan which includes diversity and inclusion. She discussed her experience as a member of the Florida Bar of Governors and the increased diversity during her tenure as a member. She thanked the Florida Bar's Leadership Academy for increasing the diversity of leadership within the Florida Bar. Ms. Dori Foster-Morales explained her journey to leadership, and commended the Lee County Bar Association for making diversity and inclusion a priority.



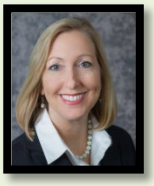
Mr. Michael Tanner, Esq., Florida Bar President –Elect said it is essential for us to have a diverse and inclusive Bench and Bar Association. He further discussed the importance as well as the benefits of having a diverse Judicial Nominating Committee (JNC). Mr. Michael Tanner stated that a diverse JNC will increase the people's confidence in the integrity and fairness of the judicial system. He suggests that attorneys take advantage of The Florida Bar's Diverse and The Florida Bar's Voluntary Bar Association Grant Program.



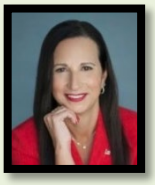
Ms. Rebecca Bandy, Director of the Henry T. Latimer Center on Professionalism discussed the challenges of life during the Coronavirus. She discussed her personal experiences during this time. Ms. Rebecca Bandy stressed that professionalism is still as important as it has always been. She concluded her presentation by sending her best wishes to the audience and their families.



Mr. Eugene Pettis, Esq., Former Florida Bar President said that he believes we are stronger when we reach out of our comfort zone and stand together. He shared his daughter's experience with diversity. He asked people to go to work and be bold and break the mold, to let people in. Mr. Pettis commended the audience on taking the time to help with diversity and inclusion which will inevitably make the State of Florida better, the Florida Bar better, and at the end of the day, the communities will be better as well.



The Honorable Linda Doggett, Lee County Clerk of Court, stated that the Clerk's Office is here to serve the community; they have a culture of being professional and caring for their peers and their customers. For the Clerk's Office, diversity and inclusion means caring about people as well as helping them.



The Honorable Amira Fox, State Attorney, 20th Judicial Circuit stated that she is proud to have a diverse and inclusive State Attorney's Office. She encourages her staff to be active in the community so they can get to know the community members that they serve. The members of the State Attorney's Office conduct themselves everyday with honesty, integrity and respect. They seek justice for all equally.



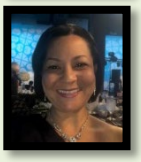
Mr. Michael Raheb, Esq. shared the quote from Mr. Muhammad Ali where he says, "Me, We." Mr. Raheb said, "We all won, God bless us all".



Ms. Sarah Owen, President & CEO Southwest Florida Community Foundation, talked about the question posed about which leadership qualities did we think were most important in changing the world. Ms. Owen said the answers that struck her the most were "listening to voices unheard", "hold opposing values intention", "avoiding the conformity trap", and "a partner with humility and audacity".



Ms. Amy McQuagge, Vice President of Sanibel Captiva Community Bank stated a quote by Verna Myers, "Diversity is being invited to the dance, inclusion is being asked to dance."



Ms. Melissa Barris, Esq. quoted her grandmother who would say, "In all your gaining, gain understanding." Ms. Melissa Barris further stated "When we are diverse, we allow ourselves to develop a team of different mindsets to deal with today's issues in the legal field, and in the community."



Mr. Matthew Roepstorff, The Lee County Bar President concluded the program by thanking the speakers, viewers, and the Diversity & Inclusion Committee. He explained that each person has a responsibility to his/her community to be an independent thinker, and not accept someone else's viewpoint. Mr. Roepstorff encouraged everyone to come together to share those thoughts in a respectful, civil, and polite way in an environment of understanding.