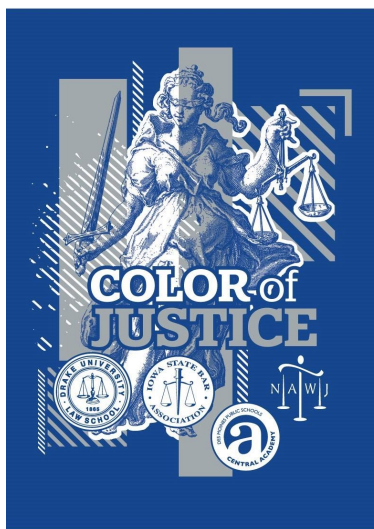




OCTOBER 2023
Annual Report from District 9
Honorable KAREN A ROMANO

IOWA, MISSOURI, WISCONSIN

1. Continue to work on outreach to members and encourage new membership. Unable to get response for State chairs in Missouri and Wisconsin but will continue to reach out.
2. Successful Color of Justice Program. On March 7, 2023, District 9 hosted the Second Annual Color of Justice event in Des Moines, Iowa. Judge Celene Gogerty was the moving force in organizing this event. Thirty-three amazing students from Des Moines Public Schools Central Academy were inspired by panel discussions regarding attending law school and beyond. This event was co-sponsored by NAWJ District 9, Des Moines Public Schools, Drake University College of Law, and the Iowa State Bar Association. Attorney Anjela Shutts, a past-president of the Iowa State Bar Association was invited to join the planning committee and she secured funding from the ISBA. Lawyers, judges, law school staff (including the dean), and law students provided inspiration. The statewide newspaper, the Des Moines Register, covered the event as well. In addition to the panels, the students were able to speak with lawyers and judges one-on-one over a provided lunch. Lastly, the students received swag including a custom designed Color of Justice t-shirt. Below is a photo, the Register article, and the image from the t-shirt.



This article appeared in the Des Moines Register on March 10, 2023. (online on March 8, 2023)
<https://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/news/2023/03/07/at-color-of-justice-event-students-of-color-explore-careers-in-law/69978108007/>

At Color of Justice event, DM students of color explore law careers

F. Amanda Tugade
Des Moines Register
USA TODAY NETWORK

Roosevelt High School students Ealaf Adam, Dalren Castro and Angelina Dang each grew up watching members of their families go through the legal process.

They saw loved ones face language barriers and struggle to understand the law, find lawyers or fill out legal documents. Adam, 18, recalled attending Immigration court hearings for her mother, a Sudanese refugee, while 16-year-old Dang said she interpreted legal advice for her parents, translating “big words” she didn’t even know from English to Vietnamese.

But an event on Tuesday at Drake University helped the three teens open their eyes — that maybe their personal experience could lead to a potential career in law.

Adam, Castro and Dang were among

30 students of color from Des Moines Public Schools invited to tour the university’s law school and legal clinic and hear from alumni and current law students about their journeys into the legal profession. Called the Color of Justice, the nearly daylong event was sponsored by the university and the National Association of Women Judges, with funding provided by the Iowa Bar Association and the Central Academy Alumni Network.

District Judge Celene Gogerty and District Associate Judge Romonda Belcher, both of whom graduated from Drake, helped lead the event and moderate panel discussions.

Belcher, who made history by becoming Iowa’s first Black female judge, said the Color of Justice is an opportunity for young people to see individuals who look like them pursuing degrees or careers in various fields of law.

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High school students from Des Moines Public Schools listen as four Drake University law students share their experiences during a panel event Tuesday. DES MOINES PUBLIC SCHOOLS/SPECIAL TO THE DES MOINES REGISTER

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Careers

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People of color are widely underrepresented in the legal profession, the American Bar Association (ABA) reported. In 2020, only 5% of lawyers were Black — a percentage that has remained the same for nearly a decade — and about 5% were Hispanic, according to the ABA. While 40% of the U.S. population are people of color, 18% of state high court justices are Black, Latino, Asian American, Native American or multiracial, the Brennan Center for Justice recently reported.

“This event really showed like these people are you and you are them,” said Adam, a senior at Roosevelt, who sat behind Belcher during the lunch portion of the event. “That you can be in their spot and you can inspire others to do the same. It’s really important that we get to actually see people who have similar experiences to us and are actually in law.”

Dang, a sophomore at Roosevelt, told the Des Moines Register she enjoyed listening to guest speakers and learning that their path to studying law wasn’t “smooth.”

Take for instance Gloria Soto, a third-year law student who once worked in special education before making a career pivot and applying for law school. Or Carlos Lopez, another third-year law student, who wasn’t sure what to do with his undergraduate degree in public administration and law enforcement management. Law student Michael Sharp said he went into undergrad with an undeclared major, and classmate Darlann Garrison-Nickerson said she was mainly focused on playing college ball.

In a panel discussion, they spoke about pursuing law, navigating the college application process and handling the stress and demands of law school. Some opened up about being first-generation college students in higher education and overcoming the challenges to find resources, mentors and job opportunities.

Lopez, 28, told the teens that he was an average student and a two-sport athlete in high school and helped his mother keep the books to her business. He had decent grades even in college and “didn’t really have a career planned out.” He went with the flow.

Lopez said the lesson there is to just try. You have to “motivate yourself” and be willing to go to those lengths when you find something you’re passionate about.

Echoing Lopez, Belcher said she shared this advice with participating students.

“Don’t let anybody tell you you’re not smart enough,” she told the Register. “(That) you aren’t the right race. You don’t have the education, you don’t have enough experience. If you lack something, go get that thing so you can prepare yourself for the opportunity when it presents itself to you.”

F. Amanda Tugade covers social justice issues for the Des Moines Register. Email her at ftugade@dmreg.com or follow her on Twitter @wrtfelftssa.

3. Judge Celeste Bremer is working with the Roadways to the Bench program through the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts. She attended the April 3, 2023 program held in Minneapolis. Judge Bremer hopes to bring the program to Iowa in the future. The flyer from the program contained the following summary:

On April 3, 2023, the federal judiciary will hold its second nationwide Roadways to the Bench event as part of the Strategic Plan for the Federal Judiciary to achieve its goal of a judiciary “comprised of a diverse complement of highly competent judges, employees, and CJA attorneys.”

Interested lawyers and law students are invited to observe a national live-streamed panel discussion followed by local roundtable discussions with bankruptcy, magistrate, district, and appellate judges about pathways to the federal bench.

The national panel, which will be moderated by Judge Carl E. Stewart (5th Cir.), is comprised of Judge Stephanie Dawkins Davis (6th Cir.), who previously served as a district judge from 2019 to 2022 and as a magistrate judge from 2016 to 2019; Judge Laura Taylor Swain (S.D.N.Y.), who previously served as a bankruptcy judge from 1996 to 2000; Bankruptcy Judge Kesha Tanabe (Bankr. D. Minn.); and Magistrate Judge Mustafa T. Kasubhai (D. Or.).

The first Roadways to the Bench event was held in 2019. Ten lawyers who attended that event are now federal judges.

4. Judge Celene Gogerty has been presenting a monthly Lunch and Learn CLE Series for the judges of the Fifth Judicial District of Iowa, prosecutors and defense attorneys on a variety of criminal law subjects.
5. Emily Chafa is co-chairing the Iowa State Bar Association’s 150th Year Celebration committee. Retired Judge Donna Paulsen is chairing a sub-committee to address the contributions of Iowa Women Attorneys to the law and the ISBA. Judge Paulsen has invited a group of women attorneys and retired/senior women judges to work with her to develop ideas to recognize the contributions of Iowa women in the law.