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Duane Morris lawyer wins Women of Excellence Award

By Jerry Crimmins
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Duane Morris LLP's Cheryl Blackwell Bryson, head of the employment, labor, benefits and immigration practice group in the Chicago office, has been named a recipient of the Chicago Defender's 2010 Women of Excellence Award.

Bryson is also chair of the board of trustees of the DuSable Museum of African-American History and has been on that board for at least seven years.

"I have tried consciously to be a role model for black men, women and children, and not just them, but it's just in my personality to be a mentor for everybody," she said. "I've mentored white men ... white females" and minorities, she said.

"I'm a walking mentor. I was raised in a home where my father [Clarence David Blackwell] said, 'To whom much is given,



Cheryl Blackwell
Bryson

much is expected."

David B. Yelin, managing partner of Duane Morris' Chicago office, said, "She's frankly been a mentor to me since I've been here." Yelin has been in that office 10 years.

Bryson was one of the founding partners of the Chicago office in July 1999. She has been the head of the labor and employment committee of a major law firm.

A lawyer since 1977, Bryson believes she was one of the first black lawyers to head a practice group and one of the first black women to be on the management committee of a major law firm.

"Clients love her. She's very inspirational," Yelin said. "We all go to clients to do seminars and programs, and Cheryl attracts a following like the Pied Piper. She knows how to relate to people."

"Whatever I do," Bryson said, "I listen and I mentor, and I help people achieve their dreams, and that's been my secret to being a Pied Piper."

Bryson represents middle-market and Fortune 500 companies in many industries on labor and employment law and litigation issues before federal and state agencies and state and federal courts.

She also provides legal counsel on claim

avoidance, internal investigations, alternative dispute resolution and other defense aspects regarding equal-employment opportunity claims.

The Chicago Defender newspaper annually honors 50 women for outstanding achievement. In their selections announced this month, the paper cited Bryson's path-making career in the legal profession as well as leadership of the DuSable Museum.

It is the first museum in the U.S. for African-American history and is known internationally, Bryson said.

"People in Paris know us. People in South Africa know us," she said.

She said when she took over in 2009 as board president, she persuaded the board to hire a new chief executive officer for the museum, Carol L. Adams, who had been founding director of Museums and Public Schools, which develops curricula to make museums a resource for Chicago schools.

Bryson said she would like to see the DuSable Museum begin after-school programs for children that would include wellness education along with history.

She said her view of the museum is that "it is going to make a difference in the lives of our children, particularly black children."