

DIVERSITY

& THE BAR.

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MINORITY CORPORATE COUNSEL ASSOCIATION

ASSOCIATION FOCUS BY DIANNE HAYES

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHINESE LAWYERS ASSOCIATION

DEVELOPING A NEW GENERATION OF LEADERS

FOR 37 YEARS, THE SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHINESE LAWYERS ASSOCIATION (SCCLA) has been a source for networking, training, and developing well-prepared legal professionals in the Chinese and Asian American community in Los Angeles and Orange counties.

Incoming president Cyndie M. Chang hopes to take SCCLA to the next level by continuing the fight for inclusion and increasing the ranks in corporate settings and as partners, especially for Asian women. While there are numerous gains and success stories among members, Chang said there is still work to be done.

“There is still an important need for an organization like ours,” says Chang, a commercial litigator and partner at Duane Morris LLP. “There are many reasons diversity is important. I still see the challenges for minorities to break through certain legal areas. We try to monitor anything that affects us. There are issues of ignorance and racism that still need to be addressed.”

One of the oldest and largest Asian bar associations, SCCLA’s goals have been to advance the professional growth and interests of Chinese and Asian American lawyers, jurists and law students; and improve Chinese and Asian American community access to legal services. It also promotes the interests of the Chinese American and broader Asian Pacific American (APA) communities.

SCCLA is one of six bar organizations in the Los Angeles area supporting Asian American interests including the Asian Pacific American Bar Association, Japanese American Bar Association, Korean American Bar Association, Philippine American Bar Association, and the

South Asian Bar Association. The groups regularly partner for networking and community service projects.

“SCCLA’s founding may be the result of the large number of Asian American practitioners in the Southern California area,” says Chang about the organization that is affiliated with the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association (NAPABA) and the Los Angeles County Bar Association (LACBA). The organization is also represented in the State Bar’s Conference of Delegates.

“We do have a very robust organization with so many facets,” says Chang, who will begin her term in April. “SCCLA is, has been, and continues to be a critical component for my professional development. It has helped me frame my perspective about issues that affect the

legal profession.”

She adds, “SCCLA is definitely very supportive of women and works to address issues that affect their advancement. Personally, it has given me the confidence needed in my own professional development. It helps to have a network of other aspiring female leaders in the bar.”

SCCLA training and professional development programs include the In-House Counsel Diversity program, Lawyers Luncheon, Meet the Judges Series, and professional networking mixers. Some of the key events have included the “Phoenix Rising”—Minority Attorney Leadership Program, and a Trial Skills Workshop.

Kenneth Chiu, a Los Angeles County Deputy District Attorney, is the current SCCLA president. He credits the association for having an impact on his own development, providing him with support since law school through career development workshops, networking, and structured leadership training as a board member.

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—CYNDIE M. CHANG



“It’s provided me with a lot of opportunities, professionally and personally,” says Chiu. “SCCLA offers a lot of the networking that you would expect, meeting judges as well as fellow prosecutors. For



CYNDIE CHANG AND KENNETH CHIU

me, it’s been a good way to get to know private practitioners and those in private law firms who I otherwise wouldn’t come in contact with doing criminal work. I’ve met a lot of my personal friends through SCCLA.”

According to Chiu, SCCLA’s annual awards banquet attracts 600-800 Asian Pacific American lawyers, students and those working in the legal profession. SCCLA also hosts a summer associate networking mixer for law students who are clerking. “Out of the mixer, informal mentor relationships are formed,” Chiu said. “We’ve found that this organic approach works better than formal mentor matching.”

Law students are supported by SCCLA through training, informal mentoring, and networking. They also receive financial support through scholarships and fellowships. The SCCLA Scholarship Fund awards several scholarships of \$1,000 each to law students based on academic merit, financial need, and demonstrated commitment to serving Asian American communities.

Two non-voting board seats are reserved for law students who participate in all other aspects of board activity. SCCLA members include in-house counsel, state and federal judges, general counsel, government attorneys, faculty, solo and small practice attorneys, as well as law students and non-Chinese members.

Both Chiu and Chang acknowledge an appreciation for the structured climb through the ranks of leadership,

Southern
California
Chinese
Lawyers
Association

which requires presidents to have served in every office before becoming president.

“We are a little more structured than some bar groups,” Chiu said. “It has a practical purpose in

developing organizational history. We also wanted to put in a structure that throughout your tenure, each position gives you a new skill. You have to know how the finances of the board work to be president. There are different things that we want each board member to learn. When they leave our board they will have the skills that can be used elsewhere.

“For us, being on the board is a kind of informal leadership skills and organizational training,” says Chiu who is preparing to pass the baton to Chang. “We don’t want new members to feel the pressure of someone who has been on the board so long that they are not open to new ideas. Our hope is that board members will use the experience from being a scholar board member or scholar officer to be a part of a larger board.”

While training and development are at the core of SCCLA’s priorities, Chiu says community outreach is another priority for the organization. SCCLA has promoted equal access to justice for the Asian Pacific American community through a monthly pro bono legal clinic in San Gabriel Valley, a youth mentorship project, a holiday toy drive and food basket program at the Chinatown Service Center, as well as a charity golf tournament. **D&B**

Dianne Hayes is a freelance editor and writer based in Maryland.