



# The Changing Face of the State Bar

BY PATRICIA L. GARCIA

**G**rowing up in El Paso, Gabriel Bombara was surrounded by Hispanic role models. The Hispanic-majority city is a place where it is not uncommon for many Hispanics to hold leadership positions, such as judgeships or high-ranking political office. Seeing such possibilities emboldened Bombara, an El Paso sole practitioner of Mexican and Venezuelan heritage, to go to law school, despite the closest law school being located in another state. It didn't hurt that his greatest role model, his mother, is an attorney. "To be surrounded by so many successful Hispanic people is very encouraging," he says.

In law school at the University of California, Hastings College of Law, Bombara participated in the moot court program. His team received critiques by student judges to prepare for competition. In one instance, the judges told him to nix the native pronunciation of his last name and opt for an Anglicized version if he wanted to do well in moot court competitions.

"To which I responded in the negative," says Bombara, who focuses on criminal law. Bombara stood his ground and eventually became a leader on the team. "To see that you don't have to do things just one way is an empowering thing."

Bombara is among the growing ranks of Hispanic attorneys in Texas. The number of Hispanic lawyers has increased to 6,702, or 8 percent of the State Bar. In the past 10 years, minority membership in the State Bar of Texas overall has increased by 67 percent compared to a 20-percent change in their white counterparts, with African-American attorneys increasing from 4 percent to 5 percent, and Asian/Pacific Islander attorneys from 1 percent to 3 percent. Native American attorneys and those who identified themselves as "Other" remained at less than 1 percent and 1 percent, respectively. The number of women attorneys in Texas increased by 47 percent in the past 10 years, compared with 18 percent for male attorneys.

While more and more minorities and women are joining the legal field in Texas, there is still more work to be done. Linda Chanow, executive director of the Center for Women in the Law at the University of Texas School of Law in Austin, says that while the number of women attorneys has increased, they are still not as visible as men in leadership positions. "When you look at the people who really hold the power, we are not seeing any gains in AM Law Top 500 firms," she says. "The increases that we have seen are increases in non-equity female partners."

If a law firm is committed to increasing the numbers of women in leadership positions, Chanow says, then firms should have at least three women on their management committees. "Less than three women are considered token women members," she says. "If there are three or more women, they become peers and they will feel as though their opinions are valued."

Aside from often being left out of leadership positions, women also face a compensation gap. Women are often wary about asking for more money because they worry about being liked, rather than respected. "It's still a real issue," Chanow says. In her time at the center, which was founded by successful women attorneys who decided to do something about the disparity in pay and positions held among female and male attorneys, Chanow has received calls from women attorneys who were adversely affected when they asked for better pay. "They were put in their place or called greedy for asking for more money," she said.

One of the priorities of the center is to provide resources to the most senior women in the profession. For women attorneys in leadership positions, it is lonely at the top. "It is so much more difficult for them because often they are the only women in those positions. They need a level of support so they can continue to be advocates for other women," Chanow says.

In addition, the center looks to create avenues for the most junior women attorneys, such as law students and clerks, to practice their skills before they go out into the real world. Doing so helps ensure that the playing field is level for both new female and male attorneys. Another action is consortiums for leading women attorneys. "We bring together the leading women in the legal community and put them together in the same room so that we can all work together to tackle this problem rather than working independently," Chanow says.

But perhaps one of the most important issues women attorneys face is "implicit bias. ... It's all unconscious, so unless you take an active approach in trying to get away from that, you are going to overlook it," says Chanow.

One major challenge minority attorneys face is networking to develop a client base, says Gail Peek, of counsel to Beard, Kultgen, Brophy, Bostwick, Dickson & Squires, L.L.P. in Waco and a member of the State Bar Racial Diversity in the Profession Committee. A member of the committee for several years, Peek is familiar with State Bar initiatives intended to increase

the number of minority attorneys in Texas. There's a pipeline program, where law students are mentored about what it is like to practice in the real world and office dynamics. "This is to help law students have a more successful experience while interning, especially in learning how to survive the process: Who do they talk with about issues? What is expected of them in a professional environment? Because of problems with minority attrition and retention, especially in this challenging economic period, law students and new lawyers sometimes have difficulty finding someone who looks like them to turn to for advice."

Initiatives such as the Texas Minority Counsel Program, with a goal of increasing outside corporate and governmental legal service opportunities for minority and women attorneys, and the Minority Attorneys at the Podium Project, aimed at increasing visibility of minority and women attorneys by encouraging them to speak at CLE courses, are bringing law firms, law departments, and women and minorities together to increase employment and networking opportunities for minority and women attorneys.

## **PUBLIC NOTICE**

### **UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS CORPUS CHRISTI DIVISION**

#### **REAPPOINTMENT OF INCUMBENT MAGISTRATE JUDGE B. JANICE ELLINGTON**

The current term of the office of United States Magistrate Judge B. Janice Ellington at Corpus Christi, Texas, is due to expire November 13, 2012. The United States District Court is required by law to establish a panel of citizens to consider the reappointment of Magistrate Judge B. Janice Ellington to a new 8 year term.

The duties of a Magistrate Judge position include the following:

1. Conducting most preliminary proceedings in criminal cases;
2. Trial and disposition of misdemeanor cases;
3. Conducting various pretrial matters and evidentiary proceedings on delegation from the judges of the district court; and,
4. Trial and disposition of civil cases upon consent of the litigants.

The court invites comments from members of the bar and the public as to whether the panel should recommend the reappointment of Magistrate Judge B. Janice Ellington to the court. Direct comments to: B. Janice Ellington Reappointment Panel; Attention: David J. Bradley, U.S. District Clerk, (under confidential cover), P.O. Box 61010, Houston, Texas 77208.

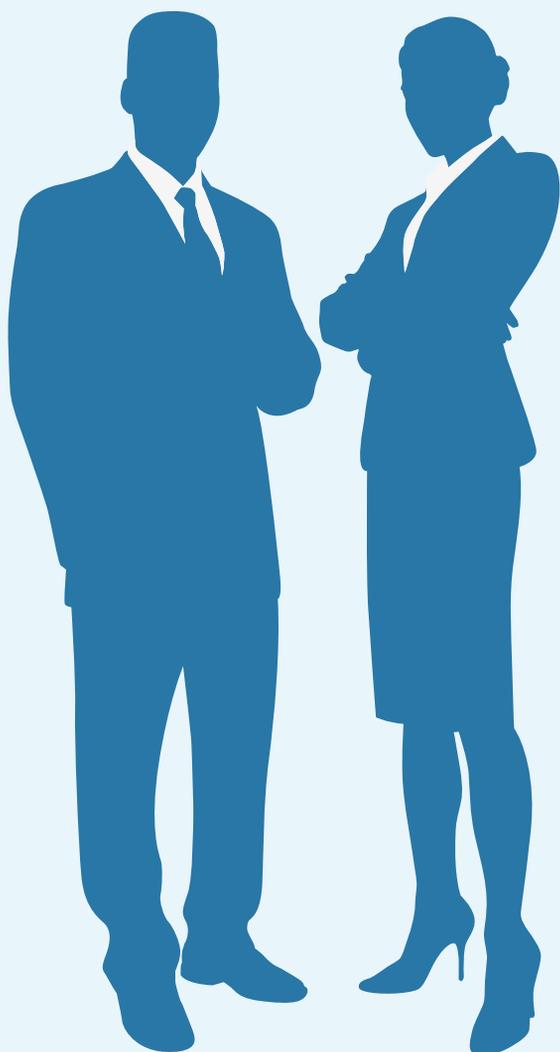
Comments must be received no later than **June 15, 2012, 5:00 p.m.**

When Peek was starting out in Chicago in 1984, she saw that more and more firms were open to the idea of diversity. What she saw then is something that firms and individual attorneys need to do now, and that's simply to embrace change. Embracing change is just one step to making the State Bar more reflective of the state's population. "It's not an issue of lowering standards or meeting a quota — that's a red herring,"

Peek says. "The real issue is not that there aren't enough talented women and minority attorneys out there. The real issue is, 'Are you going to give them a chance?'"

**Patricia L. Garcia**  
is associate editor of the *Texas Bar Journal*.

## Who We Are Today .....



### General Stats

- There are 89,987 lawyers in Texas.
- 33% are women.
- 17% are minorities.
- 67% — Change in the number of minorities in the past 10 years who are Texas Bar members.

### Breakdown by Race

- Caucasian/Anglo — 83% (70,521)
- African-American/Black — 5% (4,046)
- Hispanic/Latino — 8% (6,702)
- Asian/Pacific Islander — 3% (2,299)
- American Indian/  
Alaska Native — <1% (262)
- Two or More Races — <1% (285)
- Other Race — 1% (962)

### Law Practice

- 36% of private practitioners, who reported their firm size to the State Bar, identified themselves as sole practitioners.
- For women attorneys, 26% are sole practitioners.

Source: State Bar of Texas Department of Research and Analysis, "Statistical Profile of the State Bar of Texas Membership (2002–03)," "Racial/Ethnic Minority Attorneys: Attorney Statistical Profile (2011–12)," and "Women Attorneys: Attorney Statistical Profile (2011–12)."