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Attorneys Form Hispanic Bar Association of the Inland Empire

Group Serves Local IE Community, Support New and Aspiring Hispanic Attorneys

RIVERSIDE, Calif. — Best Best & Krieger LLP Partner Joseph Ortiz says that, growing up, no one talked to him or his siblings about going to college or pursuing a profession. “There was no support for it,” he says.

As a first generation immigrant in Southern California, Ortiz’s experience wasn’t unique. Many Hispanic attorneys in California’s Inland Empire also found their way to the Bar largely on their own.

But, now, they are no longer alone.

Ortiz and a group of Inland Empire-based attorneys have formed the first Hispanic Bar Association of the Inland Empire.

Recognizing the importance of creating an environment to support one another, engage with the Hispanic community and mentor and recruit new attorneys to the profession, HBAIE was formed to help the legal community — and the Hispanic community at large. It’s mission is to “uplift the Inland Empire’s Hispanic legal community by fostering engagement with communities, businesses, and the Bar, while celebrating Hispanic culture. We are a family that cultivates and champions the education and recruitment of Hispanic attorneys, as well as their professional advancement through continued mentorship.”

The Inland Empire has a large Hispanic population. Hispanics account for 47 percent of Riverside County’s population and 52 percent of San Bernardino’s, according to the Pew Research Center. However, the number of Hispanic attorneys does not mirror that population — a trend seen throughout California. According to the State Bar of California, 35 percent of the State’s adults are Hispanic, but only 7 percent of its more than 125,000 attorneys are Hispanic.

HBAIE aims to partner with the community to ensure that their legal needs are being met. For example, many Hispanic-owned businesses in the Inland Empire operate without legal guidance. There are Hispanic families in need of asset protection not seeking legal advice on wills and trusts because there is an inherent distrust or lack of connection to the non-Hispanic lawyers in the community.

“It’s a problem that Hispanics don’t have the resources to tap to talk about what it means to be an attorney,” says Ortiz, who is based in Riverside and serves on BB&K’s Recruitment Committee. “There’s a real need for mentorship, networking and professional development within this community.”

Ortiz handled HBAIE's incorporation by overseeing its application for nonprofit status, securing an employer identification and coordinating with other local bar associations. He now serves on the newly formed HBAIE Board.

Sheppard Mullin Partner Ruben Escalante is also a founding Board member. Early in his career, Escalante recognized that there were few attorneys who shared his background, culture and experience of growing up in a large Latino family. He, too, saw an unmet need.

"This stems from wanting to provide a community within a community," commented Escalante. "I want to do whatever we can to support, mentor and connect with the next generation. We're all in it together, so let's build it. And it starts with the next generation."

BB&K attorneys Albert Maldonado and Daniella Hernandez were also recently selected to serve on the HBAIE Board. Both recount being drawn to the legal profession as a way to give back to their communities. Now, they are excited to set positive examples for young Hispanics in the Inland Empire and help strengthen the business and legal communities.

"In my experience, just a few words can really change someone's path," says Maldonado, who grew up in Rancho Cucamonga. "It doesn't really take money, just a little bit of time and a few encouraging words."

"I want to give back to the community that helped me get to where I am today," said Hernandez, a San Bernardino native. "The group was created to inspire others to come into the legal field, especially Hispanics. Having a group to promote that — inspire that — and help them on the process can really help."

HBAIE will hold one of its first networking events in San Bernardino on Aug. 27 at 6 p.m. Learn more by visiting HBAIE's Facebook page @HispanicBarAssociationIE.

We invite you to share this new resource serving the Inland Empire's growing Hispanic business, legal and general community. Please contact Denise Nix to arrange interviews or learn more: denise.nix@bbklaw.com; (213) 787-2552.

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