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Sheppard Mullin Announces Launch of New Firm Diversity Programs

By SHERRI M. OKAMOTO, Staff Writer

Sheppard, Mullin, Richter & Hampton yesterday announced the formal launch of firm-wide affinity groups for attorneys of color, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual attorneys.

Guy Halgren, chair of the firm's executive committee, told the MetNews that the goal behind forming the networking groups was "to make sure people of every background in the firm feel comfortable and welcome."

The firm currently also sponsors an affinity group for women lawyers, which meets monthly and holds a variety of regional networking events for the firm's female attorneys and clients.

Halgren said that the women's group has been "working great" to create more camaraderie within the firm and with clients, so he "supported it wholeheartedly" when the firm's diversity committee suggested the firm branch out to create additional groups.

Dianne Smith, a partner in the firm's labor and employment practice group in the Los Angeles office and chairperson of the firm's diversity efforts, told the MetNews that the affinity groups informally began meeting during the summer, and boast approximately 40 active members in the attorneys of color group and 20 active members in the LGBT group.

Smith called such networking groups a "key tool" for employee retention that has worked well in large

corporate settings, saying, "[i]t's all about attorney development and retention."

She explained that it is sometimes hard for new attorneys to get to know people within the 560-plus member firm, and that the groups provide an opportunity for the attorneys who have something in common to communicate with each other.

"We had attorneys who expressed an interest in doing something like this," Smith said, adding that responses to a confidential inquiry sent out among the firm gave rise to the belief that "we had a sufficient number of attorneys who had an interest in it that it would be successful."

The groups have meetings to hold discussions about common concerns, arrange for speakers on professional development, and sponsor events, Smith explained.

The co-chair of the LGBT attorney group, Candace Matson, a partner and member of the firm's real estate, land use and natural resources practice group in the Los Angeles office, said she expected the new groups to increase awareness within the firm and the general public of the diversity of the firm's workforce, and to draw new associates and partners to the firm

"Sheppard Mullin is always looking for the best and the brightest, and we want to look everywhere because the best and brightest can be found across all populations," she said. "I know that our firm



Dianne Smith



Candace Matson

takes pride in being among the best law firms out there, and [diversity] is just one area that we seek to be at the forefront in.”

Matson opined that “attracting and retaining talent across all the many different populations in our country is a healthy, productive management goal for all companies,” adding that her goal was to enhance awareness of “any and all barriers” facing attorneys, and to lend support to them so that they are able to best contribute to the firm and the firm’s clientele.

The LGBT group is co-chaired by Blaine Templeman, a partner in the firm’s New York office and a member of its diversity committee.

The affinity group for attorneys of color is led by senior associate Miriam Montesinos, a member of

the real estate, land use and natural resources practice group in the firm’s San Francisco office, with co-leaders in each of the firm’s United States offices. Co-leaders in the Los Angeles office are Olivier Theard, Susan Hwang and Jacob Kiani.

Theard is an associate in the firm’s business trial practice group and environmental litigation practice group, while Hwang is an associate in the intellectual property and technology practice group. Kiani is an associate in the business trial practice group.

Founded in 1927, Sheppard Mullin is a full service firm with 11 offices located throughout California, and in New York, Washington D.C. and Shanghai.



Olivier Theard



Susan Hwang



Jacob Kiani