

LAWWEEK COLORADO



ON THE POWER OF INCLUSIVE ORGANIZATIONS

In October, LawWeek convened the leadership of the specialty bar associations for a discussion on diversity and inclusiveness in the legal profession. Their discussion revealed that while the profession has a long way to go, their organizations are making strides toward helping change the lagging numbers of women and minorities who practice law. From left, Alison Zinn, Neeti Pawar, Karen Hester, Oliver McKinstry, Andrea Wang. Not pictured, Liz Krupa. | Photography: Ali Bibbo

Can Law Firms Change Re: Diversity?

IN THE PAST DECADE, diversity and inclusiveness have become frequent topics of discussion among law firm leaders, corporate counsel and legal academics, and for good reason. The legal industry lags behind every other profession in creating inclusive environments that invite, promote and retain women and minorities.

Colorado's legal community has been at the forefront of the discussion about how to change that. Local attorneys suggest there's still a long way to go before we'll see a sea change, but as the leadership of the specialty bar associations can attest, their organizations are helping to make inroads for future generations.

The group of leaders recently met for a discussion of their own experiences as well as the work their organizations do for their communities and Colorado's legal community as a whole.

Roundtable participants included Karen Hester, executive director for the Center for Legal Inclusiveness; Liz Krupa, vice president of Sections and Committees at Hispanic National Bar Association; Oliver McKinstry, president-elect of Colorado Gay Lesbian Bisexual and Transgender Bar Association; Neeti Pawar, president of South Asian Bar Association of Colorado; Andrea Wang, president of the Asian



The group of roundtable participants photographed at Davis Graham & Stubbs on Oct. 1. | LAW WEEK PHOTO ALI BIBBO

Pacific Bar Association in Colorado; and Alison Zinn president of the Colorado Women's Bar Association.

Sandra Bray of Hunter + Geist recorded the conversation and Tony Flesor of Law Week Colorado moderated it.

The event was held at Davis Graham & Stubbs.

LAW WEEK: I'm interested in hearing how everyone made it to your current positions, if you knew that you were going to go that route when you were in law school, if you had a target or if you just fell into the path that you did.

HESTER: So this is my second career. I used to work in higher education. I practiced law for four years, and while I enjoyed it, it wasn't something that I woke up every morning joyful to be doing. So I contacted one of my law school career services folks and told him I was practicing in Texas and wanted to go back to Kansas.

I'm a single parent. Family was in the area, and I thought that would be good for me at that time. I started working for the University of Kansas Law School, which I enjoyed. I loved working with students.

I'd worked in higher education before, and I noticed that even though it wasn't a part of my duties, I was doing a lot of diversity and inclusion work. So one of my mentors at the time said, "You should really make that a part of your job responsibilities." So I went to the dean, wrote a proposal, got accepted, and that's how I officially got into diversity and inclusion. But

as I look back, I've always been involved, whether it was undergrad, protesting and things of that nature.

When I was at KU, I was president of the diversity committee for the Kansas State Bar, and we were looking at things that we could bring in the state to help make it more diverse and inclusive, and I learned about the Colorado Campaign for Inclusive Excellence, which is now the Center for Legal Inclusiveness, and I reached out to Kathleen Nalty, who was the former executive director. She was very generous, invited me to come out and meet the board, talk to folks who were members of the organization bar and shared her resources with me.

Flash-forward two years. Kathleen started her own consulting company. People told me about the opening, and I applied; and here I am. So it's really funny where life takes you, but I'm happy where I am right now. It's really a great gig.

ZINN: I don't think there's a set track to become the president of the Colorado Women's Bar Association. Almost everyone I know found their own way. And for me, it was just a natural next step, being



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