Pursuing inclusion and diversity, in society and the law, is an ongoing journey that requires contributions from all.

We are grateful for the support of all the organizations who have worked with us as we learn and grow.
The business case for inclusion and diversity in the legal profession has been clear for some time: As our society grows more diverse, so do our clients. And without including as many backgrounds and experiences as possible in the operation of our firm, we simply can’t provide the best advice.

By combining our unique skills and perspectives, we are able to accomplish better results and support for our clients that exceed what any of us can do alone. But beyond the externally facing business case, we are also certain that inclusion and diversity makes for a better, richer firm culture, nimbler and better able to improve the ways in which we operate, collaborate and serve clients.

As a profession, we’ve made progress. More women and people of color are navigating the path to the bar and making advancements within the profession. But we still have a lot of work to do. At Harris Beach, we take this challenge seriously. Though we formed our Council on Inclusion and Diversity way back in 2005, we’re not resting on our laurels. Inclusion is not only a primary operational focus; it is also one of our core values and our efforts in this regard remain an ongoing priority.

In that spirit, we are proud to share some of our 2019 accomplishments in this Inclusion and Diversity Yearbook.

One of the main focal points of our inclusion and diversity initiatives is supporting a
pipeline of law students and professionals who are historically underrepresented in the practice of law. Building on our platform and accomplishments from prior years, the Council invested substantial resources of both time and money to build relationships across the state aimed at doing our part to bring greater diversity to the legal profession. We believe in supporting aspiring students to help them go the distance, and have forged close alliances with minority law student associations across New York, from Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Ithaca and Albany and down to New York City and Uniondale. And whether that's through mentoring and education, or through funding in the form of scholarships, Harris Beach and our inclusion program are having an impact – a big one.

You'll learn a little about that impact in the pages that follow. We will introduce you to two young lawyers, Esther Aparacio and Ade Adegoke, whom we have supported in getting started in this wonderful profession. You will also hear of the impact that our partnership with the St. John’s University’s Ronald H. Brown Law School Prep Program is having on minority students throughout the state.

Our commitment to inclusion is not limited to programs outside of Harris Beach, however. You will also learn about our efforts that are focused internally, through professional development opportunities, and education and operational improvements. Recognizing the need for greater gender diversity industrywide, we have focused on providing female lawyers more opportunity and support in their careers. Of the 13 attorneys elected partners of Harris Beach in the last two years, more than half (7) were women. We also have been adding additional voices and perspectives to internal teams with the conviction that we will make better, more informed decisions when we hear from a broader cross section of our team members. As a result of a firm-wide employee engagement survey conducted in 2019, we formed the Professional Staff Committee (PSC) to communicate with the diverse members of our professional staff and to engage with firm management about their interests and concerns. Our Associate Advisory Committee performs a similar function for associates and senior counsel. In addition, the firm's management committee was expanded by two seats to allow additional voices and perspectives to participate in decision making.

The work toward a more representative, inclusive legal field is ongoing and important both to our success as a firm and as a society, as well as for the future of our profession. At Harris Beach, we are committed to work continuously to effect change for the better. We are very proud of our accomplishments this year, and recognize that we don't have all the answers, either. We’d love to hear your thoughts on this subject. We welcome you to contact any of us at the emails, indicated in the side panel, to engage with us as we continue on our journey in 2020.

Christopher D. Jagel
Partner and Chief Executive Officer
cjagel@harrisbeach.com

Wendy A. Kinsella
Partner and Co-Chair, Council on Inclusion and Diversity
wkinsella@harrisbeach.com

Kimberly A. Swetland
Chief Administrative Officer
and Co-Chair, Council on Inclusion and Diversity
kswetland@harrisbeach.com
Esther Aparacio never saw herself becoming a lawyer. Good thing she was wrong.
As she reflects on it, Esther Aparacio realizes the idea that she would grow up to become an attorney was – in a word – unlikely. Though not impossible.

Growing up in an immigrant community in Union City, New Jersey, attorneys and the law just seemed so...far off. “I just couldn’t see myself there,” Esther says. “The law just seemed inaccessible and out of reach.”

Fast-forward: she’s proven her younger self wrong. A May 2019 graduate of the Syracuse University College of Law who recently passed the New York Bar Exam, Esther serves as a law clerk for the Passaic County Superior Court in New Jersey.

Back home again, she has a different perspective — and a sincere appreciation for the hard work it took and the people, programs and institutions that have helped her along the way.

One of those is the Ron Brown Prep Program through the St. John’s University College of Law, which aims to grow the number of disadvantaged students in law schools around the country. The Ron Brown program identifies promising college students and graduates and exposes them to the study and practice of law. More than 300 past Ron Brown Prep Program participants have been accepted to more than 50 top law schools.

Esther was accepted into the program in her undergraduate sophomore year at John Jay College, where she studied political science with a minor in philosophy. She received a scholarship from Harris Beach to help defray some of the costs of the program.

But that wasn’t the end of her engagement with us. Esther kept in touch with Wendy Kinsella, co-chair of our Council on Inclusion and Diversity, along with others at Harris Beach, throughout her three years at SU Law.

Wendy informally checked in on Esther and invited her to various events, including an interview for a job opportunity in her second year. Esther and Wendy also organized the first BLSA, LALSA and OUTLaw networking reception at the Syracuse office of Harris Beach, with presentations on different areas of practice, and one-on-one conversations with attorneys and other legal professionals. Esther served as president of the Latin American Law Students Association at Syracuse University and it was a natural partnership.

When she was in law school, Esther attended the Harris Beach Ron Brown event at our Manhattan office to encourage the students attending the program and share her journey with them, as she had very recently walked in their shoes.

Wendy and Esther still stay in touch, which Esther says is a “really big deal for me” — and a big deal for the profession and its efforts to be more inclusive. For the longest time, Esther admits, she felt like the only people who cared about people in her community were people who looked like them. But she says efforts by Wendy and Harris Beach make a difference and set an example for the industry.

“Everyone knows that the rates for students of color in law could be a lot better,” says Esther. “It’s good we have attorneys who are concerned about and working on those issues. I think we need more of that. I hope other attorneys get on board, look beyond whatever work they are doing, and really engage with students like me.”

We welcome Esther to our wonderful profession and look forward to sharing her journey for years to come.
Ade Adegoke pursued his love for the law all the way from Nigeria.
As a barrister in his home country of Nigeria, Ade Adegoke worked in a general practice law office, but found himself often providing counsel for various types of transactions. He gained an affinity for the work and never lost it, even when he became a student at the University at Buffalo School of Law.

One of the interviews he landed on his way to graduation was with the public finance and economic development practice group at Harris Beach. The opportunity felt so right for Ade that he chose Harris Beach over competing offers. “The choice was easy for me,” says Ade. With the statewide profile of Harris Beach and the transactional nature of the public finance group, he saw significant opportunity for professional growth.

It was through extracurricular involvement at UB Law that Ade became aware and familiar with Harris Beach in the first place. He served as the secretary of the UB Black Law Student Association (BLSA) during the 2017/2018 academic session. In 2018, UB BLSA fielded its first mock trial team at the annual Northeast BLSA conference, and Harris Beach was the sponsor.

At a reception held by Harris Beach after the North East BLSA conference, Ade met office managing partner Bob Murray and several other attorneys in the Buffalo office. Eventually, Bob invited Ade in to apply.

Ade is now a second-year associate at Harris Beach, and is also doing work for the firm’s business and commercial litigation and commercial real estate practice groups. He finds economic development law in New York quite interesting. “Since I started, I have been learning every day,” he says.

Ade notes that the transition from Nigerian law to American law isn’t quite as dramatic as you might think. Both systems are built out of the English Common Law. One big difference: Nigeria has only a bench trial system; there is no jury system. Ade says he is happy to be in a position where he is learning everyday.

Ade lives in Blasdell in Erie County and is an avid soccer player. In an interview last year with the Buffalo Law Journal, Ade credited Harris Beach for its focus on diversity and inclusion. “I was looking for a firm that had values that resonate with my own values. Diversity and inclusiveness, good reputation and potential for growth were big criteria for me. I am lucky to be part of Harris Beach, because everyone here is willing to help you succeed and grow professionally and personally.”

Diversity and inclusiveness, good reputation and potential for growth were big criteria for me. I am lucky to be part of Harris Beach, because everyone here is willing to help you succeed and grow professionally and personally.”
Inclusion and diversity in the law is a continuous challenge. No single speech, event, program or idea alone will make us more inclusive.

At Harris Beach, our Council on Inclusion and Diversity addresses the challenge by supporting a pipeline of underrepresented minority students and professional staff and focusing on the retention and advancement of all of our colleagues. In addition, our firm culture values our differences and recognizes that they make us stronger as professionals and as people.

Executing on our inclusion and diversity plan is well underway. Some of these efforts involve outreach into our communities, colleges and law schools; others focus on educating our people and supporting a diverse and inclusive workforce and profession.

While education is a primary point of emphasis across almost all of our work, we also have a lot of fun in getting to know and support each other and our diverse backgrounds during that process.

Here, by month, are some highlights of our year’s work in inclusion and diversity:
Supporting Insurance Professionals of Color

The National African-American Insurance Association (NAAIA) is dedicated to empowering African-American insurance professionals and celebrating their accomplishments at the local, state and national levels. Attorneys and professional staff in our New York City office, along with the Council on Inclusion and Diversity, hosted this year’s NAAIA Northeast chapter meeting.

Partner Andrew Orenstein, senior associate Justina Rivera, and associate Tara Bright, all part of our New York City office, presented a program at the conference titled: “Diversify Your Portfolio: How Diversity Yields Greater Returns in Litigation.”

The presentation focused on why and how industry professionals and other litigation decision makers should account for and address race, gender, ethnicity and other diversity issues in evaluating claims, from the initial intake through the final disposition.

Recognizing the Impact of African-Americans on the Judiciary

The Hofstra University Black Law Students Association honored 18 of New York’s most prestigious judges at its annual Alumni Brunch in late February. Attorneys Tara Bright and Sandy Milord attended to show our firm’s support.

The event, entitled “The Black Robe: African American Impact on the Judiciary,” featured a keynote address from the Hon. Justice Fern Fisher, currently serving as special assistant for social justice initiatives to the dean of the Maurice A. Deane School of Law. Justice Fisher spoke of the impact that inclusion and diversity has on presiding judges and how it helps in maintaining a court system premised on justice for all. Harris Beach was also recognized for our work on this issue, and for ongoing sponsorship of promising BLSA students.

“...The inclusiveness we all felt was a topic of much discussion over the following few weeks. There are so many students that have never been a part of a law firm in any capacity or proximate to justice in any way. The event you coordinated bridged that gap.”

— Jimmy Thyden, LALSA member and Marine veteran
Networking with Promising Black and Latino Law Students

This month we took our model for networking with promising law students farther out on the road – this time to the state’s Capital. Our team hosted an evening networking reception in conjunction with the Black and Latin American Law Student Associations at the University of Albany.

The students enjoyed dinner with the Harris Beach team and invited guests. They learned about our firm and its various practice areas, as well as opportunities throughout the Capital region. After dinner, the students broke into smaller discussion groups – discussions which continued beyond the scheduled end of the reception.

The reception featured talks about career paths in the law from two established legal professionals: Jeneeta Howe O’Connor, the deputy compliance officer at The Research Foundation for SUNY, and Marquita Jo Rhodes, executive director of Albany County Bar Association.

Our Albany networking event involved both attorneys and professional staff: Bill Flynn, L.J. D’Arrigo, Brendan Venter, Brad Wanner, Douglas Gerhardt, Aubrey Ohanian, Dan LeCours, Jamie Page, Marie Calvaruso, Cindy Naclerio, Michelle Piasecki, Kelsey Hanson, Mercades Howell-Gibson, Kim Swetland and John McManus, our Capital District office managing partner.

Later in the month, we were invited to Albany Law School’s first annual Community Diversity Day. Attorneys Meaghan Feenan, Jeremy Speich and Elliot Hallak participated on behalf of the firm.
Developing Soft Skills Not Found in the Course Catalog

With so much to learn and so little time in law school, sometimes the small things get overlooked. That’s why in mid-May we invited students from the University of Buffalo College of Law Black Law Students Association and Latin American Law Student Association to join our attorneys for advice on networking and dinner etiquette. The presentation was hosted by John B. Bourdage of Bourdage Consulting.

Our attorneys, Melanie Marotto, Sharon Schwartz, Ade Adegoke and Bob Murray, along with students, heard tips on important items such as a proper introductions, inclusive networking skills and conversational strategies to build relationships. The event was held at a Buffalo restaurant and provided tips for use at future events, including dining etiquette during job interviews.
Getting Started and Surviving in the Profession

The voice of experience remains so important for promising young men and women who will become the future of our profession. In late June we partnered with the Rochester Black Bar Association (RBBA) for our second annual roundtable and networking reception to help make those connections. As a whole, the reception brings together students and young lawyers with experienced attorneys in the public and private sector, with the goal of building relationships and ongoing support networks.

Attendees heard practical tips on starting out in the legal profession from RBBA President Anthony Orphé, former RBBA President Duwaine Bascoe and attorney Taren Greenidge. Judge Stephen T. Miller of Rochester City Court then provided his advice to the group, in a talk focused on integrity and reputation in the legal community.

Knowledge of the hiring process is important, too. Jamie Page, director of human resources at Harris Beach, shared her insights and best practices when seeking an associate position or entry-level position on any legal team.

After dinner, the attendees broke into smaller groups for conversations about topics of importance for those entering the legal profession – for example, transitioning from law school into the practice of law and the training and development of young lawyers.

“I want to thank you for taking the time to host the RBBA event last night. We all greatly enjoyed learning from the attorneys and hearing their advice on how to effectively navigate the legal field. It is through such opportunities that we as a community are further enriched when we share in our experiences,” the president of the Black Law Students Association at University at Buffalo School of Law wrote in a thank you note after the event.

The RBBA event drew participation from attorneys Adewoye Adegoke, H. Todd Bullard, Heidi Gregory, Daniel Guzmán, Chris Jagel, Wendy Kinsella, Bob Murray, and Brian Roy, as well as summer associates Jessica Simonetti, Alexandra Casey and Chris Williams.
Providing Resources for Experience and Study

In July we were proud to announce the inaugural recipient of the Harris Beach Diversity Scholarship at the Maurice A. Deane School of Law at Hofstra University. The scholarship was awarded to Vanessa Wilcox of Westbury, a member of Hofstra Law’s Black Law Student Association. Vanessa also participates in the Tax Law Association and Trust and Estates Law Society.

The scholarship is given to a student who enhances the diversity of the student body and is connected to the Long Island community and the firm’s continuing support of economic development in the region. Vanessa connected with attorney Sandy Milord and Uniondale Office managing partner Tom Garry at a Hofstra brunch and a connection was made. Vanessa was offered an internship position, working in our Uniondale office during the fall semester as a law clerk with Sandy as her mentor.

Discovering the Breadth of Opportunities in Law

Our partnership with the University of Buffalo Law School provides opportunities to reach not only law students, but also undergraduate students from other area schools. For the second year in a row, we invited participants from the UB Discover Law Undergraduate Scholars Program to our Buffalo office to highlight attorney and professional staff career opportunities at law firms. About 20 undergraduates from the northeast met with attorneys and staff to learn about professions that make a law firm work – including accounting, business development and marketing, IT and paraprofessional work. Many of the Discover Law students are considering law school but are still defining the direction of their careers. The students enjoyed lunch as they heard from and asked questions of attorneys and professionals Bob Murray, Fabian Maldonado, Christopher Milne, Jamie Page, Allison Fiut, Dani Rizzo, Ade Adegoke, Deb Strain and Derisha Davis.
INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY /two.tonum/zero.onum/one.onum/nine.onum: Year in Review

Decoding the Dynamics of Private Practice

Law students recognize that where you practice is as important as what you practice. We were honored to be asked by groups at the Cornell University Law School to facilitate a discussion about the different shapes and sizes of law firms.

Harris Beach attorneys Seth Hiland and Daniel Guzmán and Director of Human Resources Jamie Page were glad to oblige. In an event coordinated by Stacy Juhl Buchholz, they put together a panel discussion for the Black Law Students Association, Latino Law Students Association, and Native American Law Students Association at the Cornell University Law School.

Both Seth and Dan earned their law degrees from Cornell; Seth is managing partner of our Ithaca office. Jamie also manages associate programs throughout the firm.

In presenting their topic: “Choosing Where to Practice: Small Versus Large Legal Markets,” Jamie, Seth and Dan likened the small market/large market discussion to the differences between New York City and western New York. Their discussion allowed the students to meet with leaders of a regional law firm and gain a better understanding of various career paths.

The students were very engaged and asked many questions. For example, they wondered if attorneys needed to get to know judges better in smaller legal markets, whether firms with regional offices are culturally integrated, and the importance of having ties to a particular region. The panel also discussed work-life balance between large and small markets and the difference in billable hour requirements.

This was a first-time Harris Beach event at Cornell and more than a dozen students attended. Plans are in the works for a similar event in 2020.

Starting Off the School Year Right

Harris Beach continues to provide support and mentorship to students entering their first year at the University of Buffalo School of Law. In early September, we sponsored the second annual retreat with members of the Black Law Students Association, held at the Beaver Hollow Conference Center.

The event provides 1L students with guidance and encourages them to take advantage of the support they offer each other. Programming ranged from the intricacies of different areas of law to the interview process to tips for time management, self-care and navigating exams. The students got to know each other and enjoyed bonding time over meals, then finished the retreat with a team-building activity, where they conquered a ropes obstacle course. Partner Wendy Kinsella, chair of the Council on Inclusion and Diversity, and attorney Adegoke Adewoye, a UB alum, partnered with other second- and third-year students to provide the advice.

“In it feels great to know that Harris Beach has remained consistent in their commitment to diversity and supporting student of color. Please rest assured that our members have taken notice about your commitment and the firm’s commitment to diversity and our academic/professional development.”

– Natalia Marte, chairperson of the Northeast Black Law Students Association and student at the UB School of Law.

SEPTEMBER

BUFFALO

Starting Off the School Year Right

ITHACA

OCTOBER

Decoding the Dynamics of Private Practice

BUFFALO

“...”
Mentoring and Educating Students

Attorneys and professional staff at Harris Beach took advantage of several opportunities in October to help promising students of color in Albany learn about their future as attorneys.

At the Upstate Academic Retreat of the Northeast Black Law Students Association, held at Albany Law School, Harris Beach sponsored a networking lunch. Attorney Andrienne Walters presented to the students and answered questions about networking, work-life balance, the pro bono scholars program, what to expect during their third year of law school and the bar exam process. This was a “return home” for Andrienne: She is an Albany Law alum!

A few days later, the Albany Law School Black Law Students Association visited our Albany office for dinner, networking and advice from our attorneys as well as other professionals in the region. John McManus, managing partner of the Capital Region office, along with Wendy Kinsella and attorney Brendan Venter, discussed various topics in the practice of law. The students also heard presentations on public service and in-house positions from Lillian Moy, executive director of the Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York, and Jennifer Clark, senior legal counsel at MVP Health Care.

TOP: Andrienne Walters of our Albany office attended the October academic retreat of the Northeast Black Law Students Association.

BOTTOM: Albany Law School Black Law Students Association members meeting with Harris Beach Capital Region attorneys at the Harris Beach office in Albany.
Moderating Discussions on Diversity


All three discussed their challenges in entering the legal profession and their paths to success. They also shared strategies for overcoming obstacles and emphasized the need to be hard-working and persistent.

Introducing Law Firm Life to Diverse Professional Staff Candidates

The importance of inclusion and diversity extends beyond the bar. Our networking initiatives include making sure we have the best and brightest in professional roles as well as attorneys. These efforts have become one of our focal points and will continue into 2020.

In late October, the Council on Inclusion and Diversity arranged a panel discussion for students in the African American, Latino, Asian, Native American (AALANA) affinity group at Finger Lakes Community College. The presentation discussed the paralegal, IT, business development, human resources and other non-attorney roles in a law firm, and encouraged the students to keep their minds open when considering career opportunities. Participants from our team included Jamie Page, Alex Neubert, Fabian Maldonado and Carley Smith.

Albany Law School discussion on diversity in the law: Partner Wendy Kinsella served as moderator.
Celebrating Our Successes in Inclusiveness

The Rochester Black Bar Association has worked for the last quarter century to open opportunities for people of color and encourage the profession on its journey of inclusiveness. In conjunction with the 25th annual Gala, our team enjoyed an early November celebration that included some recognition for one of our own.

As part of its Silver Anniversary Gala, the RBBA presented partner H. Todd Bullard its 2019 Pioneer Award for a lifetime of accomplishments in serving the community and lawyers of color. Celebrating with Todd were attorneys Phil Spellane, Bob Ryan and Bob Murray. The award in part honored Todd for helping create the Harris Beach Diversity Scholarship Program more than a decade ago.

Todd was also recognized by Lawyers of Color in 2019 as one of the nation’s best attorneys for his noteworthy accomplishments and commitment to diversity and inclusion in the legal profession. Todd was honored along with attorneys from some of the nation’s largest organizations and law firms, such as the managing counsel at American Express, an associate general counsel at JPMorgan, the intellectual property general counsel at Xerox, and senior counsel at both Marriott and Procter & Gamble.

Lawyers of Color is a non-profit organization that promotes diversity in the law and equality and democracy among marginalized communities. The organization selected 100 attorneys in each of six regions.

Fabian Maldonado, Alex Neubert and Carley Smith with AALANA students at Finger Lakes Community College.

H. Todd Bullard at the RBBA Silver Gala accepting the 2019 Pioneer Award.
Building a Culture of Inclusion
Our dedication to building a more inclusive and diverse profession requires us to look inward – into ourselves and our perspectives, challenging our ideas about the world around us.

In 2019, we made a substantial investment to enhance our culture with the goal of making the workplace more inclusive operationally, across the firm. It helps when you start from a position of strength. After conducting an employee engagement survey, we were pleased to confirm that we surpassed the legal industry in many of the areas of employee satisfaction. For those areas where changes or enhancements were suggested, we formed teams to discuss, brainstorm and develop a plan to address them.

As a direct result of the survey, for example, we launched the Professional Staff Committee, chaired by Long Island office manager Jolie Bua, to communicate with all of Harris Beach’s diverse professional staff and engage with firm management about their interests and concerns.

The establishment of a professional staff committee builds on the formation of the Associate Advisory Committee, chaired by Michelle Piasecki in 2019 and Kirstie Means in 2020, which performs a similar function for associates and senior counsel.

Also as part of this initiative, we built upon previous inclusion and diversity educational programs and developed a firm-wide training and CLE program, “Understanding Diversity & Eliminating Unconscious Bias in the Legal Profession - Creating an Inclusive Environment.”

This program was developed by our Council on Inclusion and Diversity with the assistance of The FutureWork Institute, along with our Professional Staff Committee, Associate Advisory Council, Office Managers and Management Committee.

A diverse group of volunteers worked collaboratively to test and shape the program at various interactive sessions during 2019. It will be rolled out firm wide to all offices in 2020.

Exploring Our Diverse Heritage

In 2019 we expanded our efforts to celebrate the heritage of diverse, underrepresented cultures and educate our teams about the history and heritage of those groups. We built a series of fun activities, in and out of our offices, tied to national milestones celebrating these underrepresented groups. These activities enabled us to pause at various times throughout the year to honor our collective melting pot in different ways.

Black History Month

February is Black History Month in the United States, an annual recognition that honors African-Americans for their struggle for equality and for their contributions to society.

We recognized Black History Month internally with a kickoff breakfast leading to an educational campaign. Each week in February we introduced remarkable African-American leaders, highlighting the contributions of William Harvey Carney, Thurgood Marshall, Charlotte Ray and Wynton Marsalis. Teams of attorneys, professional staff and administrators worked collaboratively to research and compile the information about their careers and contributions, and then circulated it to the firm. Events concluded with a trivia contest at each office.

World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development

Each May, the United Nations calls on the world to improve its understanding of diversity of all types on a single day. The World Day for Cultural Diversity seeks to trigger dialogue across the globe, and in 2019, we took up the challenge.

In honor of the Day of Diversity, each of our regional offices created displays focusing on a central idea: “We stand out, we fit in.” Everyone was asked to reflect, and then write and leave Post-it Notes on the displays to answer the following questions: “How do you experience inclusion at Harris Beach?” and “How do you bring diversity to Harris Beach?” The activity allowed us to celebrate our shared experiences and unique qualities and build on our relationships and understanding of others across the firm.

Pride Month

In June we turned our attention to issues affecting the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer communities while recognizing Pride Month. This month acknowledged the 1969 Stonewall Uprising in Manhattan while also recognizing the contributions of LGBTQ individuals and those we’ve lost to violence and HIV/AIDS.

At Harris Beach, we participated in Pride Month by focusing on broadening our perspectives through education. Our Council Members researched the history of the Stonewall Uprising, explored important LGBTQ cases coming before the Supreme Court and highlighted events in the communities where Harris Beach has offices.
Special Historical Recognition

William Wolfe, a law intern in our Syracuse office and student at Syracuse University College of Law, represented Harris Beach at a special and historic day for all lawyers who practice in New York: the posthumous admission of William Herbert Johnson to the New York State Bar after 116 years.

Born in Syracuse in 1875, William Herbert Johnson received his undergraduate degree from Boston University, served in the Army in the Spanish-American War of 1898 under Theodore Roosevelt and then returned to his hometown and enrolled in the Syracuse University College of Law.

While at the College of Law, Mr. Johnson was ostracized by many of his peers and endured discrimination daily. Despite the negativity, Mr. Johnson became the first black graduate of the College of Law, finishing at the top of his class. He passed the Bar exam on his first try, but was denied admission because of the color of his skin. Undeterred, Mr. Johnson continued to use his legal knowledge to help those within the Syracuse community.

Mr. Johnson’s posthumous admission was a celebration of his courage, commitment and conscious efforts to righting the injustice he faced. The ceremonial courtroom was standing room only, including our William, as everyone wanted to witness the great William Herbert Johnson finally being admitted into the State Bar of New York by the Fourth Department Appellate Division Justices.

Mr. Johnson helped pave the way for black and minority students. As his grandson recalled at the ceremony, when asked why he continued to go to law school and endure such prejudice and discrimination, Mr. Johnson simply replied: “Because, someone has to be the first.”

National Hispanic Heritage Month

As we moved into September, we built on our success in connection with National Hispanic Heritage Month by involving all our offices actively in the celebration.

In addition to presenting historical background on influential public figures, the Council on Inclusion and Diversity also opened doors to the culture. At various gatherings around the state and in various ways, we were able to sample Hispanic foods and enjoy Latin-inspired music.

The Latino Community within Harris Beach and the Community Involvement Committee also hosted firm-wide dress-down days with the proceeds benefiting disaster relief for the Bahamas after Hurricane Dorian. Council member Fabian Maldonado and Angela Clarke presented the Red Cross with a check from our events. We also encouraged our colleagues to share their own stories, with attorney Frank Muggia offering a heartwarming explanation of his family’s journey from Italy to Ecuador, and then subsequently to the United States.
Harris Beach has a long history of support for the Ronald H. Brown Law School Prep Program at St. John’s University School of Law, through scholarships, internships and event sponsorships.

In 2019, we continued our commitment and three students were awarded a Harris Beach scholarship to participate in the Ron Brown program. Jacob Walsh, a senior at Albright College, and Adam Fane, a junior at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, were extremely grateful for the support, for it opened up many opportunities to them.

Adam recently wrote to us:

Receiving the Harris Beach scholarship allowed me to navigate the legal education I received through the Ronald H. Brown Law School Prep Program and hone my legal skills without much financial worry.

One of my mentors, George Logothetis, once told me, “The greatest gift you can give to a man, is to believe in him.” Being awarded this scholarship demonstrated a belief in me and for that I am grateful. It has spurred a thirst for success in me to fulfill my personal, education, and professional aspirations. I will make it my duty to ensure that the resources afforded to me serve a greater purpose. It is my sincere hope that the Harris Beach scholarship will continue to allow for other young people to pursue their dreams.”

The third scholarship recipient, Siddharth Bector, completed an amazing internship last summer in our New York City office. Siddharth is a junior at Seton Hall University. He wrote in a student survey:

“I would rate the overall experience in the legal internship with Harris Beach as excellent...it exceeded my expectations.

One of my mentors, George Logothetis, once told me, “The greatest gift you can give to a man, is to believe in him.” Being awarded this scholarship demonstrated a belief in me and for that I am grateful. It has spurred a thirst for success in me to fulfill my personal, education, and professional aspirations. I will make it my duty to ensure that the resources afforded to me serve a greater purpose. It is my sincere hope that the Harris Beach scholarship will continue to allow for other young people to pursue their dreams.”

Harris Beach also engaged with students in the program on a larger scale. In June, more than 60 Ron Brown program participants and Harris Beach attorneys and professional staff met for career development roundtable discussions in HB’s New York City Office.

During their coursework at St. John’s, the students analyzed and discussed the fact pattern for the case of State v. Cyprus. At Harris Beach, they participated in a special mock trial breakout session. Students presented their opening and closing statements for this case to experienced Harris Beach litigating attorneys.

We are grateful for our partnership with St. John’s and the Ron Brown program, and look forward to continuing to work together on inclusion and diversity in the law.
The legal profession also has work to do on inclusion, retention and advancement for women at all levels. In law schools around the nation, women make up about half of all students but constitute only a little more than a third of all lawyers and 20 percent of all law firm partners.

We recognize that there are a variety of professional, personal and systemic challenges that affect women and all attorneys in their legal careers, and are working to do our part to change those dynamics. Over the last two years, we have elected 13 new partners - of those, seven have been women. The firm is also working to elevate and support female attorneys into management roles. Women serve as managing partners of our two largest offices, in Rochester and Manhattan, and on our management and compensation committees. They also serve on or lead committees addressing associate relations, training and the client experience, and manage the strategic plans for various practice groups and industry teams.

Harris Beach continues to provide business development and leadership coaching and training for both women and men. These benefits and programs are aimed at enhancing retention and advancement. In 2019, the firm also updated and formalized its compensation policies and expanded its family leave benefits, encouraging everyone to fully utilize those benefits.

At the grassroots level, Harris Beach formed HB Women Connect to provide a forum for women attorneys to address challenges and foster professional development both in and outside of the firm. The HB Women Connect organization met several times throughout 2019, including a special retreat to Seneca Falls, New York, the home of the National Women’s Hall of Fame. That retreat was held specifically to examine the pressing issues in attracting, retaining and advancing women attorneys in the workplace. The feedback was important for the firm in addressing these important challenges.

We are fortunate to have attorneys on our team whose experience is also

New Partners 2019 & 2020

Rachel Baranello
Emily Crowley
Allison Fiut
guiding our industry. Independent of each other, attorneys Heidi Schult Gregory and Judi Abbott Curry presented CLE programs of the current progress of female attorneys in the legal field, obstacles they may face, unique attributes that women bring to the legal profession, and recent cases demonstrating ongoing bias and inappropriate conduct toward women attorneys.

Later in 2019, we joined hundreds of others at the annual induction ceremonies for the Hall of Fame. We served as sponsors of the event and were honored to be in the company of accomplished women such as U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor. We invited our student partners from the University of Buffalo Black Law Students Association and Latin American Law Students Association to join us for this inspiring event.

We also reached into the community to show our support for women’s issues through sponsorships, such as our annual participation in the Susan B. Anthony Birthday Celebration.

As inclusion and diversity is a journey, we are looking forward to 2020 with excitement. As a firm we will be taking special notice of the significant milestone of the 100th anniversary of the ratification of the 19th Amendment, which gave women the Constitutional right to vote. (It also happens to be the 200th birthday of famed women’s rights activist Susan B. Anthony.)

The women attorneys on our team are recognized leaders in the legal profession, as well as in our community. For example, Audrey Peartree, who leads our Wills, Trusts and Estates practice, was named a Woman of Excellence in 2019 by the Rochester Business Journal; while Heidi Gregory was honored with the Crennel Branch Award from the Greater Rochester Association of Women Attorneys.

We’d be remiss in our Yearbook if we did not recognize our own pioneer, Beth Wilkens, who will retire in 2020. Beth received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Daily Record and Rochester Business Journal.

Beth came to Harris Beach after her graduation from Cornell Law School in 1974 and has gone on to build enduring relationships through her practice of corporate, securities, banking and finance and bankruptcy law, as well as through her involvement in community service. Beth was the first woman and youngest lawyer ever to serve as president of the Monroe County Bar Association, and has a lengthy record of service to the law profession through pro bono work as well as committee and association leadership. She also gave of time and talents generously in connection with the region’s health care system.

We are so proud of Beth. She has taught us much and it has always been an honor to call her a colleague. The lessons she taught us will remain at the forefront as we continue on our journey to make our firm more open and inclusive toward women.
INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY /two.tonum/zero.onum/one.onum/nine.onum: Year in Review

UNIVERSITY OF BUFFALO BLACK LAW STUDENTS ASSOCIATION
Honored Harris Beach as its Sponsor of the Year for support of various minority affinity groups in the UB School of Law.

LAWYERS OF COLOR
Non-profit organization focused on equality under the law recognized partner H. Todd Bullard as one of the nation’s best attorneys for diversity and inclusion in the law.

ROCHESTER BLACK BAR ASSOCIATION
Honored partner H. Todd Bullard as recipient of its 2019 Pioneer Award for championing the needs of young lawyers or prospective lawyers of color.

DAILY RECORD
Western New York daily legal newspaper recognized partner Beth Wilkens with a Lifetime Achievement Award for her career in corporate and securities law.

VOLUNTEER LEGAL SERVICES OF MONROE COUNTY
Recognized partner Beth Wilkens for her willingness and leadership in providing pro bono legal services in our community.

ROCHESTER BUSINESS JOURNAL
Named partner Lana Ivy to its 2019 class of 40 Under 40, which recognizes up-and-coming community leaders.

FRANKLIN H. WILLIAMS COMMISSION
Partner Thomas Garry serves on the Commission, which educates and advises state leaders on racial and ethnic fairness in New York Courts.

METROPOLITAN BLACK BAR ASSOCIATION
Attorney Justina Rivera serves as vice president of membership for the New York City organization.

DRI TRIAL TACTICS COMMITTEE
Partner Omar Nasar serves as the diversity liaison for this leading organization of defense attorneys and in-house counsel throughout the country.

ROCHESTER BUSINESS JOURNAL

RECOGNITION AND SERVICE

Harris Beach and its people play prominent roles across the state and even the country in promoting and encouraging the development of a more inclusive and diverse profession of law and community:

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Harris Beach
Council on Inclusion and Diversity

We want to give special recognition to our council members throughout the firm for their dedication and service to the council.

Wendy A. Kinsella, partner and co-chair, Syracuse
Kimberly A. Swetland, chief administrative officer and co-chair, New York City
Adewoye Adegoke, associate attorney, Buffalo
Cyndy Arthmann, office manager, Rochester
Stacy Juhl Buchholz, office manager, Ithaca
Mario Domanti, chief human resources officer, Rochester
Joanne L. Finnegan, administrative assistant, White Plains
Melissa A. Fletcher, administrative assistant, Syracuse
Hilary Guthrie, chief business development officer, Rochester
Christopher Jagel, chief executive officer, Rochester
Yahaira M. Liriano, administrative assistant, New York City
Fabian Maldonado, network administrator, Rochester
Melanie C. Marotto, partner, Buffalo
Sandy Milord, associate attorney, Long Island
Dawn Morrison-Hicks, applications analyst, Long Island
Omar Nasar, partner, New York City
Alex Neubert, paralegal, Rochester
Jamie Page, director of human resources, Rochester
Justina Rivera, associate attorney, New York City
Markia Scott, document specialist, Rochester
Sara Visingard, partner, Rochester
Andrienne C. Walters, associate attorney, Capital Region