

NORTHWEST INDIAN LEGAL SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM BESTOWED WITH PRESTIGIOUS ABA PROJECT AWARD

Award acknowledges \$30,000 in scholarship contributions designed to foster legal education for Native Americans

Seattle – On August 5, in Atlanta, the General Practice, Solo and Small Firm Section of the American Bar Association (ABA) – the national voice of the legal profession, with 400,000 members – will bestow the **Washington State Bar Association Indian Law Section and Northwest Indian Bar Association (NIBA)** with the prestigious “Solo and Small Firm Project Award.” The award acknowledges the success of the Indian Law Section and NIBA in raising and donating over \$30,000 in scholarships to aspiring Indian lawyers from Washington State, Oregon, Idaho and Alaska, over the past year.

"The Indian Law Section and NIBA's Indian Legal Scholarship Program is one of the most dynamic and innovative legal programs in the entire country," said **Mike McBride**, Council Member of the ABA General Practice Section and Chair of the Oklahoma Bar Association Indian Law Section. "The Program, which enables future Indian lawyers to reach their goals of joining the legal profession and representing Tribal people, is one that other bar associations and Native professional organizations should strive to emulate."

The Program's goal of nourishing future Indian lawyers is of particular importance when considered against statewide and national research findings. According to **Gabriel Galanda**, past NIBA President and current Chair of the Indian Law Section. Indians are by far the most under-represented ethnic demographic in the legal profession. For example, Indian attorneys comprise just 0.5 percent of the 23,000-member Washington State Bar Association. Nationally, 4.1 million people identify themselves as Native American but there are only 3,000 Native practitioners (2000 Census).

Since the fall of 2003, the Indian Law Section and NIBA have awarded scholarships, in amounts ranging from \$500 to \$10,000, to the following 11 aspiring Native lawyers: Ralph Jefferson (Lummi – WA), Andrea Howard (Colville – WA), Matthew Koenigs (Aleut – AK), Michael Douglas (Haida – AK), Crystal White (Nez Perce – ID), and Ryan Gunn (Colville – WA), law students at the University of Washington Law School; Rogina Beckwith (Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe – WA), Ryon Lane (Cherokee), Lisa Koop (Moraviantown Band of Canada), law students at Seattle University School of

Law; Diana Bob (Lummi), a third-year law student at Lewis & Clark Law School; and, Karol Dixon (Athabascan – AK), a second-year law student at the University of Oregon School of Law.

“It is the top priority of our tribal bar to help provide Native people with the resources they need to access the legal profession,” said Galanda. “Many of our members would not be where they are today without the scholarships they received along the way. We are committed to doing the same for others.”

Lawrence Baca (Pawnee), who chairs the ABA Commission on Racial and Ethnic Diversity in the Profession and has blazed a trail for Indian lawyers into the national and federal bar ranks, has been invited to accept the award on behalf of the Indian Law Section and NIBA.

The scholarship monies come from membership dues, a benefit auction and cash grants from the Tulalip Tribes, the Muckleshoot Tribe, the Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe, the Suquamish Tribe, the Swinomish Tribe, the Squaxin Island Tribe and the Puyallup Tribe.

The Indian Law Section and NIBA also have their sights set on adding a requirement that federal Indian jurisdictional principles be tested on the Washington, Oregon and Idaho bar exams. (*Seattle Post-Intelligencer*; *Indian Country Today*). Currently, New Mexico is the only state to require testing on Indian law in its bar exam (*Christian Science Monitor*).

Founded in 1991, NIBA is a nonprofit organization with more than 175 Native and Indian law attorneys, judges, spokesperson and students in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Alaska, British Columbia and the Yukon Territory. NIBA works to increase the number of Native and Indian attorneys in the Pacific Northwest through legal education and advocacy. The WSBA Indian Law Section, established in 1988, seeks to further develop Indian law within the bar.

Editor’s Note: Information about the Indian Law Section and NIBA can be found at www.wsba.org/lawyers/groups/indianlaw/default1.htm and www.nwiba.org.