

SPOTLIGHT: PRO BONO

NEW YORK FIRM CREATES FELLOWSHIPS AT NYU LAW SCHOOL TO AID LATINO CLIENTS

How Bickel & Brewer Gives Back to the Community

During his volunteer work for low-income clients over the past 20 years, William A. Brewer III, one of the nation's top trial lawyers, noticed an increasing need in the Latino community for high-quality, affordable legal services. His law firm, New York and Dallas based Bickel & Brewer, was already committed to helping low-income clients, many of them Latino, through a unique program, *The Bickel & Brewer Storefront*, a legal services firm through which its lawyers provide free and low-cost legal work for people in need.

Brewer realized the demand for legal assistance among this group was outpacing the availability of dedicated attorneys. "In the growing Hispanic communities, there are many people who find it difficult to navigate our legal system," says Brewer. At the same time, many students in today's generation want to do public service but can't afford to take low-paying jobs. "They want to use their bar card to give something back and actually make real change and a real difference after they graduate," he says.

Brewer, who holds a master of law in trade regulation from New York University School of Law, wanted to create a program where top law students committed to Latino issues could commit their careers to public service without worrying about money. He reached out to NYU Law School with a generous offer: his firm would create an institute and endow fellowships to pay for the legal education of students who dedicate their careers to assisting the Latino community.

The Bickel & Brewer Latino Institute for Human Rights at New York University Law School launched three years ago. It provides free tuition to two students per year, funds their summer public-interest jobs, and pays their salary for the first two years after they graduate while they do public service work in the Latino community. Through monthly



William A. Brewer III and Richard Revesz

THE BICKEL & BREWER LATINO INSTITUTE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS PROVIDES FREE TUITION TO TWO STUDENTS PER YEAR WHILE THEY DO PUBLIC SERVICE WORK IN THE LATINO COMMUNITY.

luncheon meetings featuring Latino leaders, retreats and other events, the institute is creating a supportive community for the students while they are at the law school and beyond, connecting them with faculty and other mentors including Brewer and other lawyers from his firm. It now has five scholars, each with a different focus but all deeply committed to the Latino community, for whom the dream of public service and a law degree from one of the nation's top schools is now possible.

"There are a good number of people—talented, bright and idealistic—who would go immediately into public service if they weren't graduating from law school with \$100,000 in debt and the need to catch the conveyor belt into private sector," says Brewer. "We decided, let's get some of those best and brightest, and make it possible—in fact, make it attractive—for them to go into public service for a period of time."

Melissa Navarro, a California native and one of the first two scholars at the Institute, will graduate next spring from NYU Law School and plans to work as a public defender in an office with a significant number of Latino clients. Even though she got into other top law schools, she chose NYU because of the unique fellowship. "It's innovative in the sense it's pretty much

the only program out there whose whole focus is to prepare Latino leaders," says Navarro, who says she and the other scholars have become a close-knit group. "I feel like when I graduate, I'll always be part of the program, and as it grows, I feel I'll grow too, and we can build on that."

Over the past decade or so, Bickel & Brewer has gained a

reputation for its exceptional commitment to community service, through the Bickel & Brewer

Foundation and also *The Bickel & Brewer Storefront*. Since its founding in 1995, *The Storefront* has championed important social causes, including winning the right for wheelchair athletes to compete and win prizes in the New York City marathon. *The Storefront* is currently litigating against the city of Farmers Branch, Texas, which has passed several ordinances seeking to discourage immigrants from moving there; so far, the law firm is winning, with federal judges agreeing that the ordinances are illegal.

These programs are all very important to Brewer and his partners, he says, who feel a deep obligation to use their legal skills to help others. But the students who comprise the scholars at the Bickel & Brewer Latino Institute for Human Rights have deeply impressed him with their commitment to using their formidable talents for assisting the Latino community. That they will become tomorrow's leaders give him and his partners deep satisfaction, he says.

"I live every day with knowledge of how blessed I am," says Brewer. "I've got a great practice, and part of that good fortune is that we have the ability to get involved and do some things that hopefully make a difference."

— Elaine McArdle