



DIVERSITY ADVOCATES

Nicole Bearce Albano

To Her, Diversity Means Distinguishing Yourself in a Crowd

by Jean Tang

Albano's community-oriented hometown (Englishtown, NJ), small parochial school (Red Bank Catholic High School), and intimate college (Drew University) shaped her personal style—comfortable, approachable, warm... just one handshake short of folksy. Things did not change when she became a member of Lowenstein Sandler in January 2005. Because of her easy manner, she was informally inaugurated as the go-to partner on a number of fronts, including workload management and work-life balance.

All of which makes her recent appointment as chair of Lowenstein's Diversity Initiatives Committee (DIC) all the more laudable. As *MultiCultural Law* has recognized, the firm excels for an unusual commitment to multiculturalism. The regional powerhouse understands, for example, that recruiting is meaningless without follow-through. As a result, two companion committees were designed to interlock: the DIC, and the Attorney Career Development Committee (ACDC), which focuses on retention and quality of life—"a double-edged sword," observes Albano.

The complex commercial litigator has a thriving practice, but her committee involvement is rewarding in an entirely different way. Before taking the helm at DIC, she was deeply active on the other committees. Now, she also leads Mentoring, a sub-committee of ACDC.

"It would be easy to get caught up in the day-to-day projects and crises that might come up in my cases, without taking the time to see the bigger picture. I want that connection [to my colleagues]," says Albano.

As a young lawyer, Albano had her own mentor: Justice Marie Garibaldi, the first female jurist on the New Jersey Supreme Court. Before her clerkship with the judge, Albano prepared to join a big New York City firm. Then the judge sat her down and talked with her about staying in New Jersey, advice that resonated with Albano's own predilection for a close-knit environment.

"I didn't want to go to New York and feel anonymous," she recalls.

Had she done so, it might have harkened back to



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Albano's time at Harvard Law School, where her section alone was the same size of her entire undergraduate class. At Harvard, Albano found roots in the Harvard Legal Aid Bureau (HLAB), a student-run *pro bono* organization that sealed Albano's determination to litigate. She served as vice president, and even got to go to court. And she never got lost in the mix.

As for the challenges ahead, Albano identifies the biggest as "maintaining a flexible, non-cutthroat work place." After all, Lowenstein finds itself in the difficult stance of attracting New York-caliber talent, without matching New York-caliber salaries. Intangibles make up the difference, i.e. a collegiality that still begets autonomy. "We're not about superficial face time or looking over anyone's shoulder here," says Albano. ♦