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Diversity – Law Firms

Collegial Atmosphere Attracts And Retains The Diversified Talent Needed To Meet The Demands Of The Most Complex Matters With Insight And Economy

The Editor interviews Angela A. Iuso and Clarence Smith, Jr., Partners, Connell Foley LLP.

Editor: Please tell our readers a little bit about your background.

Iuso: I am originally from New Jersey and attended Seton Hall University for both my undergraduate and law degrees. After law school, I clerked in the Appellate Division of the Superior Court of New Jersey. Following this, I joined Connell Foley and have been with the firm nearly 18 years. I am admitted to the state and federal bars of New York and New Jersey.

Smith: I grew up in the Bronx and received my B.A. from the John Jay College of Criminal Justice and my J.D. from Fordham Law School. Following law school, I worked as an Assistant District Attorney in the New York County District Attorney's Office, followed by a position as Senior Court Attorney for the Supreme Court Appellate Division Departmental Disciplinary Committee. In 1998, I moved on to serve as Assistant Chief Counsel to the United States Department of Homeland Security (formerly Immigration and Naturalization Service), where I litigated the immigration laws of the United States on behalf of the Depart-



Angela A. Iuso

ment. In 2005, I made the decision to enter private practice and started with Connell Foley in December as a partner.

Editor: Please tell us about your practice.

Iuso: I practice in the areas of professional liability, business litigation, environmental law and product liability/tort litigation. My practice includes counseling and representing individuals and companies in a wide array of areas, including property damage, contamination, personal injury and a variety of corporate issues.



Clarence Smith, Jr.

Smith: I head up Connell Foley's new Immigration Law practice, which is a component of the firm's Labor and Employment Law group. My practice focuses on counseling employers on a variety of issues, including working visas, labor certifications and green card applications. I also assist employers in complying with the United States Department of Labor and Department of Homeland Security requirements regarding non-citizen employees.

I will also be engaged in various types of civil litigation and will continue to serve as an arbitrator before the National Association of Securities Dealers.

Please email the interviewees at aiuso@connellfoley.com or csmith@connellfoley.com with questions about this interview.

Editor: What attracted you to Connell Foley?

Iuso: I was attracted to Connell Foley because of the firm's fine reputation in the legal community. In addition, the firm's management demonstrated a strong commitment toward promoting women and assisting them in developing their careers. While this type of commitment may not sound novel now, Connell Foley was a frontrunner on this issue in the late 1980s.

I also had admiration for the traditions of the firm and the innovative counsel practiced by the attorneys. They clearly made an impact on their clients, and I wanted to be a part of that.

Finally, I was struck by the fact that many attorneys practiced at the firm their whole careers – some for over 30 years – clearly demonstrating that they enjoyed working here.

Smith: Connell Foley offered a combination of things that I found very attractive. First, I was drawn to the opportunity to lead a practice area at a well-known firm. Second, the firm has shown tremendous growth over the last few years, expanding not only its client base, but also through office expansions in New York City, Jersey City and Philadelphia. Third, I was impressed by the staff – from the most senior attorneys to the newest members of the support team. The firm has a pervasive culture of mutual respect and cooperation, traits not always cultivated in highly successful law firms. And, fourth, echoing what Angela stated, I liked that many of the attorneys have spent their entire careers at the firm. This really says something about the firm's ability to provide a stimulating and rewarding place of work.

Editor: Is there a formal diversity committee at your firm?

Iuso: Yes. I serve as the chair of this committee. Connell Foley is strongly committed to the recruitment and retention of a diverse workforce of men and women from all social, racial, religious, economic, cultural and personal backgrounds. Our goal for the future is to continue to diversify our firm, as we believe this will enrich our work environment and the quality of the legal services we provide.

Smith: As one of the newest members of the firm, I am pleased and impressed at the efforts Connell Foley has made in this area. I look forward to participating.

Editor: What is the foundation of your firm's commitment to diversity?

Iuso: Our roots in this area extend back as far as 1968, when Connell Foley employed a female partner who went on to become the first woman appointed to the Appellate Division of the State of New Jersey. This was just the beginning of the firm's long-standing tradition of promoting women and minorities within the firm and encouraging their fullest development within the profession. This commitment has since extended firm-wide, in that we maintain a highly diverse workforce of staff and paraprofessionals.

Editor: How does your firm attract diverse attorneys?

Iuso: Our Hiring Committee is particularly focused on attracting diverse attorneys to the firm, both as summer associates and permanent attorneys. As such, our recruitment efforts extend to a wide range of law schools across the country. We are also committed to hiring diverse attorneys as lateral associates and partners.

But, our commitment doesn't end once the hiring process is complete. We work to ensure that all the attorneys and staff are comfortable while employed here, ensuring that our culture is marked by acceptance and inclusiveness.

Smith: Personally, I was attracted to Connell Foley by a combination of the tangible strengths – the firm's clients, their interest in my extensive government experience, and their willingness to transition me to private practice – as well as its intangible qualities, most notably their culture.

Editor: What are a few of your firm's strategies for retaining a diverse labor force?

Iuso: We are committed to a mentoring program for our newest associates, which offers support and professional guidance. We strive to maintain a fully integrated work environment within the firm.

Editor: Please give an example of your firm's other diversity initiatives.

Iuso: Our firm has partnered with Rutgers University School of Law in Newark, New Jersey to create a Connell Foley scholarship. The yearly scholarship provides financial support and, more importantly, individual mentoring to a minority law student who will work at the firm as a summer associate. We view this as a firm-wide commitment and work together to structure a meaningful mentorship program so that the recipient may avail himself or herself of many relationships and firm resources.

In addition, we attend the Minority Corporate Counsel Association's annual conference and awards dinner. This organization provides a wealth of information on diversity-related issues and recognizes firms and companies that have made outstanding progress in this area.

Editor: Where would you like Connell Foley to be in terms of diversity in say five years?

Iuso: In five years, I believe this firm will be even stronger because of our commitment to diversity. We are pleased with our increasing progress and the momentum we have gained in this area. We believe we can move forward with an even higher success rate.

Smith: I would like to see the firm bring on even more diverse attorneys, setting an example that the legal profession – and private practice in particular – is a bona fide opportunity for people of all backgrounds.

Editor: How can in-house lawyers promote diversity in the law firms they hire?

Iuso: While corporate counsel should be sensitive to the fact that many firms do not always see a return on their investment in diversity overnight, Connell Foley is a good example of a firm that has moved forward exponentially as a result of our deliberate and firm-wide commitment on this issue in recent years. In-house counsel are encouraged to recognize the efforts and progress that many private law firms have made in this area.