

Trailblazing HCBA president champions attorneys of color, new lawyers

Adine Momoh is first black woman and youngest person to lead 100-year-old association

BY MAJA BECKSTROM

As the 100th president of the Hennepin County Bar Association, Adine Momoh '09 (WMCL) has a challenge for members: "Are you being a champion for anyone?"

The daughter of Sierra Leone immigrants, Momoh is the first black woman to lead the association and, at age 34, also the youngest president. Her own first champions were her parents, who encouraged her childhood ambition of becoming a lawyer.

"They instilled in me a desire to strive for excellence and to not be distracted," she said.

After graduating summa cum laude from the University of St. Thomas Opus College of Business, Momoh graduated magna cum laude from William Mitchell College of Law, where she served as a managing editor of the law review. She was hired as a business litigator in 2009 at what was then Leonard, Street and Deinard. There, she learned to network and tackle complicated bankruptcy and securities cases, did pro bono work, and, with the encouragement of senior partners, became involved in the bar association, first as co-chair of the civil litigation section and later as the association's secretary.

As president, Momoh wants to help others navigate the profession, especially "new lawyers, those who have practiced for less than 15 years, and diverse attorneys." To that end, she has created a new social initiative called A Table for 10. The association plans to regularly reserve tables for breakfast, lunch, or dinner at minority-owned restaurants in the Twin Cities, where everyone is welcome but the focus is on attorneys of color.

"What I've observed in Big Law is that a lot of diverse attorneys don't always get asked to informal networking opportunities, whether that's over drinks at a bar or being asked to play golf or to go to someone's cabin," said Momoh. "I want to provide opportunities to connect outside of work in an informal way."

Momoh, who in 2016 became an equity partner at Stinson Leonard Street, is also making practical changes at the association to welcome new lawyers. She has asked each executive committee member to attend two meetings of the new lawyer section. On her first visit she gave tips on networking.

Momoh serves on the dean's advisory board at Mitchell Hamline and on the boards of several associations and foundations. But her biggest role as a champion may lie ahead. She and her husband, Vince Baillet, recently became parents of a baby girl.

"I'm already telling her she's going to achieve great things," said Momoh. "I want her to know she can do whatever she sets her mind to."

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