

DCBA PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE JUNE, 2009

By: Steven P. Befera

On June 5, 2009, I was honored to accept the Office of President of the Dade County Bar Association, now in its 93rd year serving Miami-Dade County. The rich history of our Association is replete with examples of how our members have contributed their time and energies for the betterment of our community and government. In 1939 the Dade County Bar Association formed its first Legal Aid Program. In 1943 we established the "Lawyers Reference Plan" the first referral program of its kind for military personnel and the general public. In 1960 the DCBA formed a Relief Fund for Cuban Lawyers. In 1966 we constructed a four story office building in downtown Miami which houses the DCBA, Legal Aid and "Put Something Back" programs and won the American Bar Association "Award of Excellence" for the most outstanding Bar Association in the United States. In 1986 we established the Judicial Campaign Practices Commission. In 1992 we created Legal Assistance Programs for victims of Hurricane Andrew. In 1997 in cooperation with the Dade County School Board, we established the "Teen Court." In 2000 the DCBA received the Florida Bar award for the Most Outstanding Professionalism Committee in Florida. These are but a few highlights of our achievements over the last century. While we deserve to be proud of these and many other accomplishments and awards obtained before and since, we cannot rest on our laurels.

In these times of economic crisis and increased pressure on our overburdened and underfunded justice system, we are again called upon to make a difference for the common good. With this in mind, I ask each of you to join our efforts in the coming year and beyond so that we may achieve the following objectives. 1) Obtain adequate funding for our Courts and the Offices of State Attorney and Public Defender so that fair and timely justice may be delivered to our citizens and; 2) Enhance and expand our delivery of legal services to those most in need through our award winning Legal Aid and "Put Something Back" programs.

In addition, our newly elected Board of Directors, together with our appointed Committee Chairs are committed to more efficiently deliver to our members, enhanced, new, and valuable benefits and services. To achieve this internal objective we will 1) Update our website, making it even more interactive, valuable and enjoyable to use; 2) Market our Association more effectively and consistently through new approaches to its official name and identity; and 3) More aggressively publicize our good works so member participation is energized and new membership is developed

Twenty-nine years ago, I traded the snow and ice of a small hardscrabble mining town in Northern Minnesota for the sun and adventure of Miami. I can personally testify to the opportunities available to those willing to work hard to achieve them. However, there exists lingering prejudices in our society which stymie growth and achievement for our community. Therefore, we must continue our efforts now and in the future to encourage diversity in our membership and our leadership.

Thank you again for your support and for bestowing upon me this honor to serve you as President of the Dade County Bar Association. I look forward to meeting personally with as many members as possible this year. Please feel free to write or call with your input. Your active participation is always welcome and greatly appreciated.