



For Release:
May 15, 2017
For Immediate Release

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HENNEPIN COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION RECOGNIZES COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY

MINNEAPOLIS: -- The Hennepin County Bar Association's (HCBA) Diversity and Inclusion Committee recognizes three individuals (two lawyers and one non-lawyer) and a legal employer for their outstanding commitment to diversity in the profession. Individual awardees are **Gregory Merz** (Gray Plant Mooty), **Roshan Rajkumar** (Bowman and Brooke), and **Cynthia Anderson** (Lindquist & Vennum). **Blackwell Burke** receives the legal employer award. Recipients will be recognized at the HCBA annual meeting on June 1.

In his three decades of practicing law, **Gregory Merz** has been a relentless advocate for equality and justice for marginalized members of society. Serving as chair of Gray Plant Mooty's Diversity and Inclusion Committee, Merz has dedicated himself to increasing hiring, promotion, and retention of minority attorneys at his firm. Merz has been recognized for his extensive pro bono work for people of color and limited financial means. He has worked numerous difficult cases, including a death penalty case, a class action case from foster children, and a discrimination case against an immigrant nurse. In addition, Merz volunteers for the Advocates for Human Rights and represents asylum seekers. He has done important international legal research work for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia, and he has worked on educational issues in Nepal. He has also served on the board of directors of the Legal Aid Society of Minneapolis and the Women of Nations.

Roshan Rajkumar has dedicated himself to advancing diversity and inclusion in the legal profession. Beyond the demands of his work as a litigation attorney, Rajkumar is chair of the firm's Diversity and Inclusion Committee where he is working on a number of innovative advancements to enrich the diversity of Bowman and Brooke. He was also selected as a 2017 Leadership Council on Legal Diversity Fellow, a prestigious program that focuses on driving diversity in the legal profession nationwide. Previously, as hiring partner, Rajkumar was in charge of vetting, recruiting, and hiring diverse law students and lateral attorneys for the firm's

Minneapolis office, and other offices throughout the U.S. Through this experience, Rajkumar recognized how implicit bias affected recruiting efforts, and he reconstructed interview questions to ensure gender and demographic neutrality. He further carries out his passion for diversity in the community by volunteering as a leader in several community organizations. He is co-chair of the Board of Twin Cities Diversity in Practice, has served on the United States Tennis Association Diversity and Inclusion Committee and as a volunteer in many different areas at the Basilica of Saint Mary in Minneapolis.

Cynthia Anderson, pro bono director at Lindquist & Vennum, has devoted her career to promoting basic human rights, especially in the area of immigrant status and economic class. Last year, she was instrumental in spearheading Lindquist & Vennum's involvement the Austin Area Minority Business Project—an innovative program that addresses the legal needs of minorities in southern Minnesota. Along with Volunteer Lawyers Network, she has developed a training course on poverty for pro bono lawyers. And in her past work with the Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota, she helped the organization grow to serve more members of the community.

The firm of **Blackwell Burke** has made itself into one of the most diverse firms in the Twin Cities. The firm is nearly balanced between men and women and fifty percent of the attorneys are people of color. The firm encourages attorneys to advance diversity outside of billable hours, and they have set up an incentive program for giving back to the community. Two former presidents of the Minnesota Association of Black Lawyers are on staff. One attorney founded the Minnesota Mother Attorneys Association and another attorney was recognized for his contribution to the Latino legal experience in Minnesota.

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The mission of the HCBA is to serve the needs of a diverse membership by advancing collegiality, professionalism, ethical conduct, and competence in the legal profession. The association strives to ensure the fairness and accessibility of the legal system by promoting public understanding and confidence in our system of justice and by working along with the courts to improve the administration of justice. The largest of Minnesota's 21 county bar associations, the HCBA serves nearly 8,000 legal professionals.

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