

CABA

BRIEFS

WINTER 2020



Hispanic Identity Knows No Bounds

By Jessica Marra

Being born and raised by a Cuban Mother in Miami, I was not sure what to expect when coming to Broward County for law school. Through proud Hispanic Judges like Judge Robert Diaz and Judge Marina Garcia-Wood, I quickly discovered that the legal Hispanic community in Broward, while still growing, already had a strong voice. From Judge Diaz's Hispanic Law Student Luncheon, where we received a "hand up, not a hand out," to the numerous Hispanic connections I have made in this legal community over the years, it has become clear that irrespective of physical geography, our collective cultural Hispanic identity remains the same. My Hispanic colleagues, mentors, and Judges that have now become friends all share a dedication to family, an eagerness to work hard, and (of course) an appreciation for good food. U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sonya Sotomayor's words appear to ring true: "*The Latina in me is an ember that blazes forever.*" If the ember is truly bright, it will follow you wherever you go. And so, it has followed me, my Hispanic colleagues and the numerous Hispanic Judges that have continued to break barriers over the years in Broward County.

It is, in large part, because of these leaders in our Hispanic community that my ember (and likely those of my Hispanic colleagues) shines so bright. Over the last 20 years, the Hispanic legal community in Florida has climbed from 5% to 10% for attorneys, and up to 10% of our Florida State Judiciary. To that end, Broward County currently has 16 Hispanic Judges and Magistrates, when as recently as 10 years ago it was questionable whether to even run in a Judicial race in Broward County with a Hispanic



last name. Despite that hesitancy, the Hispanic Judiciary in Broward County has doubled since 2006. While we still have a ways to go, it has been encouraging to be a part of this continued up rise in Miami's neighbor to the north that I now call home. Trailblazers like Judge Marina Garcia-Wood and her colleagues started the Broward County Hispanic Bar Association (BCHBA) in 1989 when there were so few of us, with the aim to promote judicial diversity and the interests of Hispanic lawyers. Because of their brave and forward-thinking efforts, the voice of the BCHBA is more far-reaching than ever. I am honored to serve as an Executive Board Member for this great organization, helping to expand the Hispanic voice in Broward's legal community, and beyond. The Broward County Bar Association has also taken great initiative to help expand our voice all the way up the state. Organizations like CABA and the BCHBA allow Hispanics throughout Florida to unify as one force for good and to plow the ground beneath our feet for those that come behind us.

However, it is only because of those that came before us that we have the tools at our disposal to do so. As Sir Isaac Newton once said, "*if I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of Giants*". Hispanic attorneys in Broward County, and Florida at large, are fortunate to have giants in our midst; and we thank you.



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