

Indian Law Section

Board of Directors
2009 Annual Report

December 30, 2009

I. Activities Undertaken Since Last Report

The Indian Law Section, through the active participation and hard work of its directors and Section members, has had another very successful and busy year. The various activities have drawn more participation by members of the Bar, which has shown a steady increase in membership in the Section, and interest by the Section members in the activities and events held by the Section during the year. As in previous years, the Board met on a regular basis, every other month, with four active committees. A summary of each committee's activities follows.

- **CLE Committee.** The CLE Committee, chaired by Director Delilah Tenorio Choneska, planned and presented two CLE seminars during 2009. The first session was entitled "The Basics of the Indian Civil Rights Act" presented by Section members Paul Spruhan and Bidtah Becker at the State Bar Annual Conference. The presentation explored the Indian Civil Rights Act of 1968 and its application to tribal governments. It described the origins and purposes of the Act, its provisions, and the ability of member and non-members to use the Act to mandate tribal and federal court review of tribal government decisions. It discussed how tribal courts can interpret the Act to harmonize the congressional language with tribal customs and traditions, using the decisions of the Navajo Nation Supreme Court as a model. The session also discussed the congressional amendments of the Act currently proposed in the Tribal Law & Order Act (S. 3320). The second CLE was a half-day presentation at the State Bar Center in November preceding the Section's Annual membership luncheon and meeting. The presentation, entitled "The Indian Child Welfare Act: Over 30 Years of Protecting Indian Families in New Mexico" was presented by a panel of attorneys, including Section member Rosalie Chavez of New Mexico Legal Aid, Native American Program; Delilah Tenorio Choneska (Director), New Mexico Legal Aid, Native American Program; David Brainerd, General Counsel for NM Children, Youth, and Families Department, and Amanda H. Hartmann of Advocacy, Inc. The session was designed to provide some basic, practical knowledge about ICWA and its application to Native American families in New Mexico. A discussion regarding strategies to improve compliance with ICWA was also conducted.
- **Media Committee.** The Media Committee, chaired by Director Pablo Padilla, oversaw both the Section's webpage and the publication of its newsletter. Updates were made to the webpage to include general information about each committee. The committee also assured that e-blasts were being sent out to Section members on a regular basis to inform them of upcoming events, important dates and other items relevant to Section members. The newsletter, which was posted on the webpage and distributed by email to Section members, contains both Section news and articles submitted by Section members and law student dealing with current topics in Indian Law.
- **Outreach Committee.** The Outreach Committee was developed to build Section membership and involve the members more actively in the work of the Section. Chaired

by Director Georgene Louis, the Committee hosted two Section mixers during the year, each of which attracted over 20 or so attendees, including Section members, law student members, newly licensed attorneys, and guests. The Committee was successful in attaining gifts donated by various companies to give as door prizes to mixer attendees. The Committee also conducted an active outreach effort through the Summer Policy Academy and to the Santa Fe Indian School students to continue the “Choose Law” program, an ABA YLD-sponsored effort to encourage minority high school students to consider careers in law. The discussions with high school students, Native attorneys, and Native law students were lively and sparked much interest in pursuing a legal education.

- **Scholarship Committee.** The Scholarship Committee, chaired by Director Christina West, was successful in conducting the Section’s fourth annual Bar Preparation Scholarship program. The program helps defray the costs of bar examination application fees and preparation course fees for third-year UNM law students who intend to take the New Mexico Bar Exam and practice Indian Law. The Committee worked diligently on its fundraising efforts and led a successful effort to award two scholarships to Aaron Choneska and Alicia Sanasac, from a pool of six applicants.

II. Ongoing Activities

For 2010, the Section’s Board of Directors is committed to building on this year’s successes. The Board plans to:

- Continue its bi-monthly Board meetings and active committee work between meetings;
- Conduct CLE seminars at the State Bar Annual Meeting and in conjunction with the Section’s Annual Luncheon and membership meeting;
- Actively seek authors for current Indian law issues for publication in the Spring and Fall newsletters, and continue to improve the Section’s webpage;
- Expand the number of Section mixers to three, continue the outreach to UNM Indian Law students, and continue to present and expand the “Choose Law” program for minority high school students;
- Implement the fifth year of the Section’s Bar Preparation Scholarship program, with a focus on increasing its fundraising base and attracting more scholarship applicants.

III. Issues Requiring Board of Bar Commissioner Action: None.

Finally, the Section’s Board of Directors again want to extend its deepest appreciation for the support and dedication it has received from the State Bar staff, especially Christine Morganti and Tony Horvat for their assistance, professionalism, and hard work that they provide to the Section.

Respectfully submitted,

Helen B. Padilla, Chair
Indian Law Section