



School of Law
University of Missouri

Transcript

VOL. 41 No. 2 | WINTER 2018

A portrait of a woman with short, reddish-brown hair, smiling warmly. She is wearing a black blazer over a patterned scarf with yellow and black floral designs. The background is a soft-focus outdoor setting with greenery.

A Dean for Students

LIDSKY BECOMES 17TH DEAN
OF THE SCHOOL OF LAW

ALUMNI PROFILE: RONALD A. NORWOOD, '86

by Shajiah Jaffri, 1L

When **Ronald A. Norwood** joined Lewis Rice as a litigator in 1988, after serving as a law clerk for Federal District Court Judge **Scott O. Wright, '50**, he was the firm's only African-American associate. The only other African-American attorney was a partner at the firm and served as his firm mentor. Today, based on his leadership as chair of the Lewis Rice Diversity and Inclusion (DAI) Committee, Lewis Rice has been recognized for its commitment to diversity, and the firm is the most diverse it has been in its over 100-year history. In 2017, the firm was selected to receive the Corporate Diversity Award given by the *St. Louis American* Foundation – the first law firm to receive the award in the 18 years it has been given. The award is evidence of the hard work and success of the firm's DAI Committee since its creation in 2013.

Norwood was appointed committee chair because of his personal commitment to equality in the legal profession and his community outreach efforts, which included facilitating firm job shadowing for high school students. Lewis Rice also believed Norwood would help advance its longstanding commitment to diversity. In facilitating job shadowing for high school students, Norwood would lead small group tours that would visit the firm, a local law school and then federal or state courthouses to watch civil and criminal proceedings. The students would have the opportunity to meet lawyers and non-lawyer professionals and ask questions over lunch.

Since its creation, Lewis Rice's Diversity and Inclusion Committee has redoubled the firm's commitment in this area with the goal of becoming a recognized leader in legal diversity. The DAI Committee's work revolves around four pillars: proactive, diverse recruitment; proactive mentorship of young associates; proactive community outreach with student and professional organizations and other community oriented programs; and proactive retention efforts. Through its work, the DAI Committee has supported the College Bound Program and Black Law Students Associations at Missouri law schools, including MU, as well as organizations that support women and gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students.

Norwood says that one of the main challenges for the DAI Committee is convincing some attorneys that these initiatives are good for business. The committee has been successful in moving the needle by convincing those attorneys that bringing in more women and people of color, and getting rid of implicit biases about whether these groups can perform well, is good for the firm's business, as well as being the right thing to do.

"Our profession is a service-oriented profession," says Norwood. "The job is supposed to be about justice. And achieving justice for our clients is one thing. But in a broader context, social justice is also very important."

Being African-American helped Norwood see the practice of law from different vantage points and navigate the legal terrain from different circumstances. Even before his role as chairperson, Norwood recognized



the value of diversity and inclusion in the legal community. He has been active in the community as a mentor and with different organizations that celebrate diversity and inclusion. He works with the Black Law Students Association at the School of Law. He mentors college students, law students and new lawyers. He serves as chair of the Harris-Stowe State University Board of Regents.

Community involvement is important to Norwood because he remembers the people who mentored him. **Maurice D. Early, '84**, encouraged him to attend the School of Law. Assistant Dean Emeritus **Robert G. Bailey, '79**, advised and taught Norwood during his time in law school. And his wife, Washington University School of Law Professor **Kimberly Jade Norwood, '85**, served as an inspiration during law school, and her current work in implicit bias and colorism serves as a constant motivation for Norwood to inspire others in the area of legal diversity.

As someone coming from a humble background, Norwood feels an obligation and commitment to give back and to make sure other upcoming law students and lawyers have the same opportunities and successes he has had.