



Ronald Nguyen

Celebrating Asian Heritage Month: Leadership, Representation, and Service

As the first Asian President of the Kansas City Metropolitan Bar Foundation (KCMBF), this Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) Heritage Month holds profound significance for me. It is a time to reflect on the importance of representation in leadership, celebrate the assortment of cultures in the Kansas City community, and share the personal and professional experiences that have shaped my journey.

A Personal Story: Lessons in Representation

One of the most impactful lessons I learned about cultural understanding came from my father. One day, he asked me to join him on a drive to pick up a church bulletin so he could hire a lawyer. I agreed, assuming we were heading to the American church just ten minutes from our house. However, as he got on the highway, I asked where we were going. He replied that we were driving to the Vietnamese church – an hour and twenty minutes away.

When I questioned why we weren't going to the nearby American church, which also had lawyers listed on its bulletin, his response was profound: he wanted a Vietnamese lawyer who would understand his language, culture, and perspective. While I am confident that the American lawyers would have zealously advocated for him, his insistence on finding someone who shared his background taught me an invaluable lesson about representation.

This experience became a driving force in my decision to immerse myself in Vietnamese culture – not only as part of my heritage but as a way to connect with others and better serve my community. It also inspired me to learn about other cultures and languages, including Spanish. Over the years, this commitment has helped me build deeper connections with clients from various backgrounds by understanding their decisions through a cultural lens.

The Importance of Service in Leadership

My dedication to representation extends beyond my legal practice into active service within the community. Throughout my career, I have had the privilege of serving in leadership roles across several organizations that advocate for underrepresented communities: As an officer, president, and board member of the Asian American Bar Association of Kansas City (AABAKC), I worked to foster relationships among Asian American attorneys and address issues impacting our community. This experience reinforced my belief in the power of collective advocacy and mentorship within the legal profession.

Serving on the advisory council of the Asian American Chamber of Commerce of Kansas City (AACC), allowed me to support initiatives that promote economic opportunities for AAPI-owned businesses while strengthening ties between cultural and professional communities.

As sponsorship chair and legal advisor for National Association of Asian American Professionals (NAAAP), I contributed to programs that empower Asian professionals through leadership development and networking opportunities.

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**MILITARY MATTERS
PRO BONO SPOTLIGHT**



Kelisen Binder

Congratulations to **Kelisen Binder**, of The Binder Law Firm, for being selected as this month's Military Matters Pro Bono Spotlight. For more information, please visit kcmbf.org/militarymatters today.

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WITH THE FOUNDATION?**

Email info@kcmbf.org

As president and board member of the Vietnamese American Community of Greater Kansas City, I worked closely with local leaders to preserve Vietnamese culture while addressing the needs of our growing community.

These roles have been instrumental in shaping my understanding of leadership as service – an opportunity to uplift others.

Representation Matters

Representation is more than just visibility; it is about creating spaces where various voices are heard and valued. My father's insistence on finding a lawyer who understood his culture underscores what many people seek – leaders who can empathize with their experiences and advocate for them effectively. This principle applies not only in law but across all sectors where trust is built through shared understanding.

As Marian Wright Edelman said: "You can't be what you can't see." This quote resonates deeply because representation empowers individuals by showing them what is possible – whether it's seeing someone who shares their story in a courtroom, a boardroom, or any position of influence. When leaders reflect their communities, they inspire confidence in institutions while fostering innovation through varied perspectives.

Empowering Future Leaders Through SLA

As KCMBF President during this historic moment, I am proud of our efforts to create pathways for future leaders through programs like KCMBF's Student Law Academy (SLA). SLA is designed to inspire high school students from historically underserved areas to pursue careers in law while providing mentorship and hands-on experiences that prepare them for success.

The SLA includes two key components:

- 1) Legal Pathway Program: Rising juniors and seniors participate in educational sessions led by legal professionals each morning while engaging in mentorship lunches weekly.

- 2) Job Shadow Program: Returning SLA graduates job shadow with law firms, courts, and government agencies during rotational site visits that culminate in a mock trial experience.

This program thrives because of volunteers like you— attorneys, judges, firms, and sponsors who dedicate their time and resources to empower these scholars.

How You Can Help

I invite you to join us in shaping the future by volunteering or sponsoring SLA initiatives: 1) Serve as a speaker or mentor during educational sessions or mentorship lunches; 2) Host scholars for rotational site visits at your firm or agency; 3) Sponsor SLA programs financially to ensure scholars receive paid opportunities without barriers; 4) Lead or host Legal Pathway sessions and/or 5) Share your career path with scholars during mentorship lunches.

Your involvement will be an investment in Kansas City's legal community while empowering young minds from underserved areas. If you're interested in volunteering, sponsoring, or just want to know more about SLA programs, please email info@kcmbf.org.

Looking Ahead: A Call for Inclusive Leadership

This AANHPI Heritage Month reminds us not only to celebrate our achievements but also to honor those who paved the way for us while committing ourselves to build a welcoming future – one where every voice is valued and every story matters.

Thank you for allowing me the privilege of serving as your KCMBF President during this important time. I look forward to working with you all this year!■

Best Regards,



Ron

G D G

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