

# PRESS RELEASE

---

## Firm Expands Its Diversity Initiative

October 23, 2008

(Memphis, TN/October 22, 2008) The law firm of Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell & Berkowitz, PC, announces new developments in its ongoing efforts to promote diversity in the legal profession. The selection of recipients in its recently established diversity scholarship program and the launch of a diversity outreach program for college students mark the latest advances in the Firm's already established Diversity Initiative.

The first recipients of the Baker Donelson Diversity Scholarship Program are Shazi Jiang of Vanderbilt School of Law and Staci Pierce of Cumberland School of Law. Ms. Jiang completed Vanderbilt University Medical School in 2007 with an M.D., and has an undergraduate degree in molecular biology. Ms. Pierce has an M.B.A. from the University of Alabama and worked for several years in the computer industry. The two recipients were selected from more than 160 applicants from schools throughout the country, such as University of California (Berkeley and Davis), Southern Methodist University, Northwestern, Washington University, Penn State and University of Iowa, to name a few.

The Baker Donelson Diversity Scholarship Program, which was established earlier this year, awards scholarships annually to diverse law school students who have completed their first year of law school. Baker Donelson awards each recipient a salaried second year summer associate position in one of the Firm's offices, and, after the completion of the summer associate position, a \$10,000 scholarship during the students' third year of law school.

In another Diversity Initiative development, the Firm has also launched a Diversity Pipeline Outreach Program. Through ongoing mentoring relationships that encourage and educate minority and female college students who have an interest in the legal profession, the program is designed to develop a pipeline that will increase the number of minority and female students who go to law school.

Through partnerships with strategically identified colleges and universities, Baker Donelson's Diversity Pipeline Outreach Program will focus on enhancing awareness of the accessibility and attainability of attending law school and practicing law. Specific planned initiatives include Q&A sessions on the basics of practicing law, educating students on the many different vocations available to someone who holds a J.D. degree, and giving students the opportunity to experience the practice of law in a variety of settings through visits to law firms, courtrooms and local and state legislatures. Eventually, the program may also include helping students navigate the application processes for law school as well as grants and scholarships.

Mark A. Baugh, Chair of Baker Donelson's Diversity Committee, says these programs address trends that point to declining numbers of women and minorities entering the legal profession. "Statistics from Columbia Law School and the Society of American Law Teachers show a nearly 8% drop in nationwide enrollment of African-American and Mexican-American students in U.S. law schools," said Mr. Baugh. "And, while roughly 50% of law school students are women, fewer female law students are moving on to practice law."

Diversity in the legal profession has been a focus for some time, with many law firms implementing formal diversity programs as well as women's initiatives to ensure the recruitment, retention and advancement of women and minority attorneys. According to Mr. Baugh, Baker Donelson has successfully implemented these types of programs, but added that the problem goes beyond just the recruitment and retention of women and

minorities by law firms. "To ensure that our profession is represented by attorneys with a diversity of backgrounds, we also have to focus on the pipeline by increasing the number of diverse students who take that initial step of choosing law as a profession and by enhancing opportunities for diverse students in both college and law school," said Mr. Baugh. "The Diversity Pipeline Outreach Program and Diversity Scholarship Program help to ensure that more minority and female students are aware of the option of law as a profession and are given every opportunity to pursue that option."

Baker Donelson is one of only a few firms in the South to have a scholarship program for diverse law school students and is breaking new ground with its outreach program. "There are a lot of diversity initiatives out there, but we're not aware of any other law firm in our market that has a formalized diversity outreach program," said Mr. Baugh. "We see Baker Donelson as a leader in the arena of diversity. We feel both these programs are strong components of our overall Diversity Initiative and ensure we are working at all levels to address the issue of diversity in the legal profession."

Since the launch of Baker Donelson's Diversity Initiative in 2002, the increase in the number of minority attorneys at the Firm has far outpaced the Firm's overall growth. While the total number of attorneys at Baker Donelson has doubled, its minority attorney population and the number of minority shareholders have more than tripled. The Firm has also been successful in improving the recruitment and retention of female attorneys and increasing the representation of women in leadership positions at the Firm. Since expanding its diversity efforts with the launch of its Women's Initiative in 2005, Baker Donelson has seen an increase of nearly 40% in the number of women attorneys and an increase of close to 30% in the number of women shareholders, versus overall Firm growth of about 20%.