

25 Years of CAPABA

By DAN A. BRODY

The Connecticut Asian Pacific American Bar Association (CAPABA) is the only association geared towards Asian Pacific American attorneys in Connecticut, with the mission to support Asian Pacific American attorneys and communities and those interested in Asian Pacific American legal issues throughout the state of Connecticut. CAPABA's membership is open to all attorneys, law professors, law students, and other interested individuals practicing or residing in the state of Connecticut. CAPABA was formed on May 1, 2000 as a 501(c)(6) organization by Attorney Amy Lin Meyerson, who also served as its first President. When Amy moved to Connecticut in 1999, she found that our state lacked a bar association that represented the needs and promoted the legal career development of Asian Americans. Thus, she set out to create the Connecticut affiliate of the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association (NAPABA), which is the nation's largest Asian Pacific American membership organization representing the interest of 80,000 attorneys, judges, law professors, and law students and with over 90 affiliates is the national voice for the Asian Pacific American legal profession. Both CAPABA and NAPABA promote justice, equity, and opportunity for Asian Pacific American attorneys and foster environments for professional development, legal scholarship, advocacy, and community involvement.

With the encouragement and support of NAPABA, UConn and Yale Schools of Law, the Connecticut Bar Association (CBA) and other attorneys of color, Amy established a small but dedicated network

of attorneys of Asian and Pacific descent who shared the vision of creating a NAPABA affiliate in Connecticut. The CBA lent its assistance by hosting CAPABA's website during its early years, and UConn and Yale Schools of Law hosted functions where prospective CAPABA members could meet to facilitate its foundation and CLE programs.

CAPABA's inaugural officers and directors were Amy Lin Meyerson (President and Director), Mony P.B. Yin (Vice-President and Director), Mary Chang (Secretary and Director), Ivan K. Fong (Director) and James Wu (Director).

CAPABA's First Annual Dinner was held on July 30, 2001, at Butterfly Restaurant in West Hartford with approximately thirty attendees. In 2003, only three years after its incorporation, CAPABA hosted its first NAPABA Northeast Regional Conference, which drew a substantial number of attendees. In 2008, 2011, and again in 2018,

CAPABA hosted the NAPABA Northeast Regional Conferences, drawing hundreds of attendees from multiple states. Every year since its founding, CAPABA's Annual Gala Dinner attracts lawyers, judges, law students, and other legal professionals to gather in a celebration of the year's accomplishments and to look forward to those to come. Our Annual Gala Dinners also provide us an opportunity to recognize those in the legal profession who have provided exemplary service and support to our mission or the APA community.

In 2006, the CAPABA Educational Foundation was established as a non-profit educational affiliate of CAPABA. Each year, the Foundation oversees the annual award of the CAPABA Educational Foundation Scholarship. The Scholarship is intended to be awarded each academic year to an Asian Pacific American law student who demonstrates leadership potential, excellence in academia, and a firm





commitment to and involvement with the Asian American community in Connecticut. Scholarships are awarded each year at CAPABA's Annual Gala.

CAPABA celebrated its 20th anniversary in the middle of the global COVID-19 pandemic on May 20, 2020 and pivoted from in-person events to online events throughout 2020 and 2021, including a Wine and Whiskey Tasting, a panel on Anti-Asian Violence, and holiday parties, as well as outdoor get-togethers. While we were unable to celebrate our 20th anniversary in person, we did so by holding a joint Virtual Annual Gala with the Connecticut Hispanic Bar Association (CHBA). Our members also were active during the pandemic in their communities. CAPABA Board of Director Ginny Kim helped organize the CBA's pandemic pro bono clinic and President Dan Brody volunteered and took on the clinic's first pro bono case. CAPABA also was active during that time in responding to incidents of anti-Asian hate crimes and incidents occurring in our state and even to our members. CAPABA members, including Attorney General William Tong, participated in communities' rallies and events, participated on educational panels and programs, and gave interviews to media outlets.

This year's 2025 Annual Gala will celebrate CAPABA's 25th Anniversary and there is

so much to be thankful for and celebrate! In our last bar year, we attended and publicized *The Far Country*, a powerful play by Lloyd Suh and a finalist for the 2023 Pulitzer Prize for Drama, which connected members to the history of Chinese immigration in the early 20th century. We held cultural gatherings like our Lunar New Year celebration, Voter Registration collaboration, and Hot Pot dinners to strengthen the ties within our community. We have also worked to bring in the next generation, with renewed efforts to connect with law students, including a presence at the Connecticut Bar swearing-in ceremonies. Beyond our CAPABA community, we continued to collaborate with numerous partner organizations, including other affinity bar groups, Lawyers Collaborative for Diversity and NAPABA to improve diversity in the legal profession and positively impact our community through activities such as NAPABA's lobby day and get-out-the-vote campaigns. Lobby day allowed our members to raise awareness on matters affecting the Asian and legal community, such as historical laws that prevented Chinese individuals from holding real estate, including the Alien Land Laws and other discriminatory property restrictions. Members worked to ensure that our community's voices were heard by encouraging voter engagement within the Asian community through voter registration events, and we continue to hold these

events monthly. We also saw our members participating on panels addressing critical issues such as microaggressions, offering tools to help our community navigate and overcome these challenges, and serving on the state's Hate Crimes Advisory Panel. Through vital collaborations, we were able to shine a light on resources and support to our communities, such as promoting the Connecticut Information Center's hate crime reporting tool—an essential resource in raising awareness and empowering individuals to report incidents of hate.

CAPABA has steadily grown, and today proudly includes attorneys in the private and public sectors, in-house counsel, judges, professors, law students, and others who support CAPABA's mission. CAPABA currently has three regional committees in Fairfield County, Hartford County, and New Haven County to better serve the needs of APA communities throughout Connecticut and to provide more frequent and readily accessible opportunities for CAPABA's members to attend and participate in various events and initiatives throughout the year and collaborate with each other. ■



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