

The Bar Around The Corner: Nigerian Lawyers Association



Association Address / Phone: 305 Broadway, 14th floor, New York, NY 10007; 718-522-0103

Web site: www.nigerianlawyers.org

Founded: 1999

Number of Members: 385

Brief Association Vision: To cultivate the science of jurisprudence, facilitate and advance the fair and equitable administration of justice, serve the needs of the members of the Nigerian legal community and the Nigerian community as a whole, in their understanding of and access to the law, and to educate and assist such persons in their daily dealings with the law.

Brief History: The Nigerian Lawyers Association (NLA) was incorporated in 1999 as a not-for-profit, non-partisan association of attorneys and counselors-at-law. It has taken great strides in its short existence. Each past administration has worked tirelessly to bring a variety of enrichment programs to its members and the surrounding community. From the creation of legal clinics in 1999, to the inception of the scholarship program in 2010, the NLA has clearly demonstrated a commitment to furthering its mission.

What is your association's most popular outing / social event? Each year, NLA confers awards on individuals who have made inspiring professional or public service contributions that have significantly impacted a community, a nation or the world at an Annual Merit Awards Dinner. This event is always invigorating and insightful, as distinguished Nigerians impart words of wisdom and encouragement to attendees. The evening culminates in an elegant sit-down dinner of traditional Nigerian cuisine followed by dancing to the beats of local and international artists.

What are your association's most important current projects / initiatives? *Public Relations*—NLA works hard to strengthen the image of Nigerians both in America and abroad. In June, the NLA invited CEOs and journalists from key Nigerian publications and community organizations to discuss the media's role in promoting a positive image of the country. Though the discussion was intense at times, we reached a consensus that, at the very

least, a fair and balanced representation of the country is warranted.

NLA is uniquely positioned because it has sponsors in the U.S. and Nigeria. One of the NLA's future goals is to explore alternative ways to connect with the Nigerian community and facilitate justice. In that regard, the NLA will facilitate dialogue with Nigeria-based firms and the Nigerian Bar Association (based in Nigeria) to determine how the NLA could better serve the Nigerian community.

Legal Clinics—NLA conducts pro bono legal clinics in venues such as churches, mosques, community centers and local libraries. The clinics, which have been held in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Bronx and Queens, address various legal problems, including real estate, bankruptcy, immigration, family law and criminal law. One of the clinics involves Deferred Action Childhood Arrivals (DACA), which is part of a series of clinics throughout New York sponsored by the Department of State to provide free legal assistance to a growing number of eligible youth.

NLA is the proud recipient of the Conference of Bar Leaders' 2011 Bar Leaders Innovation Award, presented in recognition of the NLA's pro bono clinics.

Legal Internship Program—Established in 2008, this program provides young attorneys, law students and law graduates based in the U.S. with opportunities to intern with a participating law firm based in Nigeria. Students who participate in the program receive a discounted airline ticket from JFK to Lagos, Nigeria.



The Nigerian Lawyers Association held its annual dinner on Oct. 13, 2012 in New York City, where member of the year awardees were honored. L- R, Immediate Past President Yomi Ajaiyeoba; Board of Directors Immediate Past Chair Oliver Mbamara of Brooklyn (Office Of Temporary And Disability Assistance); Patrick Okeke; President Nnenna Onua of Brooklyn (Soleil, Onua & Associates, LLP) and Board of Directors Chair Courage Otaigbe of New York City (IBM Corporation).

Scholarship Program—The program, launched in 2010, helps law students and recent graduates achieve their academic objectives. NLA awards scholarships in three categories: JD Program (1st and 2nd year law students); LLM Program/Bar Exam Scholarship; and 3L Bar Exam Scholarship.

Journal Publication—The Nigerian Lawyer publishes papers and commentaries on a variety of legal topics of interest to NLA members and its wider audience. Today, it enjoys a readership of community leaders, government officials and professionals in academia, finance and medicine in the U.S. and in Nigeria.

If your association had no budget restrictions, what project / initiative

would you first take on? We would adopt a similar program to Taglit-Birthright Israel that would allow NLA members and those interested in the NLA's initiatives to observe firsthand the Nigerian legal system and assess some of its pressing legal issues, such as human rights violations.

Often, issues in Nigeria have impact on the Nigerian community in the U.S. Also, visits to Nigeria could enhance attorneys' skills, particularly if they practice in an area of law that has global impact in the business and/or legal communities. ♦

The Bar Around The Corner is a project of the New York State Conference of Bar Leaders, www.nyscbl.org.