

# Welcome

2013  
Diversity & Inclusion  
Annual Report





— Welcome!

To our colleagues, clients and community friends:

Last June, 11 of our attorneys and staff attended inclusive leadership training. Under the guidance of Dr. Arin Reeves, we learned skills to help us lead Warner Norcross in becoming a more diverse and inclusive law firm.

Arin began the discussion with a gardening metaphor, observing that if you want to have a bountiful harvest, you have to start with diverse seeds. While many organizations focus on recruiting a diverse group of people, they don't pay enough attention to the "soil" in which they are "planted." If the soil isn't right, the seeds just won't take.

We could not agree more – and that's why we have chosen "Welcome" as this year's theme for our eighth Diversity & Inclusion Annual Report.

Warner Norcross is committed to attracting AND retaining women and people of color by providing them with opportunities to develop a meaningful legal practice and explore leadership opportunities in an environment that fosters mutual respect. Throughout the past year, we have invested in people and programs designed to make the firm – and the legal community – a more open and welcoming place. One of the leading initiatives we have focused on is the Managing Partners Diversity Collaborative.

Launched in 2011, the MPDC is a program of the Grand Rapids Bar Association supported by Warner Norcross and 11 other law firms in West Michigan. Committed to achieving diversity and inclusion in the education, retention and promotion of Michigan's attorneys, the MPDC has launched a series of workshops and initiatives that have been well-received, insightful and engaging. In addition to the above-mentioned leadership training with Dr. Reeves, these have included:

- **Business Development Workshop:** This session for female attorneys and attorneys of color was led by attorney and change agent Jane DiRenzo Pigott. The session focused on how to develop new business, build connections within the firm and engage other business leaders in the community. Those attending were asked to prepare a business development plan

that was reviewed during the session. The workshop ended as I and other manager partners had lunch with attendees from our firms and talked about what they needed to do in order to be successful in the arena of business development.

- **grabLAW:** Short for Grand Rapids Achieve Balance, this new initiative is designed to promote West Michigan as a great place to practice law while maintaining work-life balance. Individually, there's only so much one law firm can do – but when you combine the efforts of 12 law firms with what the community at large is trying to accomplish, good things can happen. The grabLAW website ([www.grablaw.org](http://www.grablaw.org)) and social media campaign (Twitter, Facebook and YouTube) are designed to attract young law students and attorneys, providing them with important information about the region, including its professional and lifestyle opportunities. grabLAW's new brochure features Dawn Garcia Ward, an attorney from our Holland office, who was profiled in our 2010 annual report, while grabLAW's new video features Grand Rapids attorney Kelechi Adibe, who is profiled on page 6 of this year's report.
- **Outreach programs:** The Collaborative formally adopted Schools of Hope, a program through Heart of West Michigan United Way that puts reading tutors in elementary schools to

help raise literacy skills. Seventeen of our attorneys and staff volunteered to serve in Schools of Hope, which was profiled in last year's Diversity & Inclusion Annual Report. The Collaborative also launched the 3Rs, a civics education program designed to get high school students engaged, interested, and thinking about a career in the law. Brian Lennon, Ryan Grondzik and Ford Turrell are among the first class of 3R volunteers from Warner Norcross. You can read more about the program and Brian's decision to get involved on page 10.

As a law firm, we work hard to make Warner Norcross a more inclusive and welcoming place. When we hire lateral attorneys, as we did with Christin Petroski in our new Midland office, we are looking for someone who wants to grow with our firm for the rest of their career. It's not all about the bottom line – it's about creating a sense of family where your work life can overlap with your social life, and where your co-workers care about you both personally and professionally. You can read more about Christin's journey on page 13.

Our Management Committee has established an intentional effort to identify leadership opportunities, both within the firm and with our client service teams, and ensure they are open and available to women and attorneys of color. You can read more

about this initiative on page 5 as we profile Heidi Lyon, one of three women tapped for leadership of a key committee this year.

Additionally, we started a formal Inclusion Committee this year, inviting a broad cross-section of the firm to join me and Diversity Partner Rodney Martin in shaping our programs and goals as they relate to diversity and inclusion. While we have a robust program in place, thanks to the diligence and insights of Rodney, our new Inclusion Committee will serve as a sounding board for new initiatives and as a way to address feedback from throughout our organization.

Warner Norcross is a far different firm than the one I joined more than 37 years ago. Our founding partners would not believe the distance we have come or the progress we have made. But while we have made strides, there is still more to do – every day, every year – to ensure that we are a welcoming, inclusive and diverse organization able to provide our clients with the best possible legal service and advice.

Best regards,



Douglas E. Wagner  
Managing Partner



## Creating Leadership Opportunities

Heidi Lyon knows how to juggle.

She has built a successful employee benefits law practice focused on retirement plans and executive compensation and writes and speaks regularly on these topics. She and her husband, Branden, welcomed their second child, Jack, last summer. And she was just tapped to lead Warner's Professional Staff Committee – widely recognized as one of the key committee appointments at the firm.

Pro Staff handles all the HR issues for the firm's 70+ associates and paralegals. Heidi and her 12-member committee handle annual performance evaluations, policy development and implementation, training and professional development for the law firm's future partners and paralegals.

"It's an honor," Heidi says of her new role. "I think our firm's future really depends on developing and advancing our attorneys

and our paralegals. Bringing people up from within has significant benefits – we are able to teach them about our unique culture, our commitment to client service and our standard of excellence in legal practice.

"One of the great things about how we have structured this role is that we have two outstanding directors: Cheryl Coutchie, who supervises the paralegals, and Carin Ojala, who serves as liaison with the attorneys. Both play critical roles in this area on a daily basis and serve on the Committee. I also have the benefit of working with the partners on the committee to ensure we make well-reasoned decisions that are in the firm's best interest."

Heidi is one of several appointments of women to leadership roles within Warner Norcross during 2013. In an effort to ensure women have the right opportunities to lead, the firm's Management Committee embarked on an initiative to ensure

more female attorneys have leadership opportunities throughout the firm. Other appointments during the year included Jennifer Remondino as partner in charge of the firm's Holland office and Nazli Sater as chair of the Family Law Practice Group.

"This initiative is important," Heidi explains. "It positions us to advance women within the firm, which in turn maximizes our potential to provide excellent client service. It can be tough to see yourself as a leader down the road if you can't identify with others who are already in those roles. It's important for our female attorneys to be able to see someone they can identify with – whether it's finding a leadership style that works for them or balancing a career while having children."

## Engineering Success

When Kelechi Adibe was growing up in East Lansing, he wanted to be a train engineer. After all, he liked trains and admired his grandfather in Nigeria, who was also a train engineer.

His parents, however, focused on the “engineer” part of their son’s career dream, wanting him to focus on computer engineering. Both natives of Nigeria, Robinson and Patience Adibe studied in the United States and eventually settled in Michigan.

It took watching the movie “Legally Blonde” in his senior year of high school to get Kelechi to think about going to law school. He laughs as he recalls that the characters with good grades in law school landed at law firms with great starting salaries.

The East Lansing native took some good-natured ribbing when he enrolled in the University of Michigan and then Michigan’s Law School, but found he loved the law. During his summers off, he clerked at the Grand Rapids office of Warner Norcross and then a firm in Detroit.

The decision, he says, was easy.

“I was ready for something away from home when I graduated,” Kelechi recalls. “I had a better summer at Warner – the people

were fun, and I really enjoyed myself. Although, before my summer, I hadn’t spent any time in Grand Rapids aside from a field trip to the Ford Presidential Museum, I knew it would be the right fit for me.”

“It took a few months, not only to find my place at the firm but to find my place in the city. I didn’t know anyone in Grand Rapids outside of Warner. I’m not the most extroverted person, so it was a challenge to show up at networking events and try to build relationships and friendships.

“The number one thing was to keep accepting invites. Rodney Martin often gave me tickets to events, then made sure to introduce me to people once I got there. Now I’ve been to networking events alone and feel comfortable meeting people and then suggesting we get lunch or drinks together.

“It has been a learning process. I feel like I have super powers now.”

Those “super powers” have translated into “super involvement” in both the firm and the community. Kelechi concentrates his practice in commercial finance and bankruptcy, and has been involved in a growing number of interesting cases and transactions.

On the community side of things, he works with Rodney Martin to provide pro-bono legal counsel to Business Leaders Linked

to Encourage New Directions, or BL<sup>2</sup>END. The organization works to engage and retain young professionals of color in the greater Grand Rapids area, which encourages diversity of leadership.

Kelechi has been named to the inaugural Hot List of Lawyers of Color, which recognized 100 attorneys who are minorities from the Midwest and under the age of 40. He’s attended several of the Grand Rapids Young Professionals Events, which connected him with other opportunities for involvement.

And last year, Kelechi spotted a new neighbor moving into his downtown apartment building, so he dropped off a business card and suggested the two get together for dinner. The neighbor turned out to be Davenport University’s new Dean of the College of Urban Education, who promptly tapped Kelechi to volunteer in his new mentoring program for young men in the urban core.

“I realize I take a lot of my background for granted,” Kelechi says. “Both of my parents were always there for me, I went to a great public school and it was assumed that I would go to college. While it’s easy to become insulated, understanding that not everyone is as fortunate is essential. I am glad to be a part of a program that helps young men realize that they do have options, and that life isn’t so limited.”





## Following a Lifelong Passion

When Corinne Sprague was a little girl, she took piano lessons like many of her friends. In the third grade, those lessons led to singing with a choral group that would become the precursor to the Grand Rapids Symphony Youth Choir.

The Grand Rapids native grew up in a household that encouraged her to love music, to appreciate the arts and to get involved with the community. So it was only natural that Corinne would choose to get involved in the arts in a big way after she joined Warner Norcross in the fall of 2010.

Corinne was tapped by the Grand Rapids Symphony to co-chair its Community Engagement Committee, which recently launched MySymphony360, a new membership-based program designed to engage young professionals through networking opportunities and concerts.

“The opportunities for involvement in Grand Rapids are so great,” she explains. “You don’t have to have parents who are big donors to become involved with the Symphony to a degree that you could never be if you lived in New York or Chicago. I joined

the committee about two years ago, and now I’m one of the team leading an initiative to expand the orchestra’s reach.

“The Symphony looked out at its audiences, then at the community, and saw a disconnect. We want to engage new audiences to help them realize that classical music can be fun and entertaining, and recognize that our Symphony is an asset for everyone in the community. MySymphony360 offers great opportunities for mentoring, interaction and involvement.”

Corinne is one of scores of Warner Norcross attorneys who volunteer their time to organizations dedicated to the arts, to mentoring, to community enrichment, to education, to well – to just about any type of non-profit you can think of. Warner attorneys hold board seats, volunteer their time at women’s shelters and soup kitchens, read to elementary school students, swing hammers to build houses, raise funds and the list goes on.

In fact, our attorneys donate their time and talents to more than 335 non-profits in Muskegon, Holland, Southfield and all the cities where we have offices. This engagement is key to the firm’s

ongoing commitment to making the communities where we live and work become better places.

Corinne is an excellent example of that. Now a fourth-year associate in the firm’s Business Practice Group, she has followed her passion for music to a second role with the Grand Rapids Symphony and also serves as the youngest member of the Music Director Search Committee. The Symphony is in the midst of a multi-year search to replace David Lockington, who intends to step down at the close of the 2014-15 season after a 16-year tenure as Music Director.

“Both of these initiatives are focused on musical excellence and designed to take the Symphony in the right direction,” she said. “Our arts community in Grand Rapids is outstanding. The quantity and quality of our arts organizations far surpass what we should have for a city of our size.

“The arts can contribute to everyone’s life. When young people to start contributing to the future of these organizations, we help to preserve the great legacy that we have.”



## 40 Attorneys X 3Rs = Infinite Opportunities

When Brian Lennon sits down to talk about the 3Rs with freshmen at Ottawa Hills High School, he doesn't focus on 'rithmetic.

Instead, Brian and 40 other attorneys and law students in Grand Rapids lead discussions about Rights, Responsibilities and Realities as part of a new civics course. An award-winning program piloted by the Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association, the 3Rs debuted in Grand Rapids this fall with support from the Managing Partners Diversity Collaborative (see Doug Wagner's letter on page 2).

Brian easily ticks off the four goals of the 3Rs:

- Get students interested in civics and government issues
- Improve their understanding for the Constitution and the rule of law
- Provide career-planning opportunities to get students thinking about potential careers and what it will take to get there

- Identify and encourage aspiring young attorneys in the group to think about a career in the law – and return to Grand Rapids when they're ready to practice

“My role as a team leader is to get our students excited about civics and government,” Brian explains. “The whole philosophy behind the program is that to be successful, you have to understand the rules.

“You can't play a game unless you know the rules, and to be a successful citizen, you have to know what the rules are. With those rules come responsibilities.”

The love of teaching and education runs in Brian's family. His mother ran a series of pre-schools while his father taught at Notre Dame. Brian himself is a former teacher and coach, working in South Bend and Northern Ireland. When the decision to offer 3Rs in Grand Rapids was made, he jumped at the opportunity to get back in the classroom.

Along with Warner Norcross attorneys Ryan Grondzik and Ford Turrell, Brian has committed to lead an hour-long discussion one day each month. Throughout the school year, each will work with the same small group of ninth-graders, exploring

topics that range from freedom of expression and the Fourth Amendment to equal protection and due process.

“I've really enjoyed the interactions to date,” Brian says. “Because we work with the same group of five students, we can get to know their interests and help them make connections. For example, one of the young women in my group is interested in cooking, so I'm bringing her material from the culinary arts program at Grand Rapids Community College. Another is interested in science, so I'm connecting her with various women-in-science summer camps held each year throughout the state.

“I think this will be an incredibly worthwhile initiative that will not only improve the lives – and opportunities – of these high school students, but will improve the pipeline for minority students interested in pursuing law degrees in the Grand Rapids area.”

## A Path to Success

Summer camp for academics.

That's how Brenda Garcia views the Upward Bound program that helped her make a successful transition from high school



to college. The 20-year-old credits Upward Bound, high school teachers and college professors, a scholarship from Warner Norcross and a lot of support from her family for putting her on the path to law school and – she hopes – a career as an immigration attorney.

Brenda moved to Michigan when she was 2, the daughter of Mexican parents who emigrated to Los Angeles. She grew up in the inner city of Grand Rapids, which she said was a “challenging environment to learn in.”

As she was leaving the eighth grade and heading to Union High School, Brenda was recruited by Upward Bound, a federal program that provides support to students preparing for college. She was immediately hooked.

“Upward Bound has been a major influence in my life and in my family’s life,” said Brenda, whose two younger siblings are also going through the program. “That’s how college came into my view. I didn’t have an older sibling or family member to ask what do I do. Upward Bound gave me volunteer opportunities in the community, pushed me to apply for scholarships and encouraged me to participate in extracurricular activities.”

Now a junior in the legal studies program at Grand Valley State University, Brenda was the first member of her family to graduate from high school and go to college. She will also be the first to go to law school and is already looking at programs at Notre Dame (her top choice), University of Michigan and Michigan State.

With the encouragement of Upward Bound, Brenda applied for many scholarships, including the University Club Scholarship. Her application caught the eye of Cathleen Dubault, one of the co-founders of the scholarship who was at the time the Director of Legal Recruiting at Warner Norcross.

Cath contacted Brenda at the end of her freshman year at GVSU, encouraging her to apply for an internship at the law firm. After a successful summer interning, Brenda was offered a part-time permanent position in the firm’s Human Resources Department.

Through the Grand Rapids Community Foundation, she applied for and received the Warner Norcross Legal Studies

Scholarship in 2013, which provided her with \$2,000 to support her studies at GVSU. Since the inception of the scholarship program in 2001, Warner Norcross has awarded more than \$142,000 to students like Garcia who are pursuing a career in the legal profession. In 2008, the firm established a second program to provide funds to minority students to take a study course in preparation of taking the Law School Admissions Test, or LSAT.

“I would love to be an immigration attorney – and I would love to work at Warner Norcross when I finish law school,” Brenda said. “I have always had an interest in immigration and have seen in my own family and friends that there’s a strong need for good immigration attorneys in the Hispanic community.”

“I love the environment at the firm. They give a lot of attention to their staff and really appreciate the work we do. I also like that there’s no competition between attorneys for clients. The goal is deliver the best client service possible.”



## Work and Home, the Same Community

Christin Petroski remembers the evening last February when she and her husband, Jake, were watching the 11 p.m. news in their Orlando home.

She was tired and grumpy but still working – because that’s what you do when you’re on partner track in one of the largest global law firms in the AmLaw100. Christin looked up from her laptop in time to catch a story about a horrific murder in their community and decided to check out what the *Midland Daily News* had on its front page.

Midland had become a prominent topic in the Petroski household since the summer of 2012 when Christin, along with her husband, Jake, and their young daughter, Ava, traveled to Jake’s hometown to celebrate his grandparents’ 60th wedding anniversary. They both fell in love with the community.

“We spent a week here and just loved being in this beautiful town and around family and Jake’s old friends. In Orlando, we felt so stressed and guilty all the time, between the crazy hours commuting and the long days at work. We asked ourselves,

‘What are we doing?’ And we realized that we didn’t want to live like that anymore.

“By the end of our trip, we came up with a two-year plan to move to Midland. It would be a great place to raise our daughter, we would have a lot of family minutes away and we could give Ava the same caring experience that we both had growing up in smaller communities.”

But Christin didn’t want to sacrifice the caliber of her legal practice just to make the move. Her initial research didn’t turn up any firms in the Great Lakes Bay Region that could offer a similar level of opportunity – until that February evening when she Googled the Midland paper.

That night, the *News* featured a lengthy article on Circuit Court Judge Jon Lauderbach’s decision to step down from the bench and join Warner Norcross, which had just opened a new office in Midland. Some quick research prompted her to send an e-mail query to Jeff Ott, the partner in charge of the new office. He responded that afternoon – and a few days later, she was on a plane to Michigan for an interview.

Christin joined the firm in late May and almost immediately got a call from Linda Paullin-Hebden, chair of the firm’s Business

Practice Group, to work on an M&A transaction for one of the firm's largest clients. That deal led to another, which led to non-profit and foundation projects and, before you knew it, Christin was building her own book of business.

"Most big law firms have a number of initiatives to address issues for women in the workplace, which is wonderful," Christin said. "But not all law firms have attorneys who go out of their way to welcome you- whether it be to lunch, to participate in a meeting, or to work on a deal. That is the Warner difference.

"Right after I started at Warner, Linda called me and invited me to Southfield. She introduced me to people and got me working on projects right away. Rather than paying lip service to the notion of inclusion, Linda and others at the firm got me involved immediately.

"The flexibility here is really nice. I live 10 minutes away from the office, so I can go home and see Ava at lunch. I don't mind if I have to work late or on a Saturday because I have this flexibility. I think that's something that big firms really miss. If you're flexible with working moms, we will be forever dedicated and loyal. I think I work harder now because I feel more in control of my career."

## Demographic Profile as of December 31, 2013

### Associates

Percent Female = 52.5%      Percent Minority = 17.5%

Race/Ethnicity	Female	Male	Total
African American	1	2	3
Arab American	1	0	1
Asian/Pacific Islander	2	0	2
Hispanic	0	1	1
White	17	16	33
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>40</b>

### Partners

Percent Female = 15.4%      Percent Minority = 3.4%

Race/Ethnicity	Female	Male	Total
African American	0	1	1
Arab American	1	1	2
Asian/Pacific Islander	0	1	1
Hispanic	0	0	0
White	17	96	113
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>117</b>

### Counsel & Senior Counsel

Percent Female = 42.3%      Percent Minority = 11.5%

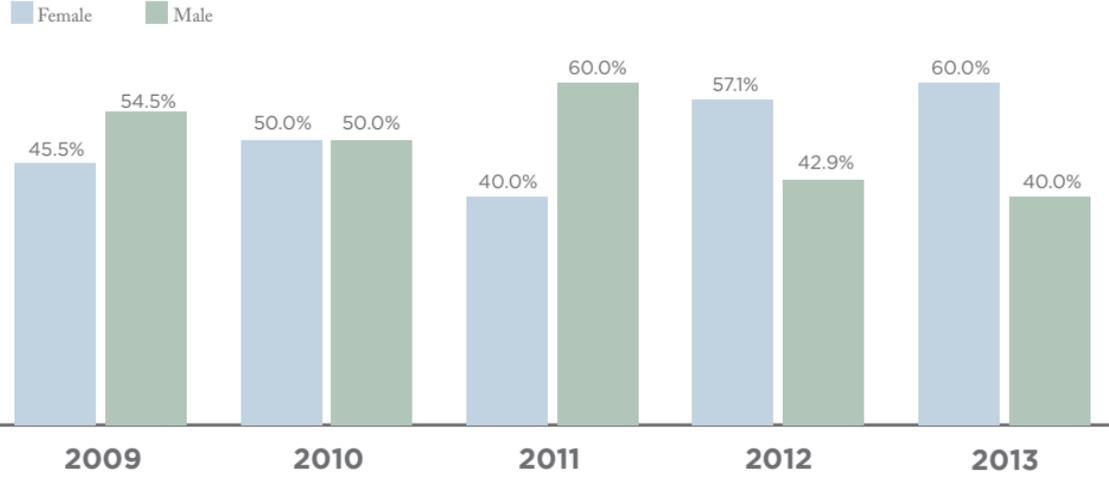
Race/Ethnicity	Female	Male	Total
African American	0	1	1
Arab American	1	0	1
Asian/Pacific Islander	0	0	0
Hispanic	1	0	1
White	9	14	23
<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>26</b>

### All Active Attorneys

Percent Female = 27.3%      Percent Minority = 7.7%

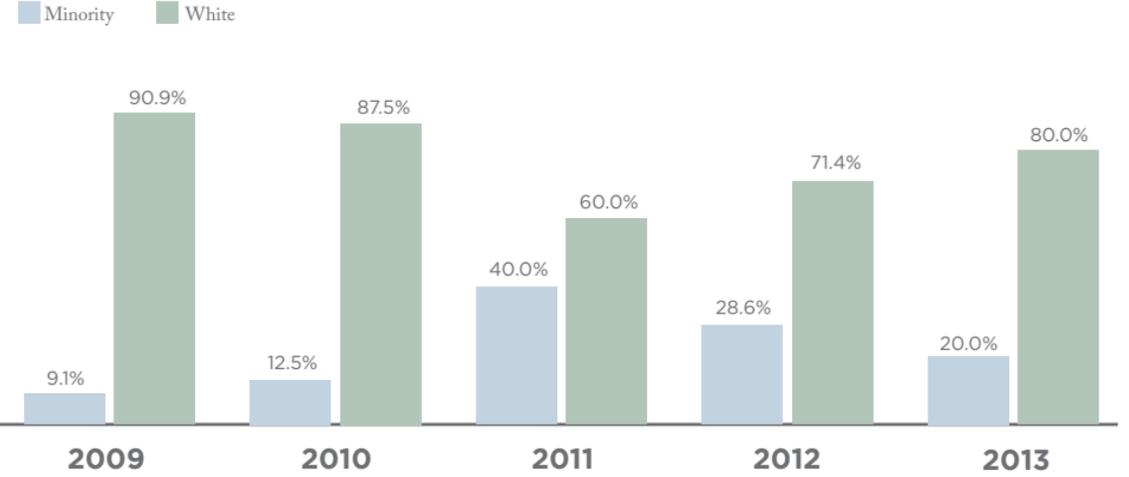
Race/Ethnicity	Female	Male	Total
African American	1	4	5
Arab American	3	1	4
Asian/Pacific Islander	2	1	3
Hispanic	1	1	2
White	43	126	169
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>183</b>

## Associates Hired by Gender



	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Female	5	4	2	4	3
Male	6	4	3	3	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>

## Associates Hired by Race and Ethnicity



	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
African American	0	0	1	1	1
Asian/Pacific Islander	1	1	0	0	0
Hispanic	0	0	0	1	0
Arab American	0	0	1	0	0
White	10	7	3	5	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>



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