

# Strength in Diversity

BY EVE H. KARASIK

## The Bankruptcy IDEA Consortium

In its second year and the brainchild of Hon. **Frank J. Santoro** of the U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the Eastern District of Virginia (Norfolk) and Aja Carr Favors (a chapter 7 panel trustee and attorney practicing in Chicago),<sup>1</sup> the Bankruptcy Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility Consortium (the “Bankruptcy IDEA Consortium”) is a network of insolvency-related organizations. Over the past few years, almost every insolvency-related organization has created its own diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) group to address issues of bias and foster inclusion and acceptance in the insolvency profession.

Seeing this encouraging development across the various insolvency organizations, Judge Santoro and Ms. Carr Favors had the idea that the synergies of the various organizations working together would provide a powerful platform for a long-term commitment to achieving diversity in the insolvency field. Thus, the Bankruptcy IDEA Consortium was born. Its goal is to centralize opportunities and resources offered by the consortium’s member organizations in an effort to further the goal of facilitating diversity in culture, race, ethnicity, gender, (dis)ability, sexual orientation, gender identity, country of origin and religion in the bankruptcy bench and bar, and throughout the insolvency profession.

The Bankruptcy IDEA Consortium’s members are ABI, the ABA Business Bankruptcy Committee of the Business Law Section, the American College of Bankruptcy, the Association of Chapter 12 Trustees, the Association of Insolvency and Restructuring Advisors, the National Association of Bankruptcy Trustees, the National Association of Chapter 13 Trustees, the National Association of Consumer Bankruptcy Attorneys, the National Association of Federal Equity Receivers, the National Conference of Bankruptcy Judges, the Turnaround Management Association and the International Women’s Insolvency & Restructuring Confederation, along with the Executive Office for U.S. Trustees as an *ex officio* member. Representatives from each organization are members of the IDEA Consortium Board, which meets monthly to discuss ongoing activities and ideas for new projects that will help the consortium achieve its goals. ABI’s Bankruptcy

IDEA Consortium representatives are myself, Hon. **Deborah L. Thorne** of the U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the Northern District of Illinois (Chicago) and ABI Executive Director **Amy A. Quackenboss**.

The central concept, as reflected in its mission statement, is that the IDEA Consortium will serve as a repository of opportunities and resources of the member organizations’ efforts to promote and foster diversity in the insolvency field. Key to the IDEA Consortium is its website,<sup>2</sup> designed to host the opportunities and resources, which range from employment listings, a list of speakers on DEI and accessibility topics, a list of affinity organizations, related events and much more.

The Bankruptcy IDEA Consortium Board members are volunteers on three subcommittees: the Access and Careers Committee (webinars, information and internships/jobs), Communications and Technology Committee (ownership of web development and content, plus marketing-related activities) and Outreach and Engagement Committee (law school engagement and panel discussions). These subcommittees are directly responsible for developing and implementing the various consortium projects.

The consortium’s website is up and running thanks to the tireless efforts of Jennifer Brinkley of the National Association of Bankruptcy Trustees and the consortium’s Communications and Technology Committee. It continues to work to provide content and keep posted content up to date. One project in the works is the creation of short videos from a representative of each of the consortium’s member organizations, which will provide vignettes discussing opportunities in the insolvency profession and the representative’s personal experiences in the field. The first vignette is an introduction to Ms. Simmons-Beasley, an attorney and standing chapter 13 trustee for the District of South Carolina.

The Access and Careers Committee has been tasked with creating a speakers network, which will be an exclusive database of diverse professionals within the bankruptcy industry (locally, regionally and nationwide). This tool will allow conference panel and webinar organizers to find diverse speakers who are the best fit for any event, and provides resources for organizing conferences, workshops



**Eve H. Karasik**  
Levene, Neale, Bender,  
Yoo & Golubchik, LLP  
Los Angeles

Eve Karasik is a senior partner with Levene, Neale, Bender, Yoo & Golubchik, LLP in Los Angeles. She is ABI’s Vice President-Diversity & Inclusion and a Fellow in the American College of Bankruptcy.

<sup>1</sup> Ms. Carr Favors served as the first chair of the board of the Bankruptcy IDEA Consortium. **Pamela A. Simmons-Beasley**, an attorney and standing chapter 13 trustee for the District of South Carolina (Columbia), is the current chair of the board of the IDEA Consortium, with Ms. Karasik serving as vice chair.

<sup>2</sup> Please visit [bankruptcyidea.org/about-the-bankruptcy-inclusion-diversity-equity-accessibility-consortium](http://bankruptcyidea.org/about-the-bankruptcy-inclusion-diversity-equity-accessibility-consortium).

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and events. The speakers network is designed to quickly connect users to a growing database of diverse speakers who, in turn, will make the organization's audience smarter, better prepared and more connected throughout all career stages.

The Outreach and Engagement Committee has crafted a letter to be sent to law schools throughout the U.S. that informs them of the Bankruptcy IDEA Consortium and its website as something that can be used as a resource for law students, particularly those from underrepresented communities. The letter explains that the website serves as a clearinghouse and central repository of information for students from these communities to provide opportunities for them to learn about the insolvency profession. By providing law schools with information on internships, career opportunities and other resources, the consortium hopes to increase the interest of underrepresented students in pursuing careers within the bankruptcy profession. The Outreach and Engagement Committee has created a list of approximately 200 law schools nationwide that will receive this letter.

The Bankruptcy IDEA Consortium has also created a list of affinity groups, such as the Hispanic National Bar Association, the Corporate Counsel Women of Color, the National LGBT Bar Association and more, and is reaching out to each of them for permission to list their names and contact information on the Bankruptcy IDEA Consortium's website. The access to the affinity groups will provide another resource for networking, career-building and education in the insolvency industry.

The Bankruptcy IDEA Consortium is developing a resources library for its website, which will include content focused on various aspects of DEI and accessibility in the legal profession, particularly the insolvency field. The first articles posted on the consortium's website, authored by the National Association of Bankruptcy Trustees and National

Association of Chapter 13 Trustees, are (1) "Insight: Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility in the Legal Profession," (2) "The Inclusion, Diversity, Equity Accessibility Consortium: A Major New Development in the Bankruptcy World," and (3) "Equity and Inclusion Leads to Innovation and Greater Results: The Case of *Johnson Publishing Company*." The goal is to have original content, but also to link to articles, webinars and other content on member organizations' websites. The "Website Resources" section will make it much easier to access materials on DEI and accessibility, which means that these important resources are more likely to be read by and impact a much larger group of people. Members of the Bankruptcy IDEA Consortium's organizational members — such as ABI members — are welcome to submit articles that they have written on consortium-focused topics for review and publication on the website.

The Bankruptcy IDEA Consortium's website has a job-posting page focused on providing employment opportunities in the insolvency field to diverse candidates. The goal is to have members of the Bankruptcy IDEA Consortium member organizations provide employment opportunities in both the private and public sectors. The Office of the U.S. Trustee has jumped in the lead with multiple job postings listed for positions throughout the nation. The consortium hopes that the other member organizations will soon follow this lead in making the consortium's website a robust resource for diverse candidates looking to start or develop careers in bankruptcy law.

I send special thanks and appreciation to all of the Bankruptcy IDEA Consortium members and their respective representatives who continue to volunteer and contribute significant time and energy to achieving this mission. It is extremely rewarding to work with all of you on this journey to achieve DEI and accessibility in the insolvency profession. **abi**

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