

The Challenge

The newsletter of the Illinois State Bar Association's Standing Committee on Racial and Ethnic Minorities and the Law

Letter From the Ex-Officio

BY KHARA COLEMAN

As newsletter co-editor for REM, and as ex-officio, my reflections on the legal issues and injustices facing our communities are always at top of mind. I would have never imagined that, in my lifetime, I would need to find words to protest hate crimes against our communities—blatant, violent, bloody crimes against Asian Americans, African Americans, religious minorities.

In the profession, we often talk about implicit bias. But I am not sure the injustices that we fight are merely

“implicit.”

As lawyers, we are always trying to be prepared to face whatever new challenges come before us. I have been asking myself all year what ELSE I can do to support the effort to make our system more “just.” I know paying attention to the injustices is a first step—you can’t stop what you can’t see.

But what else can an overworked, justice-conscious lawyer do?

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Reflections From the Chair

BY SONNI WILLIAMS

As the chair of ISBA's Standing Committee on Racial and Ethnic Minorities & the Law for the 2021-2022 Year, I look toward the future of the ISBA with optimism and pride.

Over a year ago, I embarked on my campaign to be elected as the ISBA's third vice-president. I decided to run not because I needed the win to get clients, build my professional resume, or for power, but because I love the ISBA and its members. It didn't escape me that if I won, I would be the first female lawyer of color to be elected as the ISBA's third vice-president and through the bylaws, I would ascend to being installed as the ISBA's president in 2024.

Yet, I was advised by several close supporters that I should not mention my historic win in my speeches, but let others mention the historic win.

Although I appreciate this advice, I felt like I was being told that I could not own my own historic win—that it belonged to others.

As a woman of color and first in my family to be an attorney, I am proud to own my historic win. Just like me, each of you as members of the ISBA's community of Racial & Ethnic Minorities should be able to own up to being the “first” or “only” in the room where it happens and take every action to

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Letter From the Ex-Officio

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First, I vow to continue to educate myself on the history of the legal battles for justice in every REM community. This month's article on Dr. King is one example of such history. But I also had a lot to do in order make sure I was educated on stories like that of Vincent Chin, murdered in Michigan in 1982. I get angry that I never learned about this hate crime in school, and

I want to work to keep such stories visible.¹

Second, I vow to pay attention to the modern justice warriors—what and *where* they work to represent us. I am especially passionate about seeing diversity on the

bench, and the story of Judge Brenda Claudio is one such example.

Finally, I vow to advocate for female leadership in our profession and bar associations, and our current REM chair, Sonni Williams, has been leading our community for decades.

Enjoy this spring 2022 issue of THE CHALLENGE and stay with us—things are just getting interesting! ■

1. <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2021/03/27/981718272/how-vincent-chins-death-gave-others-a-voice>.

Reflections From the Chair

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make sure that you do not continue to be the “first” or “only” in the room. For those REM supporters and members who are in the majority, please continue to ensure that there are no longer the “first” or “only” in the room of meetings that you are invited to or organizing.

As I reflect on what has happened in the last year, I, along with many of you, mourn and are outraged by the killings of our brothers and sisters of color including George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and so many countless others due to the color of their skin. In this last year, our communities also endured the uptick in violent hate crimes against the Asian-American Pacific Islanders (“AAPI”) including the killing of eight spa workers many who were mothers leaving behind children in the Atlanta shooting.

In response to the discernable rise in hate crimes against people of color, I was proud to be part of the planning and to participate as a panelist for the multi-bar program, “Breaking Down Our Silos” presented by the Asian-American Bar Association with sponsors including the Arab-American Bar Association, Black Women Lawyers Association,

Chicago Bar Association, Chinese-American Bar Association, Cook County Bar Association, Decalogue Society of Lawyers, Filipino American Lawyers Association of Chicago, Hispanic Lawyers Association of Illinois, Japanese-American Bar Association, Korean-American Bar Association, LGBTQ+ Bar Association, Puerto Rico Bar Association, South-Asian Bar Association, and of course, the ISBA.¹ We discussed these hate crimes, macroaggressions, and implicit bias that we as women and/or persons of color experienced in our profession, but more importantly, we discussed how the various minority bar associations along with the majority bar associations must unite and eliminate our silos in order to recognize our own biases and stop them from permeating our decisions and policies.²

Collaborative programs like “Breaking Down Our Silos” give me optimism that



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OFFICE

ILLINOIS BAR CENTER
424 S. SECOND STREET
SPRINGFIELD, IL 62701
PHONES: 217-525-1760 OR 800-252-8908
WWW.ISBA.ORG

EDITOR

Khara A. Coleman
Sherlyn Smith

PUBLICATIONS MANAGER

Sara Anderson
✉ sanderson@isba.org

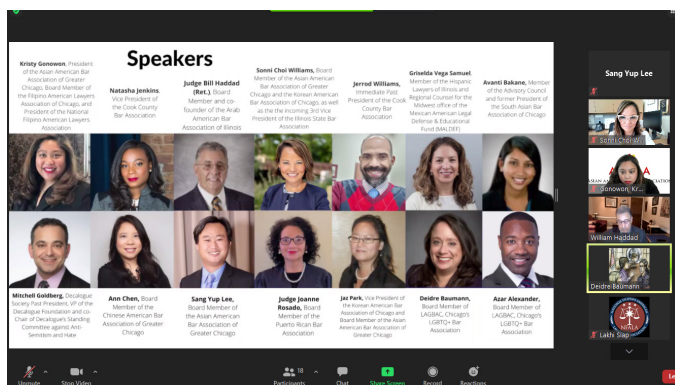
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we are all working towards the same goal, making our profession and associations more diverse, equitable, and inclusive. To that end, I don't want my successful win as the ISBA's third vice-president to be the only one, my win is to

inspire others after me to take the risk and time commitment to run for ISBA offices and know that you have seat at the table in the room where it happens.■

1. <https://www.chicagoasiannetwork.com/posts/bar-associations-discussion-on-breaking-down-our-silos>.
2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gz5Zp0M8FIQ>.

Spotlight on Hon. Brenda Claudio: The First Hispanic Judge in Kankakee County

BY GERALDINE D'SOUZA



Judge Brenda Claudio's entire life has been greatly influenced by the fact that she was born in Puerto Rico and moved to Chicago at the age of two to live with her maternal grandparents. Her mother moved to Chicago to live

with them shortly thereafter. She has always had a foot in both worlds due to frequent travel back and forth to Puerto Rico to visit her family. Judge Claudio fondly remembers being able to spend her childhood summers there with her paternal grandparents and her father. She actually credits her paternal grandfather with planting the seed of her desire to practice law since he would always tell her older brother that he should grow up to be a lawyer. Young Brenda Claudio thought, "I can do that too," and felt that her grandfather was actually encouraging them both to pursue that dream. In fact, Judge Claudio's brother also pursued a legal career and is currently working as an attorney in

the Office of the Clerk of the Circuit Court of Cook County.

Judge Claudio's mother taught high school Spanish and knew the value of a good education. She encouraged her daughter to bypass their neighborhood school in Chicago to attend the more prestigious Lane Tech. Young Claudio was so determined to get the best education possible that she would leave her house at 5:45 a.m. every day and ride two buses to arrive at school in time for ROTC. Claudio was a go-getter from a very young age. She values her tight knit family, and she continued to live with her mother and grandparents throughout her college years at the University of Illinois at Chicago and during law school at DePaul University College of Law. She was motivated to pursue law school at a very young age, not just because of her grandfather's encouragement, but also due to her love of TV lawyer Perry Mason. She was drawn to the fact that in Perry Mason's courtroom, the truth always came out, whether through the defense or prosecution. This made her believe that the purpose of courtroom proceedings was to get to the truth, and this made her love and embrace the law.

Judge Claudio worked in the personal injury arena while in law school but felt that was not really her calling. After law school

graduation, she worked in corporate law, but found it to be quite dull. A senior attorney once handed Claudio a DUI file on the eve of trial and told her to go to court and handle it. Claudio had very little time and opportunity to prepare her case, but she won the trial for her client, and she has had a passion for the courtroom ever since.

Wanting to spread her wings a bit after living with her family her entire life, she applied to the State's Attorney's Office in Kankakee County, vying for a civil law spot. However, when that civil law spot was no longer available, she easily transitioned to prosecuting criminal cases. In 2001 a new opportunity presented itself, and Judge Claudio became the sex crimes prosecutor for that county and did that for most of her career as an ASA.

ΩIn 2021, Judge Claudio was appointed to the position of Associate Judge by the Full Circuit Judges in Kankakee County. By this action, she became the first Hispanic judge to ever preside in Kankakee County. This is a momentous milestone that Judge Claudio takes very seriously. She feels ready to serve in the judiciary and feels she will be serving the community just as she always has, just in a different capacity. Kankakee has a large Hispanic population, and Judge Claudio feels that they were

long overdue in having a Latino on the bench. She feels that other Hispanics will feel a better connection to the system by seeing someone who looks like them on the bench, and that she can bring a different cultural perspective to the bench and an understanding of the Hispanic community's apprehension of the police and of the system itself. Judge Claudio understands that while she no longer represents "The People," she is now a representative of the people in the community where she serves.

When asked what she believes obstacles are for minorities who wish to pursue a career in the legal field, Judge Claudio responds that she believes that being stereotyped holds a lot of minorities back. Many people believe, upon seeing a person

of color in a position of authority, that they got that position through some act of affirmative action or to reach some quota rather than because their intelligence and training merits that spot. Judge Claudio has witnessed people react with outright surprise when they realize that a minority lawyer or judge they are dealing with is actually smart and knows the law.

Judge Claudio is proud of her Latino heritage, and credits it for her strong sense of family and community. She realizes that all people need to feel represented, and that she is now a role model for a small community who has never seen a person of Hispanic descent on the bench in their county before. She believes that her appointment is just one step in the right direction and hopes to see

more opportunities for younger minority lawyers and even students, who now will look at her and hopefully see what they can also achieve with hard work and dedication. Judge Claudio credits the people who mentored her and believed in her with her success. Surely Judge Claudio's work ethic and dedication to the law will continue to lead her through a tremendously successful judicial career and make her an asset to the bench in Kankakee County. Congratulations on being a trail blazer, Judge Brenda Claudio!

*Geraldine D'Souza
Cook County Associate Judge
6th District, Markham Courthouse*

Martin Luther King Jr. Day 2022: A Different Perspective on the 'Legacy' of MLK Jr. From Civil Rights Attorney Vernon Jordan

BY SHARON L. EISEMAN

First, before turning to a discussion of Dr. King's legacy and what it means, let's review how a holiday in his memory was established. Are you surprised to learn that serious controversy arose in 1983 when Congress moved to create a national holiday to honor Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and commemorate his legacy? It did, from southern legislators as well as from President Ronald Reagan who opposed any national observance for Dr. King who was variously described as "an outside agitator" (by Senator Strom Thurmond in 1968 following Dr. King's assassination), and as someone who "welcomed collaboration with Communists" (by North Carolina Senator Jesse Helms). To express his resistance that year, Helms led a sixteen-day filibuster of the MLK Holiday bill but then finally voted for it in exchange for Congress' approval of his tobacco bill. Despite this opposition, the bipartisan vote in favor of the bill handily won the day,

possibly because many Republicans may have believed they needed to show the public their support for civil rights.

And did you know, or do you recall that Dr. King died before he even reached the age of forty, having been assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee on April 4 of 1968 when he was in the midst of preparing to lead a protest march in support of the City's striking sanitation workers? Yet in his short lifetime, Dr. Martin Luther King accomplished the unimaginable, especially for a black man from the South and one advocating for peaceful integration. Thus, this year, as in every previous year the holiday has been observed, people all over our country—and beyond—will pay homage to this great man, preacher, and acknowledged leader of the civil rights movement in America that has defined for generations what our country must acknowledge and address in order to

eliminate racism in our society. Moreover, due to an enhanced focus during the Pandemic on making serious and substantial progress on addressing problems related to long ignored, even embedded, patterns of racial inequality across all modes of society, we may see more attention paid to the barriers to racial equality that remain despite Dr. King's significant efforts to obtain civil rights for ALL.

Dr. King's Early and Relevant Education

Even before he stepped onto the national 'stage' and ignited a widespread movement for peace, justice and racial equality through his electrifying voice and powerful words invoking hope for the dreamers in his audiences, Dr. King had achieved many impressive goals. At an early age, and in short order, Dr. King proved the belief that he was bright, articulate and driven by

earning a B.A. in Sociology from Atlanta's Morehouse College when he was only nineteen, a B.A. in Divinity just three years later, and then, in 1955, a Doctorate in Systematic Theology from Boston University. Those studies and his degrees both reflected his interest in canonical teachings and grounded him in the power of oratory of a spiritual nature that would engage his listeners and move them to action.

How Rosa Parks' Courage Helped Inspire Dr. King's Early Activism and Advocacy for the Oppressed and Dispossessed

Also in 1955, Dr. King was chosen by local civil rights activists to lead a one-day boycott of the buses in Montgomery, Alabama. Their protest was spurred by area residents upset when Rosa Parks, a black woman, was arrested and fined on the bus she was taking home from work for violating the City's segregation laws. Parks had refused the order of the bus driver to give up her seat to a white man who had been standing on the crowded bus. Under local law governing public accommodations, he was entitled to preferential seating because of his race. That single day turned into a year which is how long it took Montgomery to desegregate the buses.

By persisting in its defense of racial segregation within its public transportation system, the City not only faced legal and financial challenges, but it also, perhaps unwittingly, simply stoked the flames of a significant and growing national civil rights movement. That movement, which engendered many other battles for racial equality, was borne of one black woman's using her **voice** to demand equal access to public services. Ms. Parks later explained that she claimed her seat that fateful day, not because she was physically tired but because she was "tired of giving in". For more about Rosa Parks, who was lauded for her courage, wrote two compelling memoirs, and lived into her nineties, see <https://www.biography.com/people/rosa-parks>.

Etched Forever in Our Collective Memories: Dr. King's Compelling Words

Events in the sixties related to Dr. Martin

Luther King, Jr. are forever etched in our memories and in America's history. On August 28, 1963, King delivered perhaps his most stirring and memorable speech, one that has come to be known as the "I Have a Dream" speech. To the 250,000 participants in that day's organized march to D. C., King pronounced: ***"I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed, 'We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal'."*** In that same speech he made the dream personal when he stated: ***"I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin, but by the content of their character."*** The theme of non-judgmental equality and respect for human rights and opportunity for all without regard to color resonated with many individuals besides the marchers, which is what King intended: that his message of hope would take hold across the nation and trigger needed changes in the law.

In the face of many threats to him, his family and all his detractors, Dr. King receives the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964

The era of the sixties was also witness to the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Dr. King—in 1964. In the presentation to King, Nobel Committee Chairman Gunnar Jahn described the Reverend as an "undaunted champion of peace" who had distinguished himself by showing that "a struggle can be waged without violence". Mr. Jahn also praised Dr. King for never abandoning his faith despite his having been subjected to numerous imprisonments and bomb threats, as well as repeated death threats against him and his family. Although detractors continued to attack Dr. King's teachings, much progress had been made toward the goals of equality, justice and peace that King was preaching. As notable examples, in the middle of the sixties, Little Rock High School and the University of Mississippi were integrated, Congress enacted the 24th Amendment to the U. S. Constitution, and President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Dr. King's Assassination: A Dark Day for All, and Its Aftermath

Sadly, as we all know, that decade didn't

end well. Dr. King's good fortune, and possibly the momentum toward a more civil and just society, took a tragic turn on **April 4, 1968**, when Dr. King was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee and it seemed the world had come to a stop. By that time, many who questioned his motives and his means to achieving peace and equality had begun to appreciate the import of his messages and his work on the ground toward implementation of his mission—even though some believed Dr. King was espousing more aggressive actions to bring about the change he wanted. While his death left a terrible void, his legacy as a 'champion of peace' has continued to move us forward toward a more just society, even if slowly and with 'bumps' in the road in recent years. Still, we all need to keep vigilant to make sure we don't lapse in our efforts or allow prejudice, anger and distorted perspectives to further divide us as a nation into separate and unequal factions. And this is where Vernon Jordan enters the scene and shares a somewhat different and thus refreshing view of how to best honor the work done and progress achieved by Dr. King.

Vernon Jordan's Characteristic 'Call to Action' as a Means to Change

Vernon Jordan, who is African-American, graduated from Howard University Law School in 1960 and joined the firm of a prominent civil rights attorney in Atlanta as a law clerk earning \$35 a week, eventually becoming a well-known civil rights advocate in his own right. As a new lawyer, Jordan was part of an NAACP team representing a young black man who, in a mere 48 hours, had been arrested, arraigned, indicted, tried, convicted and sentenced to death by electrocution. That was a time when 'colored' people had to find outlying black-only motels when transacting business in the courts—or anywhere. And because they were banned from restaurants, they had to buy food at a grocery store and eat in their car.

Mr. Jordan's firm, which included Constance Motley,³ sued the University of Georgia in Federal Court, alleging that its restrictive admission policies constituted racial discrimination. Despite challenges and a stay that was reversed, the case concluded

successfully for the plaintiffs in 1961 with the Court Order directing that the two named African American plaintiffs be admitted to the University. (See *Holmes v. Danner*, 191 F. Supp. 394 (M. D. Ga. 1961.) In 1970, having left his firm, Jordan became the executive director of the United Negro College Fund, and in 1971 he assumed the presidency of the National Urban League, a position he held until 1981 when he resigned to become legal counsel in the Washington, D.C. law office of a Texas firm.

Aside from serving as a presidential advisor and a consultant to other high level government officials, and in demand for appointment to the boards of multiple corporations, Jordan has recently held the position of senior managing director for an investment banking firm. He has also authored two books, most recently (2008) *Make It Plain: Standing Up and Speaking Out*, a collection of his public speeches with commentary. The title certainly makes plain what Jordan has fought for all of his life and career. This indefatigable humanitarian has continuously used his legal and oratory skills and his talent for advocacy to help move the dial forward on the task of eliminating racial injustice.

Vernon Jordan's Characteristic 'Call to Action' as a Means to Change

It is on the stage before attentive audiences such as college graduates, that Jordan is most effective. In June of 2015, speaking to Stanford's graduating class at a multi-faith celebration for the students and their families, he minced no words, instead urging the audience to be **'disturbers of the unjust peace'**. Using a question from the prophet Isaiah: "Who will go, and whom shall we send?" as a basis for his message that day, Jordan said he prays the answer is "Here am I. Send me." He continued on: **"Send me to help clear the rubble of racism still strewn across this country. Send me to be one of the bulldozers on behalf of equality and in the cleanup crews against injustice. Send me to 'disrupt' injustice. Send me to 'hack' bias and bigotry. Send me to 'lean in.'"**

And now, 'fast tracking' right to 2018: Vernon Jordan, at 83 years of age,

was invited by Dr. Otis Moss III, the young and engaging Senior Pastor of the Trinity United Church of Christ in the Washington Heights Community on Chicago's South Side, to give the guest sermon at the Church's September 30, 2018, Sunday morning service focused on 'Honoring Our Elders'. How did I learn about this meaningful event? Attorney **Juan Thomas**, a member of the ISBA's Standing Committee on Racial and Ethnic Minorities and the Law, had invited his REM colleagues—which included me—to this special church service, and I decided to attend and with my husband Noel. Besides being quite touched by the warm welcome we received from the congregants that day in a venue where we were two of just a handful of white people in attendance, we were moved by Pastor Moss' sermon and by Mr. Jordan's compelling insights.

The primary message Jordan conveyed is simple: **While it is important to honor MLK Jr. for his accomplishments and celebrate his storied career as a civil rights activist, we cannot, must not, stop there as we often do, assuming it is enough to pay a yearly tribute to Dr. King as our means of supporting racial, ethnic and gender equality. Instead, we have to keep King's DREAM alive by working to achieve the goals he pursued. In other words, we should consider ourselves the heirs of his legacy and take on the tasks he left to us—unfinished—until they are finished.**

What Can We Do to Make a Difference 'Going Forward'?

For us to stay on track toward achieving justice for all, we must have strong leadership in our local, state and federal governments and in the private sector, as well as great teachers in our schools. It is through the polls at each election and, of course, through our political discourse and educational systems, that we can encourage each new generation to attain a better understanding as to the positive outcomes when diverse communities live and work together in mutual respect for their differences. (<http://diversity.uchicago.edu/>.) We must also do what we can to assure that equal opportunities

for achievement are available to all. Part of this equation is having **the will to speak up** when we see imbalances and inequities. It is especially important that, as lawyers, we also use our knowledge, our words, and our penchant for persuasion to convince others to join the movement and commit to action toward a more fair and just treatment of those groups in our communities who have no voice, no advocates, and waning hope.

Meanwhile, let's not forget the upcoming Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday to be observed in this Nation on Monday, January 17, 2022. We hope you will join in the tributes likely taking place all over Chicago—especially in our public schools and in other public arenas, perhaps some remotely if COVID-19 Protocol is being observed, as Chicago is a City that particularly and warmly embraced King and to which he had many close ties. Between 1956 and 1966 Dr. King gave three speeches at the University of Chicago's well-known Rockefeller Chapel, all of which became famous for his inspiring messages and brought him to the attention of the public.

Resources for learning more: If you wish to read more about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and his legacy, check out the University of Chicago's website at <http://mlk.uchicago.edu/> which offers significant material about the subject and identifies meaningful volunteer activities for commemorating the Holiday on every day of the week of observance, from January 17 to January 23. The University is also hosting a Virtual Week of Service to engage the community in activities relevant to honoring MLK's legacy of diversity, inclusion, and respect for all. In addition, much historic detail is available on the website for the National Park Service's Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial located in Washington, D.C. That site, and the story behind the MLK Memorial, "Out of the Mountain of Despair, a Stone of Hope", is accessible at: <https://www.nps.gov/mlkm/index.htm>. Teachers will also find many resources for observing the Holiday at www.MLKDay.gov. For the young and older, participating in a 'Day of Service' as part of the MLK, Jr. Holiday is a way to help preserve Dr. King's legacy and keep the

torch of equality burning and the work to undo inequities ongoing.

One additional reference is The Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change in Atlanta, Georgia, which Mrs. Coretta Scott King established in tribute to her husband, not as a 'dead monument' but as a living testimonial that would engage and empower visitors. The King Center includes a Library and an Archive, and it has recently undertaken a project for an "innovative digital strategy and conference series". It also offers a chance to enter your dream and choose up to 5 'themes' to tag it. If your dream is approved after review, it will be posted on the Center's website. Check it all out at <http://thekingcenter.org> where you will find the focus on "Priorities to Create the Beloved Community." ■

1. Constance Motley, widely known as an early civil rights activist, was born in 1921, the ninth of twelve children, to parents who emigrated from the West Indies. At the age of 15, having been inspired by reading about civil rights heroes, Motley decided she wanted to be a lawyer—and ultimately became the second black woman to graduate from Columbia Law School where she met Thurgood Marshall, chief counsel for the NAACP Legal Defense Fund where Motley worked while a law student. She later clerked for Supreme Court Justice Marshall, became chief counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, and wrote the draft complaint for *Brown v. Board of Education*. As a practicing attorney, Motley argued before the Supreme Court, winning nine out of her ten cases. As lead counsel, Motley was also successful in defending protestors arrested in the early sixties for taking part in the Freedom Rides, and for helping James Meredith gain admission to the University of Mississippi in 1962. Ultimately turning to the political arena, Motley became the first black woman to serve in the New York State Senate. In another first for an African American woman, Motley became a federal judge when President Lyndon Johnson appointed her to the Manhattan Federal District Court in 1966.



ISBA 8TH ANNUAL
MEMBER

APPRECIATION MONTH

May 1-31 | Membership Renewal Incentive

Renew by May 31 to be entered into a drawing to win one of five Apple iPads with Apple Pencil (or cash-equivalent VISA gift card)

May 3-14 | Illinois Bar Journal Caption Contest

May 3 | Free 1.5 Hour, Live CLE Webcast

12-1:50 p.m. | 2022 Celebration of Women as Leaders in the Profession

May 5 | Free 1 Hour, Live CLE Webcast

12-1 p.m. | Wellness Series – Part 2: Building Your Resilience Bank Account

May 9-21 | Bookstore Sale - 25% off All ISBA Books!

May 11 | Free 1.5 Hour, Live CLE Webcast

1-2:30 p.m. | Running to the Roar: Why We Need Courageous Conversations

May 16-21 | Facebook Contest – Win a \$100 Visa Gift Card

May 23-28 | Instagram Contest – Win a \$100 Visa Gift Card

May 24-27 | Member Discount Vendor Giveaways

May 26 | Free 1 Hour, Live CLE Webcast

12-1 p.m. | Wellness Series – Part 3: Building Your Prevention Toolbox



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