

2014

**OUTSTANDING
LEGAL
DEPARTMENT
AWARDS**

**JPMorgan
Chase & Co.**

DIVERSITY, QUALITY OF LIFE / LARGE DEPARTMENT



Left to right standing: Therese Bechet Blake, Michael Pearce, Jennifer Read, Melissa Gold, Dionne Fraser, General Counsel Matthew Biben, Kelesha Armand, Emma Smith, Dorothy Giobbe, Jose Santos, Manuela Cattaneo.
Left to right sitting: Eileen Shin, Alison Lam, Nuris Portuondo, Traci Kamil.

NYLJ / RICK KOPSTEIN

DIVERSITY, QUALITY OF LIFE / LARGE DEPARTMENT

JPMorgan Chase & Co.

BY REBECCA BAKER

When Matthew Biben was tapped to lead the legal diversity committee for JPMorgan Chase & Co. in late 2012, his upbringing had already prepared him for the task.

“I had a strong grandmother and mother,” he said. “I always had strong women around me, and that fostered a sense of equality.”

Biben, the general counsel for consumer banking, and the roughly two dozen attorneys on the legal diversity committee developed and promoted an array of programs to make the law department more diverse in terms of race, age, gender and socio-economic background.

“I want to recruit the best, the most diverse, the most talented team I can,” said Biben, 46, who is white. “We’ll have the most effective team if you draw from a wide experience. It’s good for the work and good for the firm and the problems we help solve.”

The nearly 1,000 lawyers at JPMorgan Chase help solve a gamut of legal problems, including litigation, transaction and contract law, bank regulations and corporate governance, as well as Security and Exchange Commission issues.

The majority of the lawyers who work on the Chase, or “consumer side,” (versus the JPMorgan or “investment side”) have an in-house social network called The Octagon that

COMPANY: JPMORGAN CHASE & CO.

HEADQUARTERS:
New York, N.Y.

INDUSTRY: Financial/Banking

NUMBER OF LAWYERS IN N.Y.: 400

NUMBER OF LAWYERS IN U.S.: 650

NUMBER OF LAWYERS
WORLDWIDE: 1,000

GENERAL COUNSEL, JPMORGAN
CHASE CONSUMER BANKING:
Matthew Biben

Biben described as part internal Wikipedia, part virtual water cooler that aims to help attorneys achieve a work-life balance.

More than half of the 1,000 attorneys at JP Morgan Chase are women—including the heads of asset management, mortgage and

commercial banks—and one out of four are ethnic minorities, including the general counsel for Chase's credit card business, according to the company.

The fact that the legal diversity committee is chaired by Biben, who oversees about 600 of the company's attorneys as general counsel, underscores the importance of diversity to the corporation. Biben, who is based in New York, also serves on the corporation's diversity committee.

The bank has roughly 400 attorneys in the New York area.

Among the diversity initiatives fostered over the past year have been the Su Casa program, a paid part-time internship for a college or law school student in the New York area. So far three Hispanic students—one per semester—have been brought on to handle non-legal support matters, including recruiting and networking events.

Biben said Su Casa was an effort to "create a positive narrative" while "in the midst of the bad mortgage headlines." The applicants and the stories of their backgrounds were impressive, he said: The first candidate, a young woman who emigrated from Guatemala at 14 with her family, learned English and was accepted to law school. "It was unbelievable."

A push to increase age diversity by bringing on newly-minted attorneys, which the legal department does not do casually, led to the creation of the Chase Honors Program last year. Law school graduates spend two years at JPMorgan Chase rotating among various departments based on need and interest. After finishing the program, they could be accepted as second-year associates at Morgan Lewis & Bockius, a Philadelphia-based firm with offices in New York.

"That's not the model for corporate law departments," Biben said. "You get different perspectives from someone practicing 30

years and someone who's been practicing 30 minutes."

Of the seven post-grads accepted into the honors program, five were women or people of color, according to the company.

The law department also hosted speed networking events with women and minority-owned law firms to broaden the department's base for future hiring or engagement on future positions, Biben said.

The company surpassed its goal of legal spending to women and minority owned firms in 2013 by \$1 million, for a total of \$23.2 million. Of that amount, \$4.9 million went to women-owned firms.

The legal diversity committee also has organized external events with the Black Ivy Alumni League, Hispanic National Bar Association of New York, and Hispanic Bar Association of New Jersey, leading to introductions to attorneys who were offered full-time employment at JPMorgan Chase.

Biben said he asks would-be new hires about the first job they ever had. He noted one candidate said he helped his mother, a custodian, empty wastepaper baskets early in the morning before school.

"That's the energy, the grit, the determination I want," he said. "I want some folks who went to Harvard and some with parents who couldn't spell Harvard."

And last year, JPMorgan Chase's law department gave its first-ever diversity award, named for Joan Guggenheimer, the company's former general counsel who The New York Times described as "a soft-spoken lawyer who had the ear of the chief executives at two of the world's biggest banks" before her death from cancer in 2006.

Biben said Guggenheimer was an icon in the legal community who promoted women and championed diversity in the company. The first Guggenheimer award winners were a vice-president in London and a senior vice

president in New York for promoting women and the LGBT community, respectively.

Quality of Life

In regards to quality of life, Biben said a social network intranet, enhanced over the past year, is "where legal problems tap out."

It's called the Octagon—named after the Chase logo but also alluding to the mixed martial arts ring. The site, in part, is where attorneys in the Chase, or consumer side, can upload documents. It's become a repository for briefs, comment letters, even a manual for mortgage litigators. It also has a discussion board where attorneys can ask business-related questions or recommendations for a good restaurant when traveling.

But a key feature is that it is a place to learn about health initiatives such as LawFit, a competition that awards teams of employees whose members achieve 20 minutes of daily physical activity at least four days a week.

"It's not about creating Ironmen. It's about creating healthy lifestyles," Biben said.

The Octagon is also used to advise attorneys in life planning, such as setting up educational 529 accounts for their children. Biben said that component was triggered by the sudden death of a 44-year-old lawyer who left behind a wife and two children, ages 6 and 4, after being stricken with a virus.

"It was one of the most difficult funerals I've ever been to," he said. "People get so focused on work, and sometimes you don't think about your own personal situation."

@ Rebecca Baker can be reached at rbaker@alm.com.

Twitter: @RBakerNY.