



■ Law students and young lawyers at the North American South Asian Bar Association conference in Atlanta

Meet showcases growth of South Asian lawyers

SUMAN GUHA MOZUMDER

Close to 400 attendees from 22 states across the United States as well as Canada and India attended the third annual convention of the North American South Asian Bar Association, where legal luminaries discussed a host of issues including how to deepen networking among South Asian legal professionals.

The two-day convention in Atlanta, Georgia, celebrated the community's accomplishments and committed itself to doing more for the world in which they live and work.

The convention, at the Intercontinental Hotel in Atlanta, was hosted by the IndusBar of Georgia with support from the CompuCredit Corporation. Attendees took the theme 'Networking to Influence, Influencing the Network', as a call to action and engaged nearly 70 distinguished panelists on a wide variety of topics.

Key topics presented in panels, keynote addresses and receptions included diversity, business development, the USA Patriot Act, racial profiling and pro bono work. The convention gave the South Asian-American legal community opportunities for professional development and to learn of issues that affect them and their community.

"The South Asian American professional community is experiencing a watershed moment as groups like NASABA, TIE, AAPI, AAHOA are expanding across North America. I am proud to say that NASABA has almost doubled in new chapters since 2003," incoming NASABA president Paul Grewal told *India Abroad*.

Underscoring the influence wielded by South Asian attorneys was keynote speaker Neal Katyal, the Georgetown University Law Center professor, who received NASABA's 'Outstanding

Advocacy Award.'

Katyal is lead counsel for detainees at the US detention camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The Hamdan v Rumsfeld case, in which Prof Katyal argued before the US Supreme Court in March, challenges the constitutionality of military tribunals established by the US.

Prof. Katyal said the duty of the lawyers is to make the world a better place. 'Whatever your talents - corporate law, litigation, real estate, tax - all of you have talents you can deploy to better society,' he said.

Showcasing South Asians' impact in another way was luncheon keynote speaker Madhu Khatri, General Counsel of Wipro Technologies, the India-based information technology services giant. Khatri, whose company employs over 50,000, came from Bangalore to share her insights on the current state and future of business in South Asia and the possibilities for American lawyers of South Asian descent.

Her challenge to the attendees was to remain in the forefront of these developments and to ensure the continued strength of South Asians throughout the world.

The two speakers exemplified one of the convention's most notable, but unplanned features - youth. A vast majority of the attendees have been practicing for less than 20 years; a majority of them for less than 10 years. The organizers pointed out that not long ago, there was only a handful of South Asian attorneys in the United States and Canada. That group is growing in strength, with an increasing number of South Asians choosing law school every year.

Like Katyal and Khatri, there were other South Asian attorneys at the convention who are trying to influence the network by seeking to extend that influence into the public arena in their own way. Among them were Shyam Reddy, a

corporate lawyer at the Atlanta-based Kilpatrick Stockton LLP, who is a candidate for Georgia Secretary of State; Neera Walsh, an attorney in the Cook County, Illinois, State Attorneys office; Rohit Kirpalani, general counsel at Atlanta-based CompuCredit Corporation and Monica Desai, a bureau chief at the Federal Communications Commission.

The opening keynote was given by Judge Stanley Birch of the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals, who is well known for his decision in the Terry Schiavo case that captured the nation's attention for much of last year. Judge Birch stressed the need for judicial independence.

Other notable speakers included general counsels Teri McClure of UPS, Joaquin Carbonell of Cingular, and Javade Chaudhri of Sempra Energy, who spoke to a packed audience on the diversity practices of their companies, especially in the area of legal services.

"Feedback from each panel's attendees was very positive because we worked hard to have subjects that appealed to law students, attorneys, legal business executives, general counsels and judges," said convention co-chair Sonjui Kumar.

NASABA started with 12 chapters in the fall of 2003. Less than three years later, it has 23 chapters. "Our goal initially was to create a central meeting point for the South Asian legal community and to establish our presence among the community, particularly the legal community," Vijay Chattha, a spokesperson for NASABA, told *India Abroad* earlier.

The growth of the organization gives hope to people like Inderpreet Sawhney, NASABA executive committee member and vice-president of the 2007 convention. "Next year's convention in San Francisco will likely yield over 500 attendees, and we are actively looking for speaker and panel ideas," Sawhney said. The theme of the 2007 NASABA Convention is 'Bridging Borders.'

Human services group seeks to help graying community

'The elders are retiring, and not everyone wants to keep them'

MONIKA JOSHI

The Asian American Association for Human Services, a non-profit established in 1993 that works to disseminate health-related awareness in the community and enhance quality of life, celebrated an anniversary gala June 23 with the announcement of a new president and board of directors.

Rantik Parikh, who took over as president and chairman of the board of AAAHS, said his priority would be to expand health-related activities of the association, and also include issues such as retirement homes for senior citizens and interpreter services for voters.

"There is a need in the Indian community for senior citizen and retirement homes where they can get, say, the food of their choice," Parikh told *India Abroad*. "I heard that the same problem exists in the Filipino community. The elders are retiring, and not everybody wants to keep them."

New Jersey Assemblyman Upendra Chivukula, who is honorary chairman of the AAAHS, said the graying Asian-American community is yet to make use of the various services made available for seniors by state and Federal agencies. 'We need to work with them, and try to seek their help,' he said.

Senior citizens services are tied into healthcare, with prescription drugs, long-term care, nursing home care or assisted living being major issues. New Jersey is a large state, and the Asian-American population is spread throughout, Chivukula said. 'We have to reach out to key people in various areas, and create access and opportunity for Asian-Americans.'

Chivukula, who has been attending health-related forums organized by the AAAHS for many years, said the organization has been trying to create awareness about issues such as mental health, which is not looked at too kindly in the Asian-American community. 'We need to educate the people that mental health is an important aspect of overall health,' he pointed out.

Along with Parikh, vice president Darlene Borromeo, secretary Claire Iwatsu, and treasurer Eric H Wong were announced, representing the many Asian communities. Ronald K Chen, public advocate for the state of New Jersey, and Assemblyman Robert Gordon were present at the event held at Royal Albert's Palace in New Jersey.

Parikh said his body was working toward having an active presence online, so various communities can exchange information and assist and emulate programs run by each other. He said senior citizen's groups scattered over Edison, Jersey City, Somerville, Bridgewater and Piscataway were ready to affiliate with the Asian American association.

The non-profit AAAHS was launched by four Asian Americans - Fred Andes, Josephine Rago-Adia, Antony Stephen and Mary Ann Wong - with the mission of providing much-needed services to the community in New Jersey. In collaboration with other agencies, it organizes statewide forums and health fairs, offers counseling and conducts studies and surveys.