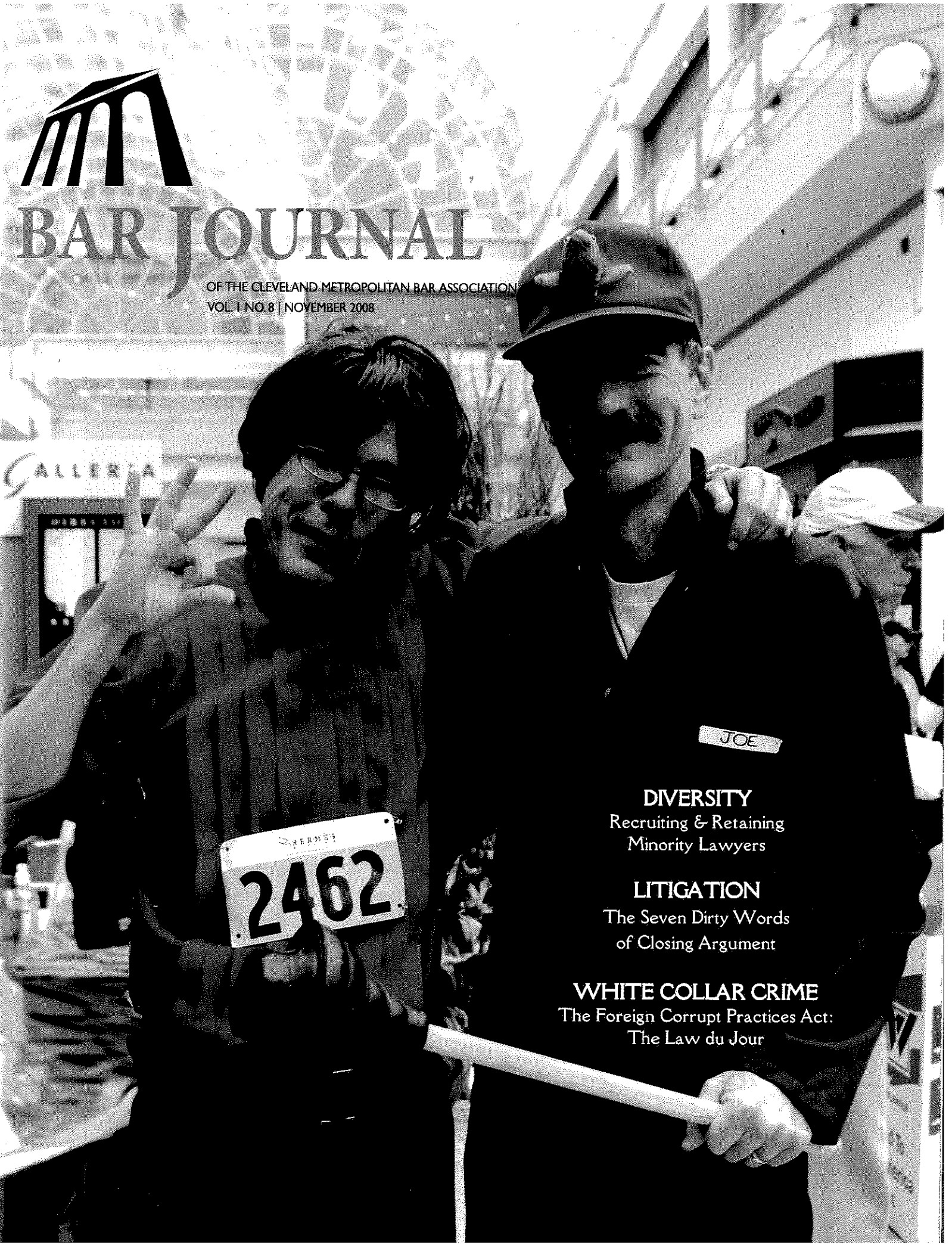


BAR JOURNAL

OF THE CLEVELAND METROPOLITAN BAR ASSOCIATION
VOL. 1 NO. 8 | NOVEMBER 2008



DIVERSITY

Recruiting & Retaining
Minority Lawyers

LITIGATION

The Seven Dirty Words
of Closing Argument

WHITE COLLAR CRIME

The Foreign Corrupt Practices Act:
The Law du Jour

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Diane Citrino



"When I was in 5th grade, my family took a trip to Spain. Although I only learned to say "mas Coca Cola por favor," I knew then that someday I wanted to work with the poor and with Spanish-speaking people," says Diane E. Citrino, the subject of this month's Justice for All Volunteer Spotlight. Diane's life is more than a little girl's dream come true, it is a shining example of a woman who loves being a lawyer and knows the value of giving back to her community.

Upon graduation from Brown University, Diane attended the University of California, Berkeley, Boalt Hall School of Law to obtain her Juris Doctor (1982). One of her first jobs was in Chicago as a staff attorney for the Legal Assistance Foundation of Chicago ("LAF"), a legal aid organization. The community she served was 95% Spanish-speaking and the experience for Diane was like "going to another country—the signs were in Spanish, the music was from Central America and the smells from the tortilla factory filled the air. Although downtown Chicago was only a few miles away, clients referred to "el Downtown" as though it was a world away." While at LAF Diane represented 1,400 Hispanic women in a class action civil RICO lawsuit. Her clients had been promised a beauty school education taught in Spanish – a promise that was never made good. The case was won in the federal courts. "I loved the client community," says Diane about her experience in Chicago. "It was very satisfying work that I stayed with until I moved to Cleveland."

When Diane arrived on the Northcoast, worked for the Housing Advocates, Inc., a non-profit public interest law firm where she co-counseled with Legal Aid attorneys on many cases. Diane also was an adjunct professor at Cleveland Marshall College of Law where she taught housing law clinical courses for more than eight years.

Diane's passion for protecting the rights of the underserved and removing barriers to justice led her to a position with the Ohio Civil Rights Commission where she served as Regional Director in Akron. While there, Diane oversaw thousands of investigations of complaints alleging discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations for a 14-county area of Ohio.

This past November, Diane became a shareholder litigator for Cooper & Walinski LPA, the largest majority women-owned law firm in the country. Even though she has a busy schedule of complex civil litigation, Diane still finds time to volunteer. She is a Trustee for the newly formed Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association, and is active in the Women in Law section and in the 3Rs program. She has served on The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland's Board and currently assists Legal Aid as an Annual Campaign Chair.

Other community activism includes serving on the Ohio Advisory Committee to the United States Civil Rights Commission, and the FBI Hate Crimes Task Force.

Diane continues to co-counsel cases with Legal Aid and remembers in particular an especially satisfying case co-counseled with Legal Aid's Davida Dodson. Diane and Davida represented a client whose soon to be ex-husband came to her home and assaulted her. The client called the police who arrested the husband at the property. The police activity caught the attention of the landlord who came running in while the client was still bleeding from the assault to assess any property damage. The landlord informed the woman that her lease would not be renewed. Because 95% of domestic violence is directed against women, the landlord's actions implicated the Fair Housing Act and also violated the Violence Against Women Act, which protects subsidized housing tenants from being evicted because of the actions of their abuser. Diane and Davida were able to use these statutes to protect their client's right to remain in her home with her children. Diane has also teamed up with other LASC staff attorneys such as Harold Williams consult on issues involving foreclosures.

One of Diane's personal heroes is Morris Dees, founder of the Southern Poverty Law Center. She often recalls his words, "Know me by my clients." Diane believes it is a privilege to work with her clients. "I feel so fortunate to have worked with so many great clients and attorneys. I have a lot of gratitude for the opportunity to serve as a volunteer and as co-counsel. It is a wonderful experience on both a professional and personal level," remarks Diane.

When Diane isn't imposing the weight of the law, she enjoys lifting weights at Kings Gym. Diane is also an artist who loves to paint and work with clay, and an avid gardener and reader.

If you are inspired by Diane Citrino's dedication to bring "justice for all," consider the role you could play in the community by providing a few hours of pro bono legal work through the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland and the Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association. Be sure to contact these organizations for more information. ■

