

## DIVERSITY CORNER



DENISE MUTAMBA

The Judge Edward Rodgers Diversity Award is awarded each year to an individual or organization that demonstrates a consistent pattern of commitment to the recruitment, retention, and promotion of diverse individuals and exhibits visionary and insightful leadership to confront and resolve inequities through strategic decision-making and allocation of resources. This year's recipient is Palm Beach County Bar Association's Past President Rosalyn "Sia" Baker-Barnes.

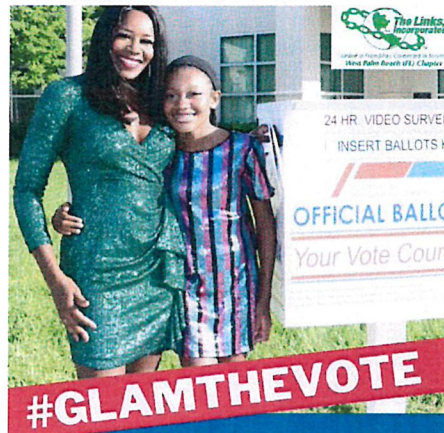


As many know, Ms. Baker-Barnes is a powerhouse in the legal community. Her father, the Honorable Moses Baker, Jr., was a prosecutor and later a judge; her mother, Rosalyn Baker, was a supervisor with the probation and parole sections of the Department of Corrections. Despite this connection, law was not her first love. Ms. Baker-Barnes did not decide to become a lawyer until the end of her undergraduate career. Before that time, she had dreams of traveling the country as a journalist. However, after interning in the governor's press office, working for a newspaper, and working at a local TV station, she realized that she wanted the ability to tell her clients' stories, but more importantly, the ability to do something to help them get back on their feet. Because of this change, the Palm Beach County legal community has not only benefitted from the poised, prepared, and passionate way she practices law, but also in how she confronted racial and gender inequities by promoting diversity in the legal profession. In doing so, Ms. Baker-Barnes has left a

legacy not only for herself, but for the legal community and for society as a whole.

Nominator Jordan Dulcie, observes how Ms. Baker-Barnes makes a concerted effort on a daily basis within their law firm to ensure that all voices are heard:

She brings her personal life experiences as a woman and African American in the legal field to every conversation, which promotes meaningful discussions within the firm on various topics that we as lawyers engage with. These often-difficult discussions provide perspective to everyone and allows others to be informed about different perspectives as we reach decisions on matters that affect the firm and our lawyers. Her voice allows us to better our interactions with our clients and provide better representation.



In addition to mentoring young lawyers, Ms. Baker-Barnes has organized community members to engage in peaceful protests in the community to denounce hate and racism, and worked with her firm's leadership to produce a television commercial promoting the firm's fight against racism and injustice. Ms. Baker-Barnes has also devoted her efforts to encouraging voter turnout by working with The West Palm Beach Chapter of The Links, Inc. on its #GlamtheVote campaign to encourage the community to vote in the 2020 election.

## Rosalyn "Sia" Baker-Barnes – 2021 Judge Edward Rodgers Diversity Award Recipient

Ms. Baker-Barnes has always used her position in various legal and community organizations to encourage women and minorities to stimulate change in their communities. She uses her platforms to promote and encourage others to share their personal experiences and to stand up for justice and fairness while embracing their cultural heritage. She works tirelessly to promote her peers to positions of leadership to ensure that various legal organizations have a diverse group of leaders to share their voices and experiences in roles of leadership.



Current Committee for Diversity and Inclusion (CDI) member Brad Avakian reflected on how she made him feel about volunteering for bar activities. "I expected there to be some sort of hierarchy that could prevent me from making meaningful connections," Mr. Avakian noted. "That expectation was blown out of the water by the kindness and inclusivity that Sia offered in her role as President."

2020 opened many eyes to the role racism still plays in American society, as the nation's record of systematic racism and injustice was presented in plain sight through too many tragic examples. Ms. Baker-Barnes was a leader in the community in standing up for those who suffered such injustices. She helped foster discussions in the community on how race affects the application of our federal, state, and local laws.

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Ms. Baker-Barnes continues to lead in this field by serving as an Advisor to the F. Malcolm Cunningham, Sr. Bar Association ("FMCBA").

This year, the entire executive board consists of young, vibrant female lawyers. The current FMCBA President, Hershley Ogé, is grateful to have Ms. Baker-Barnes advise her this year. She boasts that Ms. Baker-Barnes "is an exceptional example of what a leader should be and how a leader should encourage future generations to get involved."



Upon learning of being a recipient of the 2021 Judge Edward Rodgers Diversity Award, Ms. Baker-Barnes replied, "I am SO honored and humbled to have been selected for this award.... Judge Rodgers was instrumental in my life and my career; I have known him since I was a little girl. He mentored me, he guided me and he was always there to cheer me on. He is the reason my dad and so many others had opportunities to become lawyers and leaders here in Palm Beach County. Nine years ago, as Co-Chair of the CDI, I had the great privilege of presenting the very first diversity award to Judge Rodgers, and to announce that the award was named after him. It warms my heart to now receive the award we named for him and to play a small part in carrying on his great legacy."

Please join the Palm Beach County Bar Association in congratulating the 2021 Judge Edward Rodgers Diversity Award Recipient, Rosalyn "Sia" Baker-Barnes.

*This article contained contributions from Jordan Dulcie.*

## Rosalyn "Sia" Baker-Barnes – 2021 Judge Edward Rodgers Diversity Award Recipient (Continued)

### R. Fred Lewis Florida High School Trial Competition held on Zoom



Our Law Related Education Committee hosted its annual R. Fred Lewis Florida High School Mock Trial Competition, including 5 local teams and 30 students. Pictured are students from FAU High School and American Heritage who brilliantly competed and received valuable courtroom experience during the exercise on Zoom. We are sure to see them back as future lawyers and judges! After the trial, students were critiqued by our seasoned lawyers. A special thank you to all the great volunteers who organized and judged the competition, including program chair Andrew Kwan, Esq.

### PBCBA Membership Appreciation Week

Monday, April 19<sup>th</sup> –  
Friday, April 23<sup>rd</sup>

