

Meet CABA's New President: Dax Bello

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by Michael A. Mora

A. Dax Bello, a partner at Stewart Tilghman Fox Bianchi & Cain in Miami, has recently been named the new president of the Cuban American Bar Association and has big plans for the future of the organization.

And those who mentored Dax, including Miami-Dade State Attorney Katherine Fernandez Rundle, said the new bar president has what it takes to excel in the role.

Rundle would know as it was her father and a handful of other Cuban lawyers in 1974 who founded CABA, in order to have representation when doors in the South Florida community were not open for them.

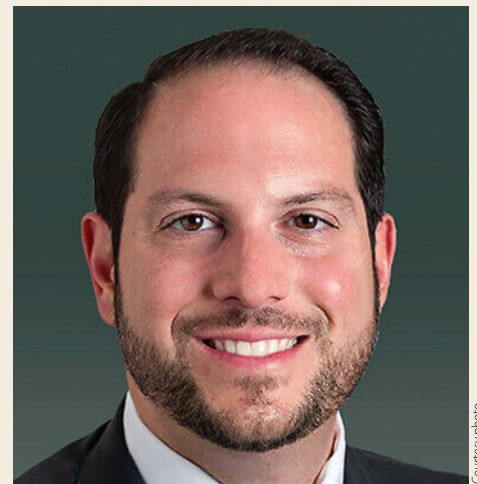
"I became the first female president of CABA, and there Dax was, coming out of our office, and he became the president of CABA," Rundle said about her former employee. "I became so impressed of his trajectory as a young lawyer with his civic-

mindedness, deep roots and commitment to the community. He has led during a very difficult time, during a pandemic which only happens once in a century."

CABA is a nonprofit voluntary bar association that has focused on issues affecting the

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Cuban American community. To address these issues, one of the most important events for CABA is its yearly gala, which is organized by CABA and is the primary driver of contributions to the Cuban American Bar Foundation. Dax said the proceeds from the gala are split



Dax Bello, Stewart Tilghman Fox Bianchi & Cain, Miami.

between the foundation, pro bono legal services, and the bar association, which could make his future goals for the nonprofit possible.

In years past, the event has been more formal. Past president Frances G. De La Guardia chose the InterContinental Miami as the venue to host the dinner and dancing event less than two months before the coronavirus stay-at-home orders complicated the normal order of things.

Now, Dax has pushed the event from its traditional January

date to March 20 and will have the fundraiser and installation in the water — coining the name Regala 2021. According to a past president, the goal is to raise at least \$100,000 to more than \$500,000 in donations at the event.

“It’s going to be very similar to what Miamians have seen in the past with the Columbus Day regatta,” Dax said. “There’s just this party on the water where everybody is on their own boats so they can stay socially distanced from others but stay involved with the festivities.”

But while Dax is a leader in the legal field, being an attorney was not always his life goal. After Dax graduated from the University of Miami with a business degree, he was weighing whether to continue running a textile factory and earning a master’s in business administration or instead attending law school.

Dax ultimately chose law school after Miami-Dade Circuit Judge Philip Bloom arranged a meeting for him with an associate dean of St. Thomas Law School.

“When I left that meeting, the associate dean invited me to join the 2008 class,” Dax said. “This was in 2005. This meeting was on Friday, and he said to come in on Monday. We’ve got a spot for you, if you want. If not for Judge Bloom, my life could have taken a much different course.”

Dax excelled in his classes but was not yet sure the direction he wanted to take his practice after

law school. As fate would have it, Rundle met Dax on a plane from Miami to Las Vegas.

“During that plane ride, I was able to recruit him and convince him that the state’s attorney office was one of the best jobs a lawyer can ever have,” Rundle said. “It is about passion, it is about service, and it is about helping people, protecting the community and solving problems.”

“What’s really admirable in my opinion, they put in a full day of working and at the same time continuing after the workday is done to make the profession better — and that is what Dax does.”

While working as a certified legal intern, Dax worked alongside some of the assistant state attorneys. That is around the time Dax “fell in love with litigation.”

“It is a daunting thought to know there is so much riding on what you do,” Dax said. “Especially with criminal cases, because a guilty person could go free or a victim could be left without justice.”

After the internship and his graduation from St. Thomas, Dax was among the about 25 people who joined the state attorney’s

office out of thousands of applicants. Dax called it an early success for his career as Rundle typically recruits over 60 new lawyers each year. His role at the state attorney’s office provided Dax with the opportunity to gain expertise as a trial lawyer.

“I was the guy that when anybody needed a trial partner, I would just snatch it up,” Dax said. “Trials come few and far between. I tried 30 jury trials while I was there and since then, I have tried three.”

After three years at the state attorney’s office, one of Dax’s mentors at CABA, helped him with his next move. Jorge L. Piedra is a partner at Kozyak Tropin & Throckmorton in Coral Gables and concentrates his practice on complex commercial and construction litigation. Piedra spoke with Dax about the right time to transition to private practice.

“Dax had many options,” Piedra said. “But it was pretty clear once his current firm, Stewart Tilghman, showed interest, that was just an incredible opportunity for him. It is the best of all worlds. He’s at a great, small law firm where he could immediately step in and do trial work.”

Dax’s practice is devoted to representing plaintiffs in various forms of civil litigation, including wrongful death and catastrophic injury, and he has recovered over \$60 million for his clients since joining the firm in 2013.

Still, since graduating from St. Thomas during the 2008 economic downturn to the position Dax finds himself in today, CABA's mentorship program has consistently been there to help him grow as an attorney. One of his focuses as president is on the mentorship program. After Dax motioned the board, CABA has given free memberships to new lawyers who could not immediately take the Bar exam because of the coronavirus social distancing restrictions delaying the licensing test or those struggling to find work due to the current economic downturn. The free membership offered a pathway to meet new people and learn new skills.

And during that time, Roland Sanchez-Medina Jr., a partner at Sanchez-Medina, Gonzalez, Quesada, Lage, Gomez & Machado in Coral Gables, who has focused his practice on corporate and securities law, and is a past president of CABA, said it has been impressive to see the growth of his mentee. Dax didn't just run for the board — "which can be a popularity contest" — but joined the CABA section on international human rights and worked his way up in the organization.

"There's a lot of lawyers that want to make money, work really hard and don't otherwise get involved in the community," Sanchez-Medina said. "What's really admirable in my opinion, they put in a full day of working and at the same time continuing after the workday is done to make the profession better — and that is what Dax does."

And now, Sanchez-Medina said that Dax's first big initiative as president in which the organization is pivoting and having the Regala out on the water was a brilliant idea.

"The CABA Gala is the preeminent legal party in Miami-Dade County," Sanchez-Medina said. "It's packed with judges, political leaders, and not having it would be a shame. If you don't make money at the CABA Gala, then it's going to be a dismal year."

Sanchez-Medina said people keep their speeches short because guests want to talk with Rundle or their congressman. While Sanchez-Medina said the event would be a wild success, the community initiatives are still why the organization is known.

"We will have a good time, but it's more important for the voice of CABA to be someone who is respected as an attorney and Dax is just that," Sanchez-Medina said. "He's a powerful guy in Miami-Dade County."

A. Dax Bello

Born: 1982, Miami

Spouse: Janine Carro-Bello

Children: Baby girl (name TBD) expected in May 2021

Education: J.D, St. Thomas School of Law; B.A. University of Miami

Experience: Stewart Tilghman Fox Bianchi & Cain, P.A., 2013-present (Shareholder); Office of the Miami-Dade State Attorney, Eleventh Judicial Circuit of Florida, 2009-2012 (Assistant State Attorney); MasTec, Inc., 2006 – 2009 (Law clerk and Attorney).

Michael primarily covers litigation in South Florida for the Daily Business Review. You can contact him by email: mmora@alm.com.



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