

# Finding the Class of 2006

By Glenn Cook

**DAVID LEWIS HAS LEARNED** how to treat life's crossroads like an intersection. You have to stop for a moment and look at your surroundings. Occasionally, you have to yield to others. Then you move forward, always keeping an eye on what's in your rearview mirror.

"Growing up in the environment I did, and seeing some of the things I've seen, I had to learn that as long as I believed I could do it and persevere, then I really could do anything I put my mind to," says Lewis, who was part of the second class of the Minority Corporate Council Association's LMJ Scholarship recipients in 2006.

In the decade since receiving the MCCA scholarship, Lewis' perseverance has paid off. He earned his juris doctorate from Indiana University's Maurer School of Law, worked as a prosecutor for 18 months, moved into investment banking at Loop Capital Markets and received his MBA from the University of Chicago Booth School of Business. In 2013, he founded his company, which acquires and builds companies in the transportation, distribution and logistics industry.

"I am the byproduct of a lot of help and a lot of prayers," says Lewis, who lives in Chicago with his wife, Dakisha, and two young sons, Joshua and Jacob. "I'm just like everyone else, except that I just have a lot of people pulling for me. And once they grabbed me, I didn't let them go."

## Make the Best of What You Have

Over the past 11 years, MCCA has awarded LMJ Scholarships to more than 180 first-year law students who were highly qualified but faced steep financial hardships. In many cases, the \$10,000 scholarship has been carried over into the winners' second and third years in law school.

While the majority of the recipients finish law school and

go into some legal work, many have moved on to varied careers in the corporate, government and nonprofit sectors. What they have in common are the significant barriers—cultural, financial and socioeconomic—they've managed to overcome.

Lewis grew up in Gary, Ind., in the 1990s, a period when the town was called the "murder capital of the U.S." The oldest of three boys raised by a single mother, Lewis says his family "moved around a ton when I was growing up." His father, with whom he maintained a close relationship, was killed when Lewis was in high school.

"Life has been tough for a lot of people," he says declining to discuss his childhood in more detail. "It hasn't been easy for me. I try not to lead with [family history] anymore because that's not where I am. I've moved past that. I was fortunate to be close to my father and my uncle, and I'm lucky to still be close to my mom and my stepmother. I know the value of family."

Lewis also learned the value of hard work. In high school, he cut hair to help his family make ends meet. He worked in a warehouse as an undergraduate at Hampton University and became a supervisor on the graveyard/sunrise shift at UPS while attending law school.

"One of the things my dad and my uncle instilled in me and preached to me was 'make the best of what you have,'" Lewis says. "I've always had an entrepreneurial itch and a strong intellectual curiosity. I gobble up the things that I find interesting. What has always resonated with me, though, is to leave a legacy. I want to build something that lasts beyond my years, something that has value." That's why he named his company Darrell & Bailee after his father and uncle, who died while Lewis was getting his MBA. It was an opportunity to honor his family while building his legacy.

# SCHOLARSHIP



## Mentors Matter

An accounting major at Hampton University, Lewis worked for Price Waterhouse Cooper before law school, serving as an auditor for corporate warehouses in the Midwest. Interning during the summers at General Electric and a startup tech company in San Francisco, he thought he would move into financial law after graduating from Indiana in 2009.

The recession limited jobs in that sector, however, so he took a job with the Lake County District Attorney's Office in his home county. He refers to that time as "just a big blur for me."

"My long-term goal has always been to move into private equity," he says. "Most JDs come out and take the bar, then ideally they do something in the practice of law, be it criminal or corporate. I've always been more interested in doing deals directly, and I wanted to get into investment or private equity consulting, so it was really tough to be there working as a prosecutor."

It was during that period, however, that he met one of his mentors, Myron Chenault, a fellow attorney who had built two telecommunications companies and sold them to Ameritech.

"He was the IT manager in the prosecutor's office, a man on his third career, and he pulled me aside one day and asked me what I wanted to do," Lewis says. "I said I wanted to do private equity, and he got me a face-to-face meeting with Darrell Williams."

Williams, a managing director at Loop Capital Markets, hired Lewis and quickly became another mentor. He helped Lewis get into the University of Chicago and continues to work with him as an executive advisor at Darrell & Bailee.

"What this has taught me is that everyone and everything has a purpose," Lewis says. "I got my dream job working in private equity only because I was working at the prosecutor's office. It wasn't the traditional, easy path, but working in that environment taught me

David and Dakisha Lewis with their sons, Joshua and Jacob.

you have to maintain some serenity when what you're doing is against the grain. If you work hard, make and maintain good connections, it all comes in due time."

### **LMJ Scholarship & Contacts Provided Opportunities**

Lewis credits the LMJ Scholarship with giving him the "financial upside" he needed to finish law school. Like other recipients, he said the contacts he made thanks to the scholarship have proven to be just as important.

"It has provided me with opportunities, exposure and resources," Lewis says. "I talk to the attorneys I worked with at G.E. to this day. I can shoot text messages to the attorneys I know with questions, and they get back with me. Having those people that I can bounce things off of is quite refreshing."

Being a beneficiary of others' generosity also has prompted Lewis to give back as well. He is on the board

of directors for the Chicago Hope Academy, a private school that serves inner-city children growing up in the same conditions that Lewis did.

"I look at these kids, and I see myself. I feel called to do this and to help," he says. "Before I started my company, my world revolved around other things—corporate life, getting good grades, being at the top of my class, whatever was the 'next big thing.' Now, having gone through all of these varied experiences, I'm centered and focused on what matters most. I have my own gravity. Whether it's acquiring and rebuilding companies, or coaching my son's T-ball team and taking him to wrestling practice, at the end of the day I want to be a servant to others. I want to help show that perseverance pays off because that's how I am where I am now." ■

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## **The 2006 recipients of the Minority Corporate Counsel Association's LMJ Scholarship have gone on to varied careers in the corporate, government and nonprofit worlds.**

### **Here is an update on the class and what they are doing now:**

- **Jazmine Abadia Russell** is a special victims counsel for the United States Air Force, representing victims of sexual assault as they navigate the legal system.
- **Grace Aduroja** is an associate with the Polsinelli law firm in Washington, D.C.
- **Michael W. Anderson** is an associate at Goodwin Proctor in Washington, D.C.
- **Melanie Nicora Baptiste-jean Noel** is an attorney with Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP in New York City.
- **Jessica Lynn Corsi** is an instructor and private tutor for TestMasters, teaching full-length and weekend LSAT courses in the U.S. and abroad.
- **Lisa Gonzalo** is an associate with Bressler, Amory & Ross P.C., a multi-disciplinary law firm headquartered in Florham Park, N.J.
- **Kerry Jefferson** is an associate at Morgan, Lewis & Bockius LLP in Princeton, N.J.
- **Harris Khan** is Legal Counsel at Google in Mountain View, California.
- **Dionna Little** is assistant city attorney for the City of Orlando, Fla.
- **Tanisha McCullen-Manning** is an assistant district attorney for Harris County, Texas.
- **John Oh** is an associate with Bassil, Klovee, and Budreau, a private firm based in Boston.
- **Ami M. Parekh** is the medical director for Health Systems Innovation for UCSF Medical Center and an assistant professor at the UCSF School of Medicine in San Francisco.
- **Samorn Selim** is a career coach, attorney and associate director for graduate class advising at the University of California's Hastings College of Law in San Francisco.
- **Arturo Villarreal, Jr.**, is a founding partner at Jilpas Villarreal, PLLC, in Austin, Texas.
- **Willie White** is an attorney with Wells Fargo in Charlotte, N.C.
- **Shannon Wilson** is an attorney with the U.S. Postal Service in Chicago, Ill.

### **Whereabouts unknown on the following:**

- **Frank Sien Chen** was admitted to the bar in California following his graduation. He has been inactive since 2012.

Details about the **LMJ Scholarship Program** can be found at [www.mcca.com/scholarships](http://www.mcca.com/scholarships). If you are interested in working with this or donating to this program, contact Aracely Muñoz Petrich, vice president of strategic development, at [amunozpetrich@mcca.com](mailto:amunozpetrich@mcca.com).