

Blaneys Partner Ian Epstein wins Lexpert® Diversity and Inclusion Award

Date: June 20, 2016

We are very proud to announce that our Partner, Ian Epstein, was chosen as a winner of Lexpert's 2016 Zenith Awards: Celebrating Diversity and Inclusion. We honour Ian for his dedication and commitment to the Scadding Court Community Centre *Investing in Our Diversity Scholarship Program* - developed to recognize and reward young people in Toronto fighting for equity and against racism.

Building on our Core Values

In 2001, Blaney McMurtry and Scadding Court Community Centre (SCCC) were founding partners of the *Investing in our Diversity Scholarship Program*, a program which is now part of the SCCC commitment to Access, Equity and Anti-racism initiatives.

Based on the notion that discrimination remains present in Canada, and inspired by the late Bill McMurtry of Blaney McMurtry, the program was founded to recognize and reward young people fighting for equity and against racism. The scholarship rewards students throughout Toronto who have shown leadership in diversity and anti-racism initiatives and demonstrate financial need, providing post-secondary school scholarships to students from diverse communities who would otherwise not be able to afford university or college. The late Bill McMurtry, a mentor to Ian, was a co-founder of the scholarship program, and was responsible for getting Ian actively involved in this worthy cause.

Ian recalls Bill's original concept for the scholarship: "Bill's commitment to the disadvantaged and under-served, his passion for Toronto and his desire to be a voice for those so often overlooked, motivated him to create a program that encouraged young people to focus on anti-racism and diversity. I share these values and have been so very honoured to carry them forward at our firm and continue what Bill started." He adds, "Bill's spirit lives on through this program and I am very proud of that."

Ian leads this initiative for Blaney McMurtry and sits on the Advisory Committee of SCCC. Within the firm, he is supported by his partner Jack Siegel, who sits on the Selection Committee. The firm also hosts an annual campaign kickoff breakfast at their offices.

Support for Toronto's Young Scholars

Maria Scarfo, Managing Partner at Blaney McMurtry, says, "Bill loved the diversity of Toronto and showed that with his commitment to those who were judged for what they were and not who they were. His desire to be a voice for those often overlooked and to expose and defeat racism while fostering diversity remain core values within our firm. I am so very proud of the work that Ian continues to do at, and on behalf of, Blaneys."

The impact of the program has been felt in many ways. Bill's brother, Former Chief Justice *The Honourable Roy McMurtry*, Head Patron of the Scholarship program, adds "The evils of racism are something that appalled my brother Bill from his earliest days, and he fought his whole life against them. This scholarship - inspired by him and with one of the awards now bearing his name - is a perfect memorial to him and to the culture of the firm he built."

From offering two \$4,000 scholarships at its' inception, the program has grown to include Toronto Community Housing and four Toronto Police Services Divisions as partners. Last year, \$130,000 was distributed to 46 young scholars, and since the creation of the program Scadding Court Community Centre has distributed over \$800,000 to 330 young scholars.

A Promising Future

According to Ian, "Our firm has had the honour of presenting our scholarships to so many impressive and deserving young people that it would be almost impossible to single one out." However, he said that two of the recent recipients come to mind as illustrating the difference the scholarships have made in fostering a future for promising Toronto youth who can use a hand up.

Munira Abukar - Profile of a Scholarship Winner

- 2010 Scholarship Winner
- One of nine children of Somali immigrants
- Ryerson Graduate, Criminology, 2015
- Served on Ryerson University Faculty of Arts Student Advisory Committee
- Keynote Speaker, Governor General's Roundtable, 2012
- Toronto City Council candidate, 2014
- Profiled in [Toronto Life Magazine](#) (Jan 19, 2015), [Toronto Star](#) (Oct 3, 2014) and Chatelaine's Top 20 under 30 (2011)
- Board of Directors, Toronto Community Housing (elected tenant representative)

Sakinna Gairey - Profile of a Scholarship Winner

- 2013 Scholarship Winner
- [Great-granddaughter of civil right pioneer Harry Gairey](#) (Toronto Star, May 30, 2013)

- University of Ottawa, in progress
- Co-founder, Northern Secondary School's Girls Reaching Out program
- Vice-President Northern Secondary Environmental Organization,
- When asked who inspires her the most, she replied, "Malcolm X and Jack Layton. Strange combination, but I admire their selflessness, loyalty, and determination."

In May 2016, Ian, on behalf of Blaney McMurtry, received an award from SCCC to recognize 15 years of "contribution and commitment to the *Investing in our Diversity Scholarship*". According to SCCC Executive Director Kevin Lee, "Blaney McMurtry co-founded the Scholarship Program with us fifteen years ago. Since then, I have had the pleasure of working with Ian Epstein each year. Like his late partner Bill, Ian is a compassionate person who cares deeply about social justice. I think that Ian's experience immigrating to Canada shaped his worldview and gave him the desire to help those less fortunate than him. He works to ensure that young Torontonians in need of a helping hand have an opportunity to pursue higher education and change the trajectory of their lives."

About Our Winner

Ian Epstein practices civil litigation and immigration law. After being involved in the anti-Apartheid movement in South Africa, Ian immigrated to Canada alone (the first of his family to do so) at the age of twenty. Determined to distance himself from Apartheid - an Afrikaans word meaning "separateness" - Ian sought a life free of the racial segregation he had experienced growing up. Ian is now a passionate advocate for diversity and opportunity.