

Obi Chukwu

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In a time of increased national anxiety toward issues of race, we are reminded of the importance of diversity, acceptance, and appreciation for our differences within our communities. The same is true within the legal profession. We, as attorneys, look to each other for support and guidance, using our differing perspectives to arrive at the best solutions. Paschal Nwokocha and Obi Chukwu exemplify the ways in which this diversity of experience leads to high-quality contributions to the legal community and to the clients they serve in their practice.

Nwokocha and Chukwu are partners at the newly renamed Paschal Nwokocha & Chukwu Law Firm (formerly known as Paschal Nwokocha Law Offices). The firm is a testament to the high quality of the Hennepin County legal community.

Their unique perspectives and ideas have influenced attorneys not only from the Twin Cities but also from around the country. Both are immigration attorneys and members of the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA) who have left lasting impressions on legal precedent and the meaning of being an active member.

Paschal Nwokocha has served as an immigration attorney for almost 20 years. Graduating *cum laude* from William Mitchell College of Law in 1996, Nwokocha knew that immigrant issues were among the areas of practice that mattered most to him. Having relocated to Minnesota from Nigeria, he believed his unique perspective would serve him well in his law practice.

Born and raised in the southeastern city of Umuahia, Nigeria, Nwokocha moved to the United States in 1992 after his father petitioned for him and his brothers to enter as permanent residents. Having left Nigeria during the middle of his undergraduate career, he enrolled at the University of St. Thomas and went on to receive his degree in philosophy the following year. Shortly thereafter, Nwokocha faced an important decision. His whole life, he had believed he would become a Catholic priest. He had begun making preparations to enter seminary only to find himself at a crossroads between what he had always perceived to be his calling and a newly discovered passion for philosophical analysis and legal reasoning. Ultimately, it was that passion that led him to apply to law school.

Though he loved problem-solving, Nwokocha was unsure of the areas of law he would dedicate his life to. So following his graduation from William Mitchell, he worked for the Minnesota Attorney General's Office for about two years. He handled a variety of work in the office. He even assisted in a case on air quality regulations that went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. It was during his time

Paschal Nwokocha

at the Minnesota AG's Office that family, friends, friends of friends, and fellow Nigerians began approaching him with immigration questions. Often, he was the only attorney they knew or trusted with private or even embarrassing information. He was someone they knew they could rely on.

As time went on, Nwokocha realized that he liked immigration, particularly, immigration litigation before the Department of Justice Immigration Court, formally known as the Executive Office for Immigration Review, and the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals. He had a keen eye for mandamus and habeas cases, which led him to open his own immigration law practice and never look back.

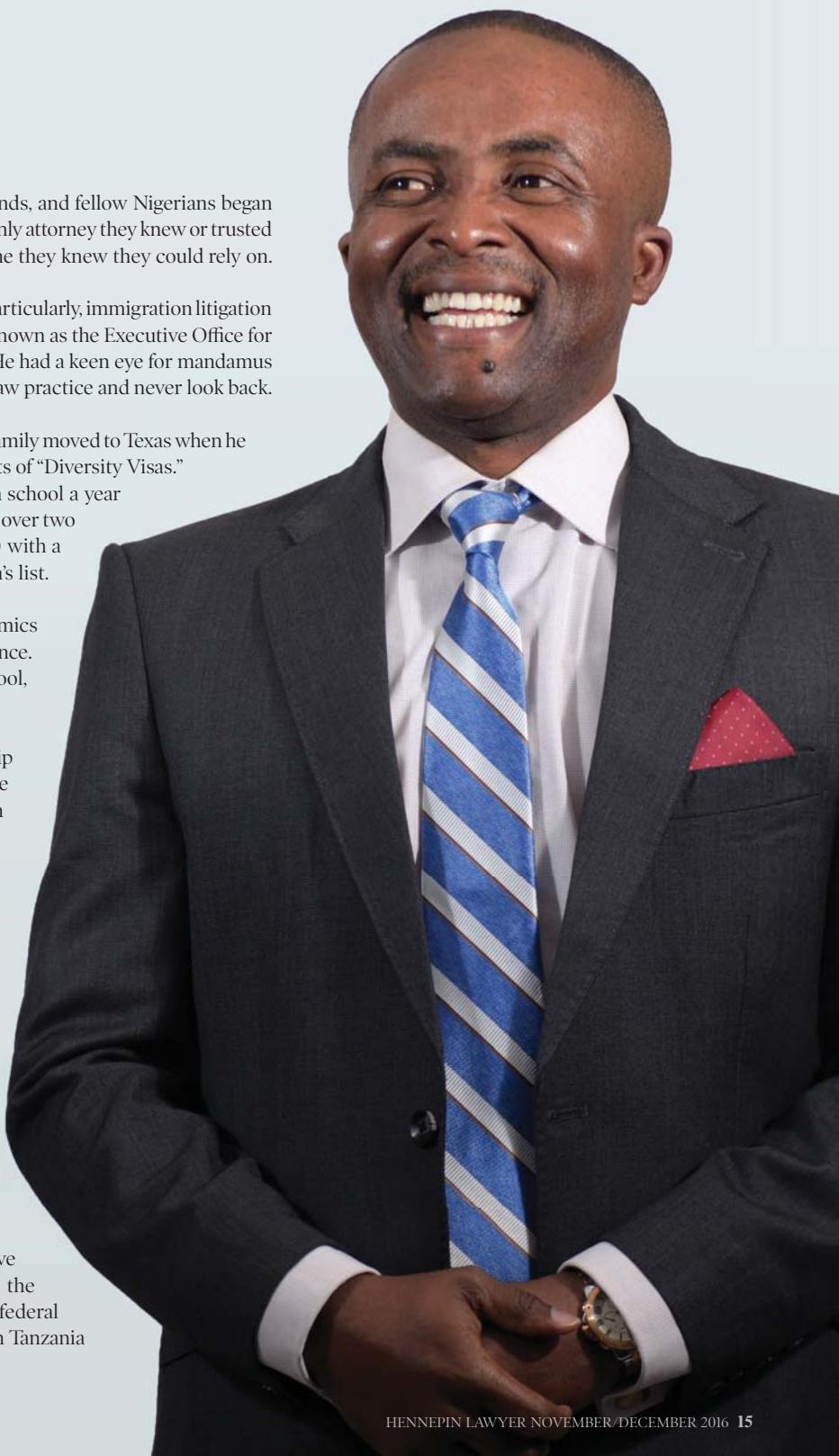
Also born and raised in Umuahia, Nigeria, **Obi Chukwu** and his family moved to Texas when he was a teenager. The family entered the United States as recipients of "Diversity Visas." Chukwu was a sophomore at the time. He graduated from high school a year early while simultaneously finishing his bachelor's degree in just over two years. He graduated from the University of North Texas (UNT) with a degree in economics, with distinction, being named to the dean's list.

While still in college Chukwu realized that, though he liked economics in theory, he had no desire to enter a career in banking or finance. His academic advisor recommended that he apply to law school, changing the course of his life.

Before graduating from UNT, Chukwu was offered a scholarship to the University of St. Thomas (UST) School of Law. At age 19, he took a chance and moved to Minnesota to embark on an entirely new adventure. In 2001, he was not only part of the first graduating class at the UST law school, he was the first black male to graduate from the school.

While in law school, Chukwu did not have much exposure to immigration law, except for his own experience with immigration bureaucracy. Chukwu's heart was in family law. He loved working with families to resolve their differences and protect the rights of children, irrespective of their cultural background, immigration status, or sexual orientation. After meeting with local practitioners, including Nwokocha, he realized that he could do both family and immigration law.

Soon after Chukwu graduated from law school, Nwokocha hired him. Primarily handling family- and humanitarian-based immigration cases, Chukwu often handles his clients' family law matters as well. He has handled removal cases before the Executive Office of Immigration Review and immigration appeals before the Eighth Circuit. He has even handled a few contract cases in federal district court, including a case involving the Catholic diocese in Tanzania



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and a priest in Chicago. On September 1, 2016, Nwokocha announced that Chukwu would become partner at the firm.

Since founding the law firm, Nwokocha has dedicated his life to changing the lives of the families he serves and setting precedent for other attorneys to follow. Nwokocha's practice has evolved to primarily handling employment-based immigration cases such as H-1B work visas and EB-5 investment-based green cards, and religious-worker work visas and green cards. This has allowed Chukwu to pursue the majority of the family and humanitarian-based immigration cases, like U Visas for victims of serious crimes, Special Immigrant Juvenile petitions, asylum, and removal defense, in addition to developing the firm's family law practice.

Both Nwokocha and Chukwu continue to be active members of AILA, serving as mentors to younger members in Minnesota, Maryland, and Texas.

Both men also continue serving organizations around the Twin Cities. Nwokocha served as the chair of the Minnesota/Dakotas chapter of AILA from 2009 to 2010, as well as the chapter liaison with the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Department of

Homeland Security (DHS) Office of Chief Counsel. He has also served on the state ethics board, conducting investigations of attorney complaints. Chukwu has served as board member of the Confederation of Somali Community in Minnesota (CSCMN) for over eight years. And together, both

men are active board members of Umune Cultural Association, Minnesota, an organization dedicated to preserving the traditions and history of the Igbo ethnic group of Nigeria. Through the organization, they have hosted cultural expositions and festivals, held information sessions about immigrant rights, and even hosted Humphrey Fellows attending the University of Minnesota.

Nwokocha and Chukwu have also taken it upon themselves to set up a networking group of African professionals throughout the Twin Cities. They connect with doctors, dentists, teachers, and other lawyers, hosting a variety of networking events to simply get to know each other, discuss trends in issues their communities are facing, and support each other through their respective professions. One of their most recent events had approximately 50 people in attendance, including African students attending the different colleges around the Twin Cities.

Even with the hectic schedules that Nwokocha and Chukwu maintain year-round, they do not lose sight of what's important. They value the trust clients place in them, while also keeping in mind the importance of maintaining a balanced lifestyle to ensure that they can practice and enjoy life. Both men are avid world travelers. Nwokocha recently returned from a month-long

trip to Italy with his wife and four children, and Chukwu traveled to Cape Verde. Both men also love soccer, and they play in a recreational league in the Twin Cities. They are both art enthusiasts who will buy at least one piece of art on every trip they take. When asked about the artwork throughout their office, both explained that it was important that their office represent them and the lives they have lived. Through pieces of art, they are able to tell an authentic story about where their careers have taken them.

Professionally, the law partners emphasize the importance of learning from their peers whether by engaging in conversations with other practitioners or by learning from the mistakes of others. They believe that the only way to succeed is to remember that they are human and need to continue learning. They also believe in working with their support staff to ensure everyone is learning and improving at all times. Their firm takes an annual office retreat abroad for team-building and work enhancement. Nwokocha mentioned that they try making appointments with the local consular offices and immigration departments to learn about the different procedures practiced by different customs offices. Their most recent staff retreat was to Cuba.

All in all, Nwokocha and Chukwu believe in the importance of their legacy, and what it will say about them as well as those that come after them. They are aware that the decisions they make now will impact those that follow, especially as a minority in this country. They want their legacies to be lasting and for the betterment of the legal profession and the community as a whole.

For these reasons, Nwokocha and Chukwu exemplify what makes our bar association unique, and prove that what drives us individually will also help us evolve as an organization, as well as in our individual pursuit for excellence.

Honoring Lawyers Who Passed Away in 2016

The HCBA's Bar Memorial Committee requests your assistance in its efforts to memorialize Hennepin County lawyers and judges. Please inform us of any colleagues who have passed away this year who should be memorialized at the 2017 Bar Memorial.

The 2017 Bar Memorial will take place on Thursday, April 27, from 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. at the Thrivent Financial Auditorium in downtown Minneapolis. The Chief Judge of the Fourth Judicial District Court presides over this special session of the court.

Contact Sheila Johnson, HCBA Events Manager, at Sheila@hcba.org, with names of those to be memorialized. If you are interested in serving on the Bar Memorial Committee, we welcome your participation.



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Ms. Ceja-Orozco is an attorney practicing exclusively in immigration law. Originally from the San Francisco Bay Area, She moved to Minnesota to attend Hamline School of Law. She graduated in 2012.