

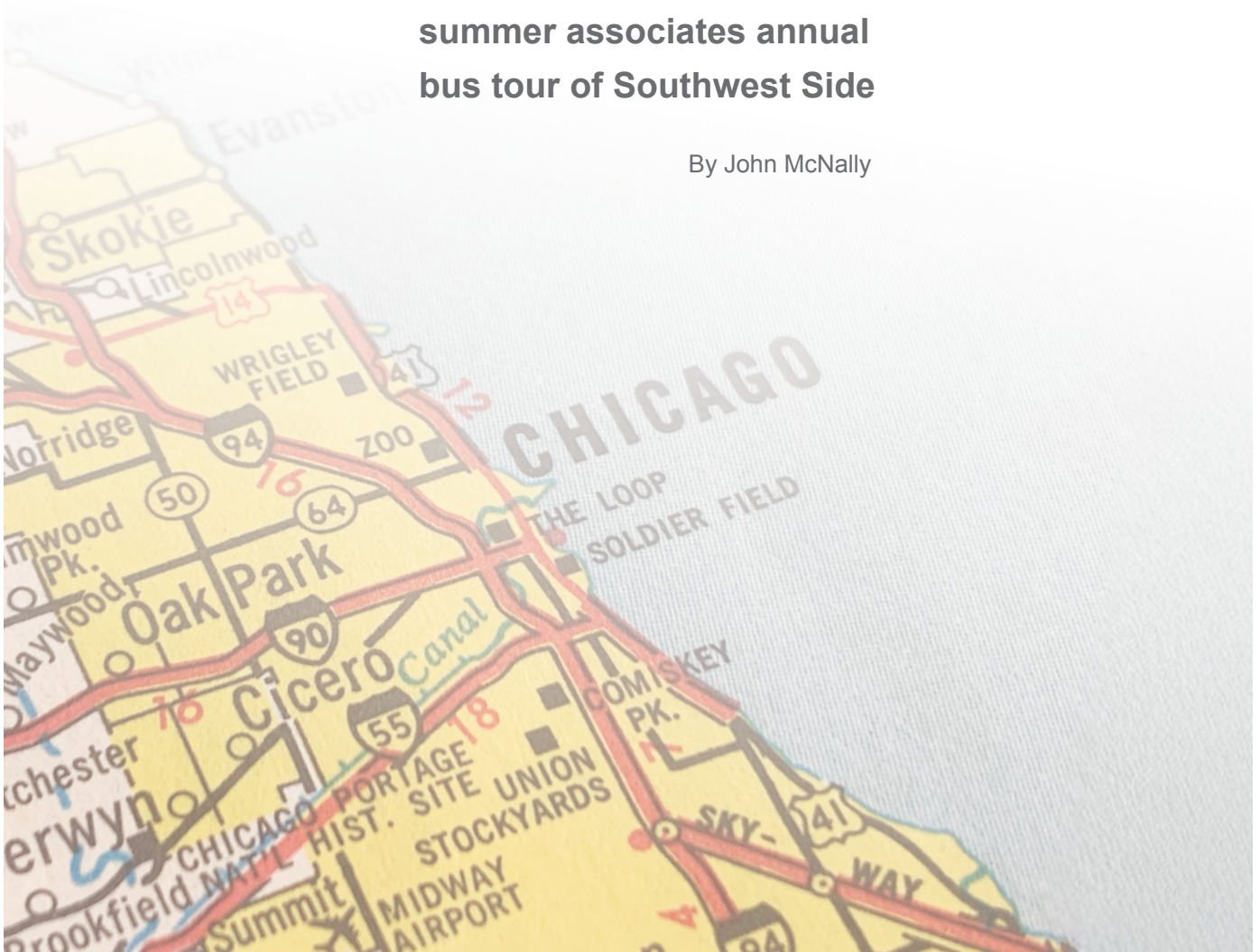
CHICAGO LAWYER

CLOSING STATEMENT

A RIDE WITH PURPOSE

**Mayer Brown partner gives
summer associates annual
bus tour of Southwest Side**

By John McNally





Joseph Seliga, a partner and co-leader of Mayer Brown's projects and infrastructure practice, seemingly could navigate the Southwest Side blindfolded.

His dad lived in the same Gage Park home for 80 years, until his death in 2016. Seliga lived there until leaving for Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. He returned to Illinois and earned his J.D. at the Northwestern Pritzker School of Law in 2000. He had many Northwestern classmates from outside Chicago — and Illinois — that wanted to learn about and experience the city.

"I would just take them out in the car," he said. "We would go out together and go to different neighborhoods."

Seliga also remains connected to the neighborhood through his pro bono work with the Southwest Organizing Project (SWOP), an organization he's been involved with since 2015. He developed an annual program where he takes Mayer Brown's summer associates on a bus tour of Gage Park and other Southwest Side neighborhoods that have a special meaning to him. On the bus ride to Chicago Lawn and Gage Park, he gives the associates a historical account of the neighborhood's unique areas.

"We do a deep dive [of those neighborhoods]," he said. "We talk about some of the community organizations and the work they're doing, including SWOP. We make a stop at the Dr. Martin Luther King Memorial in Marquette Park. That commemorates the fair housing marches that he undertook."



Joseph Seliga

Seliga has noticed how over the years more of the associates started coming from all over the country instead of from the city's law schools. This year's program has 72 associates, including 56 outside of Illinois law schools.

"This is really their first real experience in Chicago, let alone on the South Side," he said. "I do feel like we're having an ability to have an impact on them getting to know Chicago more."

After a stop at Marquette Park, Seliga takes everyone to lunch at Garifuna Flava, a Belizean restaurant at 63rd Street between South California and Western avenues. Over a delicious and eclectic menu, Seliga will chat with the associates about how SWOP serves its communities, focusing on education, community safety, housing, health-care and immigration cases.

"We draw parallels between the community work and organizing that's being done to what it means to be a lawyer and practicing law," he said. "[We show] the impact that [lawyers] can have within the profession and communities. But that is not necessarily just about pro bono work. [It's] how do you use a skill set."

Seliga recalls how Gage Park and Chicago Lawn underwent a transformation in the 70s when community organizations sought to make the neighborhoods more multiethnic and multiracial after years of racial strife in the 50s and 60s.

"That was very inspiring to me," he said. "[The organizations] have really worked to try to create economic opportunity and support members of the community of all backgrounds."

Seliga appreciates that Mayer Brown continues to support his pro bono work with SWOP and the annual bus tour.

"We have given several hundred hours of pro bono time to SWOP," he said. "I'm told every year by our summer [associate] program team that when the surveys are done by the summer associates, that this one is one of the top programs of the year."

He added: "I'm hopeful that it's going to have left an impact ... and inspire them to get to know the city better and get involved."

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