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Cynthia F. Reaves:
*A Woman of Focus
with a Vision
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Through the Looking Glass: *An Insider's Outside View of Detroit*

by Charlene Brownlow, B.A., M.S.A.

Cynthia F. Reaves: A Woman of Focus with a Vision for the Future

Cynthia F. Reaves has an enthusiasm and love for the city of her youth which is nothing less than infectious. Through her words and vision, you can see the City of Detroit as she does – a city with a hopeful economic future. Cynthia left Detroit over fifteen years ago to pursue her education in Washington, D.C. and returned to Michigan last fall. The move returned her to her close-knit family, lifelong friends and the important values she learned in her youth.

As a partner in the prestigious downtown law firm of Honigman Miller Schwartz and Cohn LLP, Cynthia F. Reaves is quick to give all credit for her success as the realization of the inspiration provided to her by her family. In her childhood, Cynthia's grandfather left an indelible impression upon her young mind. As a young man, her grandfather learned the value of having both a profession and a skilled trade as protection against difficult financial times. Growing up, Cynthia and her brother Ken Reaves, the Educational Program Manager for Detroit's WDTR Radio Station, helped their grandfather in renovating and restoring rental properties. However, they were encouraged to pursue education first. As a young man, her grandfather played baseball with the Detroit Stars, part of the Negro Leagues. He earned enough money to allow him to set up several businesses and acquire several properties in the U.S. and Canada during his lifetime. His spirit of entrepreneurialism, along with his love for the City of Detroit, was passed down to his daughters and grandchildren.

With the encouragement of her family, Ms. Reaves attended both the University of Michigan and Georgetown University Law Center in Washington, D.C. Education was of extreme importance in the Reaves household because both of her parents started out as teachers in the Detroit Public School System. Also, for fun, her father Bill Reaves designed electronic



Cynthia Reaves with former U.S. President, Jimmy Carter

educational games for Cynthia and her brother in order to encourage their interest in learning. Later both parents assumed administrative positions within the school system. When her father died in 1974, her mother continued to reinforce Cynthia's disciplined pursuit of her legal education. She encouraged Cynthia to participate in activities that would provide her with experiences outside of the classroom to prepare for the challenges she would face as an adult. Cynthia recalls her mother reciting the poem "Mother to Son" by Langston Hughes as a reminder to her that life would not always be smooth, but that she must continue to climb toward success.

Cynthia's climb has been stellar, indeed. Before the age of 40, she became an equity partner in the Washington, D.C. office of a prestigious New York firm, heading that office's nonprofit, tax-exempt practice group. By that time, she had also published four books and treatises on health law, as author or co-author. (Her most recent book published in June 2002 looked at the impact of the Enron bankruptcy upon health care.) Furthermore, early in her career the Washington establishment called upon her to provide advice and counsel on the health care initiatives proposed by President Bill Clinton. She also worked on behalf of Former



Ms. Reaves with her good friend, Attorney General Jennifer Granholm

President Jimmy Carter as part of the leadership of the Habitat for Humanity "Blitz Build" program sponsored in the Nation's Capitol.

Despite her strong health law background, Cynthia also has an expertise that is near and dear to her family: providing counsel to small businesses. Defined as businesses with revenues of less than \$50

million, Cynthia has been called upon by the U.S. Small Business Administration to provide training and counsel to entrepreneurs in order to help them grow and develop their businesses. During the 90's the agency called upon her to provide training to the U.S. Postal Service as part of an outplacement program. Finally, she was tapped to serve on the Board of Directors of the American Women's Economic Development Corporation and the National Women's Business Center in Washington, D.C. where she also served as General Counsel. In that capacity she provided counsel to women-business owners to help them grow and be successful. "It really started off with somewhat selfish intentions" Ms. Reaves confessed, "my family's business interests meant that I would constantly be called upon to provide free advice...one of the benefits of having a lawyer in the family" she confided. "In helping small businesses through the SBA and NWBC, I was also learning important strategies which I could pass on to my family. In a way, everyone won." Her work with small businesses earned her a short stint as a correspondent for a cable television show focusing on home-based businesses, where she provided strategic business planning advice to a nationwide audience.

However, despite her success in Washington, D.C., her strong ties to her family drew her back home to Michigan. Following the successive deaths of her grandparents in 2001, Cynthia returned to Michigan to be closer to her family. "It was destiny, really..." she noted "I had gotten a



Ms. Reaves and renowned poet Dr. Maya Angelou

call from my mother telling me that it would be nice to have me closer to the family in Michigan. A week later, I got the call that brought me to Honigman. When fate conspires to makes such a strong statement to you, you have to follow its lead..."

Now in Detroit, Ms. Reaves is working to establish her practice with the Honigman firm. At Honigman, she continues her work in providing counsel to health industry clients with a special focus on tax-exempt health care systems and managed care organizations. "The delivery of health care services in a managed care environment presents certain 'tensions' for consumers, providers and insurers...each constituency brings an important element to the table when it comes to the ability to manage limited health care resources." As a health lawyer, Ms. Reaves' job is to assist her clients in complying with the numerous laws that affect the delivery of health to the community. She does this through her work with hospitals, physician groups, HMOs and university-affiliated health care

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providers by providing regulatory, contracting, corporate and tax-exempt counsel and advice to them in their operations. Ms. Reaves believes the Detroit area is "prime" with opportunities in health care. "The development of the 'life sciences' corridor can result in significant economic enrichment for the region" Reaves advises. "This is a unique opportunity for manufacturing and other traditional Michigan industries to combine with health care in a way which can lead to an increase in jobs as well as an overall benefit to the community...it will be exciting to observe and participate in this process."

In addition to health care, Ms. Reaves also provides counsel to for-profit business corporations, nonprofit charities and foundations.

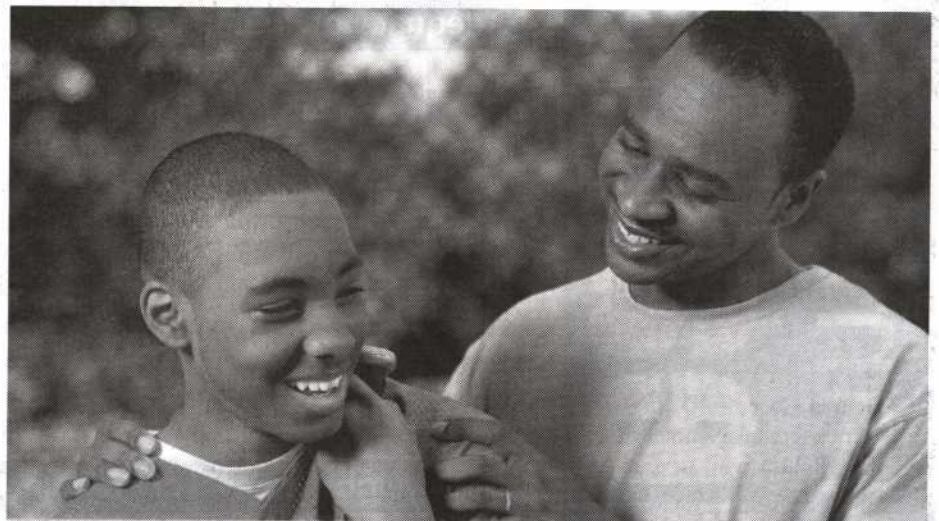
However, so as not to lose sight of her desire to contribute to her community, Cynthia immediately parlayed her Washington, D.C. political expertise into contributions to the Michigan political scene. As a "staunch" Democrat, she volunteered early on in the gubernatorial campaign bid of State Attorney General Jennifer Granholm, where she was able to bring her health care experience to the forefront. "Ms. Granholm invited me to speak to her radio audience on the impact of the Blue Cross/Blue Shield conversion upon health care in Michigan...I was happy to provide insights based upon my national perspective on health care issues...it was my chance to give something back to the community in a productive way" said Reaves. Not a fan of the limelight, Cynthia views her role more as that of a trusted advisor, a

"go to" person for sound advice and counsel who remains in the background of the political scene. "I get excited when I see candidates such as Ms. Granholm...she is not only committed to the City of Detroit, but has solid plans about how to work with our leaders to bring about meaningful change."

Speaking to Cynthia F. Reaves, one is able to see Detroit through the eyes of a newcomer, but as one who knows the city very well. Where local residents may see decayed buildings and poor infrastructures, Reaves sees grand historic testaments to the automobile industry, which is a cornerstone of the American economy. "The opportunities which are available in Michigan are amazing, the time to take advantage of those opportunities is now." The

City of Detroit is near and dear to the heart of Cynthia F. Reaves. Her office, located on the 22nd floor of a downtown Detroit high rise, offers her a unique vision of many of the recent renovations in Detroit as well as an opportunity to glimpse at what is in store for the future. Since Ms. Reaves has made significant contributions wherever she has worked, Detroit can rest assured that she will make a contribution here.

Welcome home Cynthia! Detroit needs you. Hopefully your example, excitement and enthusiasm for the city will inspire others who have left will return. We hope they roll up their sleeves and make a contribution to our fair city so that the promise that you see will become a reality once again. ❖



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