



**Gigi Guzman**



**Franklin Lee, Esq.**

## 2008 PARREN J. MITCHELL VANGUARD FOR JUSTICE AWARD

**F**rom 1971 to 1987, Parren J. Mitchell, Maryland's first African American legislator and a founding member of the Congressional Black Caucus, belonged to a chorus of civil rights activists lifting their voices against racism and social injustice. But when it came to promoting minority business development and economic justice for African American entrepreneurs, nobody sang lead like Congressman Mitchell.

Mitchell, who represented Maryland's 7th Congressional District for eight consecutive terms between 1971 and 1987, is widely acknowledged as the father of minority business development, a champion for small businesses and the leading voice for black economic empowerment in the U.S. This well-timed martyr, who died May 28th, stepped up during a period when women and minorities faced high hurdles to business ownership and the good ole boy network had a firm grip on procurement awards.

Today, many of the thriving minority and women owned businesses in this country – including those being honored tonight – owe their benefits and protections to the legislative initiatives of a man who retired from Congress in 1986 with more than 3,000 awards and 14 honorary degrees.

Since he died at age 85 on May 28, 2007, many say there will never be another Parren Mitchell. But we can honor his protégés, people who cherished his counsel and captured his passion for minority business development. Franklin Lee, Esq. and Gigi Guzman are the 2008 recipients of the Parren J. Mitchell Vanguard for Justice Award.”

## Gigi Guzman



**F**or 22 years, the Maryland Hispanic Chamber has been a pillar in the Hispanic business community.

From its beginning, Gigi Guzman helped to shape the philosophy and direction of the Hispanic business movement and in the process has established her own legacy, becoming one of the most important business advocates in Baltimore and in the Maryland region.

The Hispanic business environment was not always a business environment of mass inclusion. The predecessor to the Chamber was the Federation of Hispanic Organizations, its members of which viewed themselves as separate from each other along country lines – Chileans, Peruvians, Mexicans and so on. “They did not see each other as a cohesive group,” said Guzman. “Where we were and where we are today, it is an evolution.”

According to Guzman, a collective of Hispanic business professionals organized for the purpose of helping one another and presenting a more cohesive group to Maryland’s mainstream business and state procurement departments. Back in 1986, the currently thriving stereotypical Hispanic retail business was in its infancy.

“Back in 1986, it was such a different group, mostly pioneers,” said Guzman, recalling the early days of the chamber’s formation. “They all started their own businesses without help from anybody and most of them were professionals in engineering, information technology, healthcare and other commercial environments.”

What initially began for Guzman as administrative duties eventually ascended to the position of chairperson from 2000-2004. “There are now high levels of sophistication in Hispanic business enterprises and they are working together well,” Guzman said. Currently, she serves as an advisor to Board of Directors.

In addition to the collaborative efforts of the business owners, the business profile has expanded and grown more sophisticated with strongholds into federal and state contracting, manufacturing, technology and other industries into all areas of the state. Specifically, Fells Point and Patterson Park are now retail centers of a very vibrant Hispanic community and the Baltimore City business sector has developed a strong political base whose voice was instrumental in the recent election of Mayor Sheila Dixon into her first full term.

Guzman’s story began in Chile, where her grandparents, who were of French heritage, started glass and metal factories at the end of World War I. As industrialists, they treated their workers well, building recreation centers and soccer camps. They also were accomplished musicians who started an orchestra with the laborers in the factories, teaching opera singing as well. Guzman’s father was a lawyer, writer and diplomat. Her mother was a research scientist who worked for Johns Hopkins after settling in Baltimore in the early sixties.

It was from this background that Gigi Guzman began a successful career as a visual artist, travelling nationwide to vend at trade shows. When the gas crisis hit in the 1970s, Guzman gave up her artistic career and became an Information Technology programmer.

Eventually, Guzman felt she reached the glass ceiling in her IT career and decided to form her own business in order to grow personally, professionally and financially. In 1988, Guzman established GITECH Inc., a Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) recognized by the City of Baltimore and the State of Maryland. GITECH is a high tech firm that specializes in creating bilingual websites primarily in English and Spanish and focuses on web site development, e-commerce, e-business and updated technology portals. GITECH Inc. has three divisions: GlobalTech Bilingual Institute, GITECH Bilingual Services and ebilingualstaff.com.

GlobalTech Bilingual Institute is a workforce training organization specializing in Hispanic/Latino adults wishing to upgrade their English language skills and job skills to improve their employability. GlobalTech is approved by the Maryland Higher Education Commission as a Private Career School and provides Spanish language training to employers and executives.

GITECH’s Bilingual Services Division offers Spanish-English language services, translations, documentation, bilingual web-site development, e-commerce and e-business and consulting services in various aspects of Hispanic-Latino workforce and workplace issues.

Ebilingualstaff.com offers bilingual recruitment and staffing solutions in all types of industries and helps employers identify job applicants while matching job skills to corporate vacancies.

Guzman is active in her community through her two community-based initiatives. In 2002, she formed LatinLink, an organization primarily dedicated to literacy and health-related initiatives in the Hispanic community. In 2006, Guzman founded the Maryland Hispanic Workforce Council and currently serves as Chairman. The mission of the Maryland Hispanic Workforce Council (MDHWC) is to find solutions to workforce issues and to create opportunities for underutilized communities. MDHWC organizes job fairs, conferences and expos for underserved and underutilized communities.

In addition to her continued involvement with the Chamber, she was also a member of the Southeast Community Development Corporation Board of Directors which operates to improve the Patterson Park and Southeast Baltimore communities.

Guzman is pleased with the progress of the Hispanic business movement and has hopes for a continued bright future. “Hispanic/Latinos are working well together with other American businesses. Entrepreneurs are becoming more organized, savvy and better prepared to provide quality products and services. We are all part of the same winning team!”

Guzman has received awards from the Small Business Administration, the Maryland Department of Transportation, USHYEE and is an active speaker and advocate for Hispanic Workforce issues.

## Franklin Lee, Esq.



**W**hen Franklin Lee received the first ever Unsung Hero award by Maryland's Minority Business Enterprise Program on June 22, 2005, it was a tribute to a tall man with a humble spirit, who has been in the trenches fighting for minority business enterprise and inclusion for almost three decades.

Lee is more than a heavyweight champion in the MBE ring. Some even consider him one of the most strategic minds in MBE law. In fact, as a civil rights lawyer, Lee has probably drafted more landmark commercial nondiscrimination legislation than any legislator in history.

Lee began his career in 1980 with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in Washington, DC as an antitrust litigation attorney investigating proposed corporate mergers for anti-competitive consequences, and litigating unfair business practices in the marketplace.

During this time, he began volunteering part-time on a pro bono basis for the Minority Business Enterprise Legal Defense and Education Fund, Inc. ("MBELDEF"), a nonprofit advocacy organization founded in 1980 by the legendary Maryland Congressman Parren J. Mitchell. MBELDEF was organized to defend the class interests of the minority business community.

In 1986, Lee left the FTC to join MBELDEF full-time as its chief legal counsel, working tirelessly in the legal representation of minority business plaintiffs in cases involving marketplace discrimination, and in the defense of minority business programs subjected to constitutional challenges. Among the numerous government clients he has represented in such challenges are the City of Baltimore, the City of Denver, and the State of Missouri. In addition, Attorney Lee has provided counsel to dozens of state and local governments in crafting small and minority business program policies and legislation to promote economic inclusion in the marketplace and to ensure a level playing field.

"He is a man of very high integrity," said MBELDEF President Anthony Robinson, Esq., (2007 PJM Vanguard winner) who initially recruited Lee. "He sets high standards for himself and to the people with whom he works. He has a great work ethic without being judgmental of other people. He operates under his beliefs in what he is about doing – such a brilliant man to work with."

Lee's real test came in 1989 when the case of *Richmond v. J.A. Croson Co.* made its way to the US Supreme court. The court held that Richmond City Council's minority set-aside program was unconstitutional under the Equal Protection clause. "After that decision, the floodgates opened," said Lee. Dozens of lawsuits challenging the constitutionality of minority business programs were soon filed all across the country.

MBELDEF became the first and last line of defense. They filed briefs with the U.S. Supreme Court—and were successful in changing the paradigm in measuring and defining what constitutes a "level playing field" in the free market economy. Constitutional scholars and lawyers alike struggled mightily in the aftermath of the Croson decision to give proper meaning to the 'strict scrutiny' standard in its application to discriminatory business practices and remedial public policy. "It was a litmus test," said Lee, "that begged for new techniques of evidence-gathering and sophisticated quantitative analysis of the marketplace."

When asked what is different today, Lee responded, "Minority-owned businesses today are far more diversified across a broad cross-section of industries than they were a few decades ago. Yet, there continue to be significant disparities in the size and growth rates of our MBEs as compared to majority-owned firms," he said referring to the distribution of small, medium and large firms. "You can still look at business demographics such as sales revenue, number of employees, and market share and fairly accurately predict the race and gender of business ownership," said Lee. "In a truly colorblind world, that would not be the case. We've come a long way, but we still have a long way to go," he concluded.

This, of course, translates to challenges along socioeconomic lines. Because of artificially depressed business formation and growth, for the most part, minority-owned businesses have not yet accumulated sufficient

wealth to make significant contributions to the infrastructure and institutions of our inner city communities. As Mr. Lee put it, "Show me a community with high rates of unemployment, high rates of poverty, poor schools, and a crumbling infrastructure, and I'll show you a community with an under-developed business sector, and that's no coincidence. Without a stronger minority business community, we don't have the essential ingredients for wealth generation."

Still, Lee remains optimistic. "We have made tremendous strides since the 1970s when the Public Works Employment Act of 1976 created the first federal minority set aside program," said Lee. As an outgrowth of that law, numerous cities, including Lee's hometown of Baltimore, adopted MBE policies to promote greater participation of minorities in public projects and contracts. As an example of the dynamic impact of such laws, Lee points to the newly constructed Hilton Convention Center Hotel in Baltimore, which had its grand opening in August 2008. One of its equity partners is minority contracting leader Banks Contracting Co., Inc. (Ken Banks is one of this year's Top 100 MBE winners.)

Lee also pointed to equity participation by various minority firms in several major downtown development projects. "We never would have seen this kind of progress in ownership diversity 30 years ago," Lee said.

For the last two years, Lee has been a partner with the Baltimore-based law firm of Tydings & Rosenberg, LLP, with a diversified practice that includes both large and small business representation, regulatory compliance with governmental commercial non-discrimination policies, and other social and economic programs. He also serves in an advisory capacity on the Advisory Panel of the Greater Baltimore Committee's Bridging the Gap Initiative (a public-private partnership to promote greater mainstream participation by minority firms in the private sector of the Baltimore region). In the recent past, he has also served on the State of Maryland's Commissions and Task Forces to reform MBE programs and to promote greater lending equity in financial institutions.

One of his milestone achievements was his participation in the drafting of the Commercial Nondiscrimination Policy passed by the Maryland State Legislature in the last two years, first passed by the City of Baltimore. It is a bill that, "prohibits the State from engaging in business with a business entity that has discriminated against subcontractors, suppliers, vendors, or commercial customers on the basis of race, color, religion, ancestry, or national origin, sex, age, marital status, sexual orientation, or disability." It sets a new standard of conduct for all firms seeking to perform government contracts," said Lee.

Another recent achievement was his participation in the drafting of an economic inclusion agreement for minority businesses in the East Baltimore Biotechnology Park, which also included research and business opportunities for participation of Historically Black Colleges and Universities such as Morgan State University and Sojourner-Douglass College.

His work is not confined to the Maryland region; however, his sights are on what is occurring in the global economy, specifically in regards to the emerging technologies and the renewable energy movement, which is expected to transform the entire business landscape into a true level playing field.

"It is an exciting and fluid time. We are on the verge of changing the way in which we transact business," Lee said.

Still, Lee is well grounded in his community, from his 30 years of civic business engagement to his membership in such organizations as Black Professional Men, Inc.

"I have to believe in what I'm doing. I have a strong sense of public service," Lee said. "That's when life really has meaning."