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Mattress Firm, Norton Rose Fulbright, Carl Lewis Run Against Racism



Legendary Olympian Carl Lewis shares a moment with Norton Rose Fulbright Global and U.S. Chair Shauna Clark at the Run Against Racism in Houston, Sept. 20.

September 20, 2021 | BY MARK CURRIDEN

Norton Rose Fulbright, Mattress Firm and nine-time Olympic gold medalist Carl Lewis came together Sunday for a charity race to raise money for three elite organizations that fight racism and to announce college scholarships.

The “Run Against Racism,” which included a 10K and 5K around the University of Houston campus, raised \$197,087 to go to the Anti-Defamation League, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund and the Tahirih Justice Center.

In addition, Houston-based Mattress Firm announced that it has created two \$10,000 scholarships to go to future or current college students who come from underserved communities.

Shauna Clark, who is global and U.S. chair of Norton Rose Fulbright, said the corporate law firm wanted to do something to bring the community together.

“With everything that has gone on, we

decided we needed to take a stand and do something proactive about it,” Clark said. “Who better to be the master of ceremonies of a race against racism than Carl Lewis, who is a Houston native.”

Lewis, in an interview with *The Texas Lawbook*, said he was honored to partner with Norton Rose Fulbright and Mattress Firm for the event.

“This is my first real public event I have attended since the start of Covid,” said Lewis, who was a track and field athlete. “Children are not born to be racist. We need to take the steps to address it. This is my life’s work. I was born in Birmingham and went to college right here at the University of Houston.

“To see law firms like this step out and step forward is tremendous,” Lewis said.

Mattress Firm Senior Vice President and Legal Counsel Daria Russell said the company has worked on its overall diversity and inclusion initiatives the past couple of years.

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Carl Lewis cheers on participants at the start of the "Run Against Racism" race on Sept. 20.

Mattress Firm's SVP/Legal Counsel Daria Russell and Norton Rose Fulbright's Global and US Chair Shauna Clark at the awards ceremony after the race.



Carl Lewis addressing participants before the race.

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From Left: Norton Rose Fulbright Global Chief Executive Gerry Pecht, Global & U.S. Chair Shauna Clark, Carl Lewis and U.S. Managing Partner Jeff Cody.

Carl Lewis Lewis cheering on U.S. Managing Partner Jeff Cody and his wife, Jenifer, as they approach the finish line.



“We focused first on our internal workforce and to make it more diverse and inclusive and now we are looking externally and to the communities we serve,” said Russell, who is the granddaughter of sharecroppers and the focus of a *Texas Lawbook* profile last year.

“The two scholarships for \$10,000 will be given out annually and it shows that Mattress Firm is putting its money behind its words.”

Three Mattress Firm in-house counsel – Russell, General Counsel Kindel Nuno and senior counsel Mindy Harper – are Norton Rose Fulbright alumni and all three were recipients of the 2020 Houston Corporate Counsel Awards hosted by The Texas Lawbook and the Association of Corporate Counsel’s Houston Chapter.

Norton Rose Fulbright had lawyers from seven of its U.S. offices travel to Houston for the race. The firm, which has more than 4,000 lawyers in 50 cities around the world, said lawyers from its international offices would have participated in-person but could not because of the Covid-related travel restrictions.

“Fighting racism and championing social justice are critically important to our global firm,” Clark said. “While we are raising funds and awareness for this serious initiative, our run also gives us an opportunity to come together as a community – locally and globally – and have some fun. We didn’t expect it to be as successful as it has been. We had a goal of \$120,000 and we hit almost \$200,000.”

“And it is so cool having Carl Lewis here,” Clark said.