

10-1-1986

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Recommended Citation

UB Law Forum (1986) "Convocation Honors Genrich," *UB Law Forum*: Vol. 2 : No. 1 , Article 17.

Available at: https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/ub_law_forum/vol2/iss1/17

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CONVOCATION HONORS GENRICH

Willard A. Genrich '38, chancellor emeritus of the State Board of Regents, was honored by the State University of Buffalo and Buffalo State College at an academic convocation April 5 in Slee Chamber Hall, where he was awarded an honorary doctorate degree of humane letters. Top figures in the state education system, including many members of the SUNY Board of Trustees and Board of Regents, traveled to UB to praise his accomplishments, his unselfish citizenship and tireless volunteer work on the Board of Regents.

Over the years, Mr. Genrich has pursued two careers, one private and one public. As a businessman, he is president of Genrich Builders, Inc., which has built a number of subdivisions in Erie County. He is also the head of several real estate corporations with investments in residential and commercial properties and is a past director of Best Western Motels.

In public service, he has devoted much of his life to the field of public education. As a member and then chancellor of the Board of Regents, the 15-member agency that oversees and sets policy for the State's Education Department, Mr. Genrich has been in the forefront of major educational issues in the state since 1973.

In the nearly 200-year history of the Regents, he is the first person from the Buffalo area to serve as chancellor. Elected to that lofty position in 1980, and re-elected to another three-year term in 1983, he led the Regents as they pushed for greater educational quality and broad access to learning for students at all educational levels. No matter how heated or emotional the controversy of the moment, he tenaciously strived to keep New York's education system the best in the nation.

Under his leadership, the Regents instituted minimum competency tests for high

school graduation, set up the Secondary School Registration program to assure that schools themselves meet minimal legal and academic standards, and formulated the innovative and ambitious 1984 Regents' Action Plan that is now guiding the state's schools toward a stronger curriculum and tougher requirements.

Also during his tenure, the Regents increased access to college for students with limited financial capacities; improved doctoral programs through a state-wide review of such programs; and launched an extensive investigation of illegal medical practice related to fraudulent credentials.

Another special program which he saw implemented provides financial incentives to students who enroll in teacher education curricula and agree to teach in the state after completing their educations — this to alleviate a shortage of science and mathematics teachers.

He resigned as chancellor in 1985. "Between my businesses and Regents work, I have been working seven days a week, 60 to 70 hours a week, without a vacation for 11 years. I have done this because I enjoy my work," he said, "but it is time to give someone else a chance." However, he remains a member of the Board of Regents, on which he has served for 13 years. His 15-year term ends in 1988. During his years as a Regent, there have been over 150 board meetings and Mr. Genrich has never missed one — an incredible record for a volunteer.

From 1962 to 1973, prior to going on the Board of Regents, Mr. Genrich was the unsalaried director for the New York State Higher Education Assistance Corporation. The corporation during that period helped guarantee student loan programs for college students.

At the convocation, Mr. Genrich referred to visits he has made to children of the

homeless in New York City.

"What we call a common school system is not common to all," Genrich said.

"The heart of the Regents plan is to assure children are given an educational environment and help, so they may be prepared to compete equally.

"These children are entitled to an equal opportunity to enjoy the great benefits of a free society," he said.

"To accomplish this, we must have an educational system whose goal is not only excellence, but excellence with equity."

State Education Commissioner Gordon M. Ambach, who is also president of the University of the State of New York, said many of the State Education Department's recent goals were developed as a result of Mr. Genrich's leadership.

Ernest L. Boyer, president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, gave the main address. Other speakers included Clifton R. Wharton, Jr., chancellor of SUNY; R. Carlos Carballada, vice chancellor of the Board of Regents; Steven B. Sample, president of UB; and D. Bruce Johnstone, president of State University College.

A native Buffalonian, Mr. Genrich worked his way through the University of Buffalo as a beekeeper. He went on to graduate from UB Law School in 1938. He was admitted to the New York State Bar in 1939 and is a member of the Erie County and American Bar Associations.

After law school, he became a special agent with the FBI during World War II and received commendations from the late J. Edgar Hoover for his service to the bureau. When the war ended, he joined his brother, the late J. Harold Genrich, in the construction business.

He is married to the former Eleanor Merrill. They have four children: Ellen, Willa, Willard Jr. and Jeffrey. ■

