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Alumni Association Honors Six Distinguished Careers

Five UB Law School graduates, and one non-alumnus, were honored on May 15, 1996, at the Hyatt Regency Buffalo during the Law Alumni Association's 34th annual meeting and awards dinner. The Distinguished Alumni Awards, established by the association's board of directors in 1963, recognize the contributions that UB Law alumni have made to the profession and the community.

The honorees have used their diplomas in widely different ways, but all have made the most of the training UB Law afforded them – and all acknowledged the school's influence on their lives.

The following were the award recipients, with excerpts from their acceptance remarks:

Hon. Jacqueline M. Koshian '59, Supreme Court justice for the Eighth Judicial District, "for her conscientious and diligent performance in the judiciary." A former City Court judge in Niagara Falls, Koshian was the first woman appointed as deputy corporation counsel in Niagara Falls, in 1964, and the first woman appointed as New York State estate tax attorney for Niagara Falls, in 1975. She has served on the board of directors of the Salvation Army, the United Givers' Fund, the YMCA and the Boys' Club of America, and is a trustee of Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center.

"I am truly humbled by this experience. I came into your town in 1986 as a stranger and asked for your support, and you gave it to me and put me on the Supreme Court bench. For that I will be forever grateful.

Behind every well-tuned judge is an able and lawyer-friendly staff, together with an administration which assists any judge in doing what he or she has to do. My co-workers deserve much of the accolades. ... The only reason I stand up here today is because of all of you. You make the job easy for me. I think you're the best Bar there is in the State of New York, and I appreciate working with all of you.

H. Kenneth Schroeder '61, a partner in the Buffalo law firm Hodgson, Russ, Andrews, Woods & Goodyear, "for his leadership by example as a private practitioner." Schroeder is a senior trial attorney and chairman of the Litigation Department at his firm. His practice includes general civil and criminal litigation, as well as appellate practice on the state and federal levels. In addition, he has served as U.S. attorney for the Western District of New York, as a special assistant U.S. attorney for the District of Columbia, and as a trial attorney for the U.S. Department of Justice.

This is truly a great honor. I believe the greatest award any individual can receive is one of laudatory recognition from one's peers. We've all heard the jokes and the comments and the abuse that are heaped upon us because we are lawyers, but as I tell all my friends, when you are in need and when there are troubles, we're the one to run to. I've always been proud of my profession, and it is a profession to be..."
proud of.

Hon. Kevin M. Dillon '76, former Erie County district attorney and now Supreme Court justice for the Eighth Judicial District, “for his commitment to public service.” A lecturer in criminal procedure at UB Law School, Dillon served for eight years as district attorney. He also has practiced as a solo practitioner and with the firms Dillon & Cataldi and Condon, LaTona, Pieri & Dillon. He served as a panelist for the Governor’s Law Enforcement Forum that addressed major issues in criminal justice, and also as a member of the state Commission on Juvenile Justice.

There was a time in my Law School career when I was not even sure I would be an alumnus, let alone distinguished. ... Serving as district attorney has been a truly educational experience. I do want to thank the members of the Bar who are present here for the support that they’ve given me over the years as district attorney. Sometimes a little note, sometimes a phone call, all those things help, and I really appreciate it. I have been truly blessed at this stage of my career to have had the experiences I’ve had. I have thoroughly enjoyed being a lawyer. I’ve loved being a criminal defense lawyer. I’ve found it challenging to be a district attorney, I’ve loved teaching at the Law School, and I’m really looking forward to the next 20 years whatever they may bring. What the Law School has given me is a wonderful career and the opportunity to make a good livelihood.

Brian D. Baird ’83, an attorney with Kavinsky & Cook, “for his many contributions to the betterment of our community.” Baird is a member of the Development Committee and co-chair of the Annual Fund Drive Foundations Division of the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, a trustee of the Nichols School, a director of the Greater Buffalo Opera Company, a trustee of the Cameron Baird Foundation and a director and treasurer of the Western New York Grantmakers Association. He also has served as a director, member of the Executive Committee and chair of the Endowment Campaign for the Philharmonic.

I was 30 years old when I started law school. Quite frankly, but for UB Law School, my career would have taken a much different turn. I was fortunate to have an outstanding law school to attend. UB Law School not only teaches us to be good lawyers, but those same skills can be applied to the betterment of the community. ... Public service work is both difficult and interesting. It addresses a variety of issues, and there’s an inherent camaraderie among those working on these issues. ... In my experience, lawyers are the most well-represented profession in the philanthropic community. And the call for more of us to join the ranks of volunteers will be endless. Because in the world of community service there is never a dearth of clients, their needs are never completely met, and their cases are never completely closed.

Gordon R. Gross ’55, senior partner in the Buffalo law firm Gross, Shuman, Brizdle & Gilfillan, “for his exemplary performance in business law.” A specialist in corporate, real estate and securities law, Gross was a founder, trustee and officer of Dominion Mortgage & Realty Trust, formerly of Buffalo. He has been involved in numerous community activities, and currently serves as vice chair and a member of the Governing Committee of the Buffalo Foundation, a board member of the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, president of the Foundation for Jewish Philanthropies, a director of the Jewish Center of Greater Buffalo and chair and president of Kleinhans Music Hall Management Inc.

From the time I was a little boy I was always negotiating something, and my family always assumed that I would take over my father’s business. When I was a junior in college my father and a good friend of his who was also in business suggested that before I go into business I should consider going to law school. As I look back and reflect on it, I now realize they must have had an attitude that was something like, some people inherit wealth, some people earn it, and some are lawyers. They discussed with me how high and how unreasonable their legal bills were, and if I were to go to law school, I would undoubtedly practically eliminate all of those, so any business I was in would be that much more profitable. You can almost guess the rest of the story. I went to law school, and by the time I graduated I felt the challenge of going on to grad school. My father continued to get legal bills, but this time they were from my law firm. I don’t think my father ever changed his mind about lawyers.

John B. Sheffer II, former New York State senator, the Aaron N. Block Memorial Award for service by a non-Law School alumnus, “for his distinguished service to the community and effective advocacy for UB Law School.” After retiring in 1993 from the State Senate, where he chaired the Higher Education Subcommittee on SUNY Access, Sheffer accepted a dual appointment as a senior fellow at UB Law and the School of Architecture and Planning. He became UB’s acting vice president for public service and urban affairs in January 1996. He is co-director and co-author of the UB Governance Project on Erie County, a multidisciplinary study of how county government is structured and how it works.

One of the ways in which I have been privileged in my life is to have rewarding work in a number of different settings. I think I’ve had 10 different jobs in my adult life. My mother attributes that to my inability to hold a job. ... Two of the hats I take most pride in are politician and professor. H.G. Wells said that human history is more and more a race between education and catastrophe. I believe that that’s true. All of you in this room working together have won many of the heats of that race, and I feel very fortunate to be a small part of that. For that race yet to be run and won, I pledge back to you this really nice award.