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Newsmakers

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Newsmakers

CLARENCE J. SUNDRAM '72 RECOMMENDED FOR U.S. DISTRICT COURT

After serving for 17 years as Chairman of the New York State Commission on Quality of Care for the Mentally Disabled, Clarence J. Sundram '72 is headed for the federal judiciary. He will soon become the first federal judge of Indian ancestry.

On March 29, 1995, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan announced that he recommended Sundram to President Clinton for appointment to a federal judgeship on the United States District Court for the Northern District of New York. On September 29, 1995, President Clinton sent the nomination for confirmation to the United States Senate.

Born in Bombay, India, Sundram and his family moved to Niagara Falls in 1966 when Sundram's father got a teaching job at Niagara University (NU). Sundram later graduated cum laude from NU with a degree in English and proceeded on to UB Law.

"I loved every minute that I spent at UB Law School. I know it's very fashionable for people who went to law school to complain about what a terrible grind it was and how hard they had to work, but I reveled in the experience. The school was small enough that students had a chance to interact

with professors — and there were several professors who changed my life."

Sundram's fond memories stem from his active involvement in the Law School. He served as articles editor and member of the *Buffalo Law Review* and associate editor of the *Prisoners' Rights Newsletter*. Sundram also worked

alongside former professor Herman Schwartz in implementing the Student Counseling Service at the Erie County jail and a project at Attica prison dealing with the civil rights of prisoners.

"The work in the classroom became far more relevant as I began to see the immediate application of what we were learning. It made the process exciting and interesting. It never seemed like drudgery." Sundram also received the Dean's Award for Outstanding Contribution to the



Faculty of Law and Jurisprudence upon graduation.

After completing law school, Sundram joined the Justices of the Supreme Court Appellate Division Third Department as a law research assistant. He later became law secretary and law clerk to the Honorable Lawrence H. Cooke at the Supreme Court Appellate Division and the New York State Court of Appeals. Prior to joining the Commission, Sundram was assistant counsel to the Governor of the State of New York.

He was eventually responsible for founding the commission that he has spent the majority of his career overseeing. During his term as assistant counsel to Governor Hugh Carey, he responded to numerous complaints about poor care, abuse and unnatural death in the state's mental institutions, by recommending the creation of an independent agency to investigate the quality of care being provided.

After drafting the legislation and getting it passed, Sundram assisted in a search for someone to fill the newly created position of the Commission's chairman. He remembers, "We offered the position to a number of people and nobody wanted to take it because they thought it was an impossible job to do. The governor basically came back to me and said, 'You thought this was such a great idea, why don't you go over and run the place?' I planned to spend two or three years at it, and it turned out to be much more fascinating than I anticipated."

The Commission is responsible for monitoring conditions in institutions and community programs for the mentally disabled and serves as the protection and advocacy agency for persons with disabilities under federal law. Under Sundram's direction, the Commission has been cited by Public Health Research Group as a national model for its innovative approaches to monitoring conditions in institutions and community programs. In 1990, the Commission received an award for Innovations from the National Council of State Governments for pioneering a new approach to obtaining informed consent for major medical treatment for people who are mentally disabled. In 1993, the Commission received a Special Recognition for Excellence in Public Service from the Public Employees Roundtable.

Sundram himself has also received a number of prestigious awards, including: the 1994 Quality Enhancement Award presented by the

American Network of Community Services; the 1993 Public Official of the Year award from the New York State Association of Rehabilitation Facilities; and the 1991 Distinguished Public Service Award from the Law Alumni Association.

He has published several articles in various legal and other professional journals and recently edited a volume entitled *Choice and Responsibility: Legal and Ethical Dilemmas in Serving Persons with Disabilities*. He has testified before the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, and State legislative committees on conditions in institutions and community programs for people with mental disabilities. In addition, he served on the Willowbrook Review Panel in the landmark Willowbrook case in New York; on a consultant committee to assist the State of Alabama in meeting its obligations in *Wyatt v. Stickney*;

and as a consultant in *Gary W. v. Louisiana*, *Dixon v. Weinberger* and other cases. A frequent speaker at state and national conferences, he has appeared on programs such as *Nightline* and the *CBS Evening News*.

Sundram's love for his profession cannot be emphasized enough. "Everyday that I come to work, I feel that I can make a difference in the lives of people who need some kind of assistance from the government or agencies that the government funds. It is a wonderful feeling to know that you can do something that changes a small part of the world."

He will miss working for the Commission. "I spent a long part of my life here and the people who I work with are important to me." At the same time, he looks forward to the future challenges that await him on the bench. ■

Student Awards

UB LAW STUDENT RECEIVES NATIONAL CURTIN JUSTICE FUND AWARD

Sylvia Wagner, a third-year student at the University at Buffalo Law School, was one of three students nationally to receive awards from the John J. Curtin, Jr., Justice Fund Legal Internship Program.

The program, managed jointly by the American Bar Association (ABA) Commission on Homelessness and Poverty, and the Standing Committee on Legal Aid and Indigent Defendants, provides \$2,000 stipends to law students to spend their summers working with legal organizations serving home-

less clients and those at risk of homelessness. It offers much-needed legal

assistance to organizations serving the underrepresented and gives students direct experience in a public interest forum.

Wagner, a resident of Sloan, N.Y., worked in the Affordable Housing Clinic, part of the Legal Assistance Program at UB Law School.

The funding for the Curtin internship program, which is in its third year, is provided by the John J. Curtin, Jr., Justice Fund, a permanent endowment in the ABA Fund for Justice and Education. It was created to honor Curtin, ABA president from 1990-91 and longtime advocate for social justice and civil rights issues. ■

Student Awards

UB LAW STUDENT NAMED PRESTIGIOUS SKADDEN FELLOW

Sara Meerse, a student in the University at Buffalo Law School, is one of only 25 academically outstanding law students nationwide to be named a prestigious Skadden Fellow in a program funded by a New York City law firm.

Skadden Fellows receive an annual salary of \$32,500 for each of two years to provide full-time civil legal assistance to needy clients through specific non-profit organizations around the nation.

The program was established in 1989 by the international law firm of Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom through the Skadden Fellowship Foundation.

Meerse, who will graduate this spring, is the second UB law student honored from among hundreds from U.S. law schools who apply each year.

A 1992 graduate of the State University of New York at Binghamton and 1988 graduate of Hendrik Hudson High School, Montrose, she is the daughter of Ginger DePasquale of Tarrytown.

This spring, she will earn a law degree from UB and a master's degree in social work in a joint-degree program.

According to Meerse, "I initially came to law school only so I could become a better social worker. However, after working for Legal Services for the Elderly, I realized how I could combine the two fields — and make more of a difference."

In August, she will begin work with Pine Tree Legal Assistance Inc. in Presque Isle, Maine.

Meerse, who has participated in UB clinics serving local needy clients, worked with the Maine program for four months last summer through a fellowship with the National Association of Public Interest Law/Rural Legal Service Corps.

She chose to return there under the Skadden Fellowship to perform rural

outreach and provide direct representation on behalf of children on issues of housing,

health care and special education.

Meerse was determined to begin her full-time career with Pine Tree, exploring other funding sources as well. "I really didn't want to do anything else upon graduation except return to Pine Tree, but wasn't sure I'd be able to, considering all the cuts being made in Legal Services.

"The Skadden opportunity essentially made my long-term goal of a career in public interest possible.

"I also look forward to working with the other attorney and paralegal on staff," Meerse continued. "They're incredible—they've both been there a long time and I learned a lot from them last summer."

Meerse's activities while attending

UB Law include serving as co-director of the Buffalo Public Interest Law Program (BPILP) and graduate assistant for public practice in the Career Development Office. In addition, she was on the steering committee for the Domestic Violence Task Force and designed the memorial wall displayed in the Law School last year, which was dedicated to women killed by their partners.

Presque Isle is located in Aroostook County, a rural and northern area of 80,000 residents spread over 6,300 square miles.

Organizations with whom the Skadden Fellows serve are located throughout the U.S., allowing Fellows to make important contributions to a wide variety of legal and social advocacy groups, according to Executive Partner and Foundation Trustee Robert C. Sheehan. ■

BUILDERS' ASSOCIATION HONORS UB LAW STUDENT

Adam M. Ruben, a third-year UB Law student, was honored by the Niagara Frontier Builders' Association (NFBA) last spring for his work on a paper titled "Growth-Management Control in Lancaster: Legitimate or Pretextual?"

What began as an assignment for UB Law professor Frank Munger's Land Use Planning course evolved into a comprehensive analysis of the many issues surrounding the highly debatable moratorium on residential development in the Town of Lancaster. The paper was later selected for publication in a 1996 edition of the New York State Real Property Law Journal.

Although the NFBA has been involved in a scholarship program for over twenty years with local universities, Ruben's award represents the first time the group has solicited its members and involved them in the selection process.

Ruben was nominated for the \$500 scholarship award by Michael J. Giallanza, president of the Giallanza Corp. and secretary for the NFBA

According to Giallanza, "For a law student with a limited working knowledge of the development area to put together such an in-depth project is tremendous. Adam took this project on, conducted the research and interviews and was able to form some opinions that normally take years of experience to develop."

Ruben met Giallanza through the Buffalo law firm of Garvey & Garvey, where he has worked for the past three years as a law clerk. Once the initial idea was developed, Ruben was responsible for deciding on a strategy, researching the relevant issues, and reporting all pertinent findings. Giallanza continued, "I was extremely impressed as to how he dealt with the subject matter and believe he now has a good grasp of land use regulations and zoning matters."

A native of Lockport, N.Y., Ruben also works part-time for the federal public defender's office and volunteer's for UB Law's development and admissions offices. He hopes to pursue trial work upon graduation and believes his participation in UB Law's clinical program has prepared him for that goal. ■