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Legal Methods Dinner Celebrates Minority Achievement

Buffalo City Court Judge Raul Figueroa '77 warned graduating students of some of the challenges they will face as minority attorneys and provided a list of practical tips based on his own professional experience when he delivered the keynote address at the Legal Methods Program's sixth annual dinner and candlelight ceremony held April 22 at the University Inn and Conference Center.

The event celebrated the traditional "passing of the legacy" via lighted candles from third-year students to continuing students in the Legal Methods Program. The program is designed to provide academic support to Law School students from disadvantaged academic and economic backgrounds.

For the first time this year, four organizations representing students of color collaborated on the dinner and ceremony: the Black Law Students Association, the Native American Law Students Association, the Asian American Law Students Association and the Latin American Law Students Association. The event was sponsored by the Law School.

Dean Barry Boyer welcomed approximately 100 students, faculty members and guests, including many distinguished minority alumni. He noted that the Legal Methods Program has evolved significantly during the past two decades.

"One thing that's been a constant is our commitment to the program and what it stands for in the legal profession," he said. Dean Boyer encouraged support for efforts currently under way to create a chair at the Law School in

memory of Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall. "One of our common projects next year will be to make the Thurgood chair a reality," he said.

In his keynote address, Judge Figueroa said, "You feel as if you know it all, and you want to go out and save the world. But as a minority, you will encounter some problems, including problems from your own community."

Judge Figueroa pointed out that of approximately 3,500 attorneys practicing in Erie County, 80 to 90 are African-American and only eight are Hispanic. As the first Hispanic lawyer to work for the City of Buffalo, "nobody believed me when I told them who I was," he said. He recalled instances where he was asked to provide proof of his identification and had difficulty obtaining records on prisoners because of this skepticism.

"I always had to set the record straight, due to my name," he said.

"Have things changed? Somewhat, but not enough. We need people like you to go out there and change the system."

Outlining a series of courtroom "do's" and "don't's" for novice minority lawyers, Judge Figueroa advised care in dealing with people in the public sector. "Most of them are willing to work with you. Deal with them on a personal level," he said.

He went on to advise caution and thoughtfulness in working with court personnel, as well: "Be careful what you tell the court. Don't sell your reputation for one client." And, he warned against lying for clients, saying simply, "It's not worth it."

Regarding problems which may ensue when cases are misquoted by a lawyer, he offered more simple but profound words of wisdom: "When you're given cases to read, read them."

"These are the things you don't learn in school," Judge Figueroa con-



Fellowships

Skadden Fellowship

Shawn Boehringer, a '93 graduate of UB Law, is one of 25 students nationally who will practice public interest law this year as a Skadden Fellow.

The \$10 million Skadden Fellowship program was established in 1988 by the New York City law firm of Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom to allow graduating law students and judicial clerks to practice public interest law. The fellows are paid \$32,500 a year for the two year fellowship, a generous salary by public-interest standards. The firm also handles the fellows' benefits and loan repayments.

Many Skadden fellows remain in public-interest law once their fellowships are completed.

Boehringer, a native of Adamstown, Pa., will work for the Appalachian Research and Defense Fund in Prestonsburg, Ky. He will handle issues related to coal mining, such as working with the Kentucky congressional delegation to enact legislation that is more favorable to miners applying for federal black lung benefits, and

representing miners in workers' compensation claims, on safety issues and in retirement benefits claims against the United Mine Workers.

Boehringer, who worked on the Precious Jewels Day Care Center project for the Law School's Community Economic Development Clinic, also plans to use his experience to help groups in the Prestonsburg area that want to start day care centers.

"I knew early that I wanted to practice legal service, public-interest work," he said.

Boehringer says his home county in eastern Pennsylvania borders the coal region, so he was familiar with the coal industry and the problems associated with it.

"I was impressed with the Appalachian Research and Defense Fund; it does a lot of nontraditional legal services and a lot of proactive work on behalf of coal miners," he said.

Boehringer received a bachelor's degree in history and religion from Gettysburg College in Gettysburg, Pa.

cluded. "The bottom line is, there aren't many of us, so we're more visible. We're under a microscope, but there are always people out there to help you. Whatever you're interested in, don't be afraid to try."

"People are going to try to do things to stop you. Don't let that distract you from your main function," he added.

The combined student groups presented Professor Stephanie Phillips with the Faculty Award, thanking her for her support, confidence and friendship. A UB faculty member since 1989, Professor Phillips reminisced about her close relationship with members of the Legal Methods Class of 1993 and said she was "deeply honored" by the award.

Joseph Antonecchia, winner of the first annual Muhammed Kenyatta Poetry Contest, read his poem "Open The Door." It was noted that Antonecchia will donate his \$100 prize money back to the Muhammed Kenyatta Memorial Fund at UB. Last year's candlelight ceremony was dedicated to the late Professor Kenyatta, who was an inspiration to students throughout the Law School.

Each organization presented service awards to its members, including two new awards: the Muhammed Kenyatta Award for community involvement and the Lee Lyons Award from the Native American Law Students Association.

The Lyons Award was presented to Geoffrey A. Tager by King Lyon of the Onondaga tribe, who recited a prayer of thanks and celebration in his native tongue. "I have a good feeling being here tonight," he concluded. "I feel a lot of energy here."

Culminating the evening was the candlelighting ceremony, during which graduating third-year students held lighted white candles and called on continuing students to receive their "legacy" as the flames were passed on.

In his closing remarks, Dean Boyer summarized an evening of warmth and comradery, calling it "a springboard not only for next year, but for friendship forever." ■

Minority Environmental Law Fellowship

Melissa McClary, a first year law student, has won a Minority Fellowship in Environmental Law from the New York State Bar Association Environmental Law Section.

"The fellowship aims to redress a severe imbalance. Though minority communities are disproportionately affected by environmental hazards, there are very few minority lawyers who practice in the environmental field," said Michael B. Gerrard of Manhattan, treasurer of the section and a coordinator of the fellowship program.

The 10-week \$5,000 fellowships give law students an opportunity to work for New York State environmental agencies or public interest law firms.

She was one of four students the

other three students attend Brooklyn Law School, New York University Law School and New York Law School — to win a fellowship this year.

McClary, of Uniondale, N.Y., is a graduate of the University at Albany. She plans to work in the Buffalo office of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation or the Federal Environmental Protection Agency this summer.

Students seeking the fellowships were required to submit an essay detailing why they were interested in environmental law.

"I feel there are very few people of color in the field, yet so many people of color are affected dramatically by environmental pollution," McClary wrote.

"For all people, environmental concerns are a matter of survival."

McClary is also the recipient of an NAACP Legal Defense Fund Earl Warren Legal Training Program Scholarship. ■