Leaders All: Alumni Work is a Passion for Five in the UB Law Fold

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Leaders All

Alumni work is a passion for five in the UB Law fold

By an unusual twist of fate, five UB Law School alumni are spending their leisure time thinking scholastically: as presidents of alumni associations.

That's a disproportionate number, given the Law School's relatively small size.

Our curiosity was piqued. So we decided to ask each of them The Question: Why so many alumni presidents among you?

Susan Bring Tobe '74 is a defense litigator for the New York State attorney general's office, in Buffalo, and is finishing up her second two-year term as president of the Buffalo State College alumni association.

"I like to do something constructive," she says. "I particularly enjoyed serving on the search committee that brought President F.C. Richardson to the college."

The alumni association, Tobe says, has undergone a major restructuring in the past several years, diverting its emphasis to chapter development, reunions and programs that serve alumni and students. "We discovered that people relate more to their area of study than to their graduation year," she says. "So there've been a number of reunions based on not just the year, but also the field."

The Question: "Well, proximity is obviously a key factor here. All these people are living near their school. I still live in the neighborhood, within walking distance of the college."

"Secondly, you have to look at the kind of person who gets involved in community activities. A lot of people become lawyers because of a sense of leadership, and a desire to be active in the community."

Judith A. Schwendler '82 is a partner in the Williamsville, N.Y., law firm Ward, Brenon, Schwendler & DiVita, and was president of the University at Buffalo alumni association. Her one-year term ended in May.

"We strictly are there to be of service to the alumni, so that they in turn can maintain their ties to the university," she says.

The association, she says, also tries to get alumni involved in sharing their talents with students — everything from guest-lecturing to career counseling. "I've always felt that, as students, we take a lot from the university," Schwendler says. "There comes a point in time when it's time to give back to the university."

The Question: "Maybe because of the law school training. You're trained to be somewhat organized in your thinking processes, which spills over. Lawyers are generally motivated, I think, and planning is a big part of alumni work."

Sheldon L. Cohen '80 practices tax law as an assistant vice president of Metropolitan Life Insurance Co., in New York City. He is president of the alumni association of the State University of New York at Stony Brook, a two-year term to which he was elected in June 1991.

"As a leader, you have to try to
get people engaged and involved in the activities of the association, and what direction you think the association should take. You find yourself mobilizing and motivating people."

Cohen says the Stony Brook association has started to get alumni actively involved in student recruiting, through the school's admissions office. It also established a career advisors network; alumni registered with the network are available to students and new graduates with career advice, and maybe even a job.

"When I came to be president of the association, it was not really being managed as a business," he says. "That was my first goal, to use some of my experience in the financial services industry to bring some basic management principles to the group. This year, for instance, was the first year we had an expense budget. We're very careful as to how we spend our money."

The Question: "I don't know if it's something that's directly related to being a lawyer, just having a warm, fuzzy feeling for where you went to school. ... I met my wife at Stony Brook."

Gregory C. Youngbluth '74 practices with the Buffalo law firm Damon & Morey. He is serving a one-year term as president of the Canisius High School Alumni Association.

"You hang around long enough, they make you president," he jokes of his service to the Canisius association, on whose board he had served for five years before being elected to the top job.

"It's a nice opportunity for me and other alumni to stay involved with the school," Youngbluth says. Among their duties: helping to choose inductees to the school's halls of fame for sports figures and distinguished alumni in other fields.

The association, he says, has arranged for alumni to have the privilege of using Canisius' facilities, including its sports facilities and weight room. It also sponsors an alumni golf tournament every summer, a 5-kilometer run and other activities.

The Question: "I think lawyers by and large tend to involve themselves or get invited to get involved in a lot of extracurricular and charitable activities. I guess you go where your interests and affections lie."

Jean C. Powers '79 is a partner at the Buffalo law firm Jaeckle, Fleischmann & Mugel, where she heads the real estate department. Her one-year term as president of the UB Law School alumni association began in July 1991.

Powers says she had always worked in fund-raising events for the Law School, and was asked to serve on the board by a fellow partner at Jaeckle, Fleischmann.

"It's very gratifying to me to see how many very busy people care so much about the Law School and are willing to devote so much time and effort to it," she says.

Among the many association-sponsored alumni activities familiar to readers of this magazine, Powers notes especially the new GOLD group — Graduates of the Last Decade. In addition to chapter development, long-range planning and other services, the association sponsors two major annual events: an alumni dinner (May 8 this year) and a convocation (see story on this year's convocation elsewhere in this issue of UB Law Forum).

The Question: "UB created an environment for us when we were students that made us feel very much at home there, and very attached to the school and its faculty and staff. Therefore, we have wanted to do what we can as alumni, a) to foster friendships and relationships with our fellow students, and b) to do what we can to help the school."