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Building Leadership: Judith B. Ittig '71 Chairs the Dean's Advisory Council

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Building Leadership

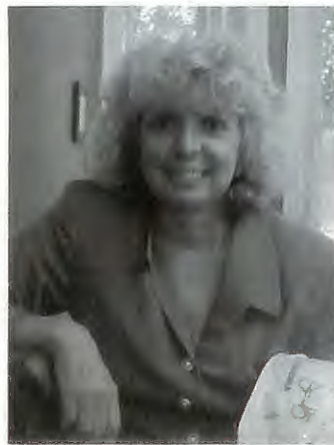
Judith B. Ittig '71 chairs the Dean's Advisory Council

Ask Judith B. Ittig '71 about UB Law School, and you will hear a response filled with fervor and enthusiasm. As chair of the Dean's Advisory Council, Ittig is brimming with ideas and optimism about the Law School's future and the part that alumni can play in it. She credits the alumni—from private practitioners to judges, from East Coast to West—for the kind of can-do energy that becomes part of a team effort in

support of the school.

"Members of the Council have always stepped forward to make significant contributions of time and money, and provided a leadership example," Ittig says. "They are people who really feel strongly about the school and want to give a significant amount back to the school. That kind of support is extremely important, and we want it to be widespread."

In advising Dean R. Nils Olsen Jr., the 40-member Council meets twice a year to hear progress reports from Law School officials and to offer members' ideas to the faculty and administration. At the most recent meeting, held in the spring in New York City, members heard from, among



others, Lillie Wylie of the admissions office speaking on recruitment efforts—a special interest of the current Council.

Olsen and other deans

were present, and, says Ittig, "They pay close attention to the conversation that goes on there. They take notes."

"It is very much a two-way street. I really believe that the school is taking good advantage of our Council members. These are influential members in their legal communities, and they can be spokespeople."

"We are also talking to people who are in law careers and in various types of fields, asking them, what do you want from recent law graduates? Are we emphasizing ideas and skills that you find valuable? We can report back to the dean what we learn."

The Council's emphasis, Ittig says, to some degree re-

flects its chairperson's thinking. Under her predecessor, William A. Niese '61, former vice president and general counsel of the Times Mirror Co. in Los Angeles, the Council focused heavily on the school's physical plant. "He shared a real leadership role," Ittig says of Niese. "In having us focus on the great needs of the school to improve the physical facilities. It was very gratifying to us on the Council to have, at the April meeting, renderings of the plans for the old moot courtroom. It was just astonishing to see what is going to be happening in such a short period of time. We were extremely impressed that the school had acted so quickly in implementing it."

There is also a financial side to membership on the Dean's Advisory Council—another kind of leadership by example. "The Council members, over the time that they have been sitting on the Council, all have come to realize the importance of individual private contributions to the financial status of the school," she says. "Such a

“We share a common sense of affection and loyalty to the school for the fact that it is responsible for our careers. I have heard more than one person say, ‘I have had a great career, and the school is where I got my training for that. UB Law is what made it possible.’”

—Judith B. Ittig



tion, a kind of facilitated, assisted negotiation. Ittig & Ittig represents parties who are arguing their case in mediation or arbitration, and often acts as mediators and arbitrators for parties with disputes.

The firm has an international practice, working for foreign companies as well as U.S. companies with overseas divisions. So there is some travel – a lot of work in the Middle East, as well as projects in Europe, South America and the Far East, and in the United States and Canada. But technology has helped with the jet lag problem, Ittig says: “You can do more work from your office than you could do 10 years ago. I have surprised people many times when I tell them that I have worked out solutions to high-dollar problems without ever meeting the parties face to face.”

Ittig also teaches arbitration skills, and is on the faculty of the American Arbitration Association. Of the construction-law practice, she says one of its satisfactions is being able to frame the results in the office's photo gallery. “So many times in the life of a lawyer, it is so hard to see a product,” she says. “One of the really nice facets of construction law is that the factory will be built, the roadway will be built, there is a hotel that you can stay in – you are part of something that you can really see.”

low, low percentage of funds from the state government are supporting a state school. It was a huge surprise to many of us that state support is now so low, around 30 percent of the school's operating budget. There are needs for scholarships, additions to the physical facilities, faculty salaries – there are all kinds of uses for this money. We all must recognize that private contributions are going to be needed to create a sizable endowment. We have all been extremely impressed with what the school has done with limited funds.”

Serving on the Dean's Advisory Council is a commitment – in time, in money and in energy. But, says Ittig, there is good reason to make that commitment. “We share a common sense of affection and loyalty to the school for the fact that it is responsible for our careers,” she says. “I

have heard more than one person say, ‘I have had a great career, and the school is where I got my training for that. UB Law is what made it possible.’”

Not that Ittig has any surplus of time. She and her husband, Gerard Ittig, are senior partners in the Washington, D.C., construction-law firm Ittig & Ittig, P.C. They represent various parties in the complicated process of getting things built – everyone from contractors and specialty subcontractors to owners and developers. With four attorneys, Judith Ittig says, “We think of ourselves as about the size of the construction-law departments of bigger firms, because we just do that type of practice.”

It is a fascinating business, she says – one in which she learns something about the construction industry with every case. The firm might

come into a project in its earliest stages, representing one of the parties and drafting contract documents and helping administer the project. Or it might be called in later in the process to help resolve disputes, such as a project that is not finished on deadline, or if design defects are alleged, or someone claims he is owed money. In that case, Ittig says, “our role could take any number of forms, from negotiation of disputes to mediation to arbitration to litigation. It is an incredible legal challenge to resolve disputes.”

The construction industry, she says, has been “pretty much a leader in alternative dispute resolution. People are very much amenable to finding other ways to resolve disputes besides litigation.” Those other ways include arbitration, a binding decision-making process, and media-