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Turning Corners: Our 109th Commencement

UB Law Forum
Our 109th Commencement

UB Law School’s 1998 Commencement ceremonies — the 109th in a venerable tradition — marked a turning point not only for the graduates, but for Dean Barry B. Boyer as well.

This Commencement, on May 16, 1998, at the Center for the Arts, was Boyer’s last as dean of the school. The milestone did not pass unnoticed.

UB Provost Thomas E. Headrick, a former Law School professor, characterized Boyer’s tenure as “six years in which the Law School progressed enormously in terms of its own development, the addition of new faculty, the expansion of programming, the development of its clinical outreach to the community and its impact on various aspects of our community and region. It has been an exciting time in the Law School. I think we owe Barry an enormous debt of appreciation.”

Noted Boyer with wry humor: “They say that what doesn’t destroy us makes us stronger, so I think we are all stronger people than we were three years ago” when the new graduates entered the school.

One thing that rarely changes is the students’ choice of a faculty speaker. By popular acclaim, Professor Kenneth F. Joyce took the podium and — ever the teacher — launched into a discussion of two pieces of case law, one involving privileged parent-child communications, the other concerning a Buffalo woman whose will directed that her historic house be demolished upon her death.

“What does that all have to do with you?” Joyce asked rhetorically. “Of course, it has everything to do with you. Because it is you who will be writing the end of those stories — at least the next chapter. And if not in those particular stories, in countless other stories like those stories. You will be writing those chapters as litigators, perhaps as judges, perhaps as legislators. More mundanely, more likely and probably more importantly, you will be writing them for the client of your office. You will be doing it on the telephone, settling with the district attorney, settling with the heirs. And in all of that you will be doing what you have been prepared to do, which is...
to exercise power — to exercise power responsibly.

"We all know laws aren't picked up on the street corner. They are not found in the index. They are made by people. And lawyers have a great deal to do with it.

"And I think, from the point of view of this particular class, that is wonderful. It does not scare me to look at you. I, for one, think that not only can you do it, but you can do it very well. And the reason is that you are good people. My experience, seeing it in your eyes, listening to the responses, even reading the scratches in your blue books, makes me feel very comfortable with your being able to exercise that type of power and influence.

"So pass the bar," Joyce concluded, "and get on with it."

The student speaker, Shawn O'Buckley, drew laughs when he compared the law school experience not to "The Paper Chase" but to "Gilligan's Island" — "every week turning into an absurd, madcap episode." The Class of '98, he said, has its own personality. "We actually cared about things besides law school during our stay here. We volunteered, we clerked, we played softball, we didn't let college get in the way of our education."

O'Buckley also made note of the rainbow of diversity that characterized the class' three-year experience. "When I heard the word 'diversity' at UB, I thought, OK, sure, I'll play along. But when I walked into my first day of Intro to Lawyering, I observed that the Class of '98 was indeed diverse and unique.

"In that first-year class there was a retired Army infantry colonel, a woman who owned her own business, a former dean of students, a nurse and a mailman. Seated next to me were police officers, firefighters, teachers and businesspeople. And we were the offspring of diverse parents. While many of us were the sons and daughters of lawyers, doctors or other professionals, most of us were first-generation professional school. There was the daughter of a cop, the son of a carpenter, the children of the working class as well as the white-collar parent. Our families suffered through law school with us, and they are as excited as we are."

The afternoon's keynote speaker, the Hon. Richard C. Wesley of the New York State Court of Appeals, had his own set of distinctions. For one thing, he is the first former New York State legislator to join the bench of the Court of Appeals, the state's highest court.

The son of a truck driver father and a mother who worked in a butcher shop, Judge Wesley received his J.D. degree in 1974 from Cornell Law School. His career encompassed a few years of private practice, two terms in the State Assembly, election to the state Supreme Court and appointments as supervising judge of the criminal courts in the Seventh District, and the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court for the Fourth Department.

Looking out at a sea of graduates and their families, the jurist recalled his own class at Cornell in 1974: "It was primarily male; only five out of the 125 graduates were women. It was primarily white. And it was primarily made up of recent college graduates. Today, law schools here and elsewhere strive to represent the emerging America of the 21st century. Diversity is the key to the prosperity and continuing validity of our profession as lawyers. This law school class better represents the emerging diversity of our community. It is indeed a great leap forward in only one generation."

The judge, whose practice years were spent in a small firm in small-town Geneseo, then sobered the lawyers-to-be with his account of the personal side of the business. "Your clients, corporate or personal, will look to you for advice, whether it be on a merger or a divorce," Wesley said. "You will have to learn about your clients' business or problem, whatever it is, and know it as well as they do. You will develop close working relationships with all kinds of people that will last for years. For me, that was the greatest pleasure of lawyering.
"In the years ahead, some of you will feel the joy of a jury verdict for a severely injured child, or the sorrow of comforting a family at the time of a loss of a loved one. Lawyering is a human experience. There's no escaping it — it will take you to mountaintops and plunge you to valleys of despair. But through it all, people will look to you for advice.

"My lawyering came to an end in 1987, when I went on the bench. But to this day, I still hear from clients: a young girl who was rendered deaf by a drug overdose, a woman who went through a horrid divorce, a man who at one time furnished his home with the profits of crime — he now works for a living. The problems of your clients will be the story of your professional life."

Looking into the ever-changing world in which the new graduates will work, Judge Wesley noted that "technology drives life today and it is perhaps presenting us with unparalleled challenges in the law." For example, he pointed to in-vitro fertilization techniques in which a fertilized human egg can be frozen and stored for years, yet still remain viable. So, he asked, if the conceiving couple divorces, who gets the eggs? Taking another example, that of surrogate motherhood, Wesley noted the several combinations of "parents" possible — donor egg, donor sperm, surrogate mother. All of this human ingenuity, he said, has outpaced the law and created an area of growth for lawyers willing to take it on.

"As technology changes our lives, it also has the opportunity to injure us," Wesley said. "The interplay between technology and its impact on our lives will continue to be the focus of tort law into the 21st century."
Class of 1998 receives awards at UB Law

Congratulations to the 48 students who received awards at the University at Buffalo Law School 1998 commencement ceremony.

Corinne A. Carey, of Buffalo, N.Y., received the Max Koren Award, which honors the senior judged by the faculty to be the outstanding member of the graduating class. This award is supported by a gift from M. Robert Koren, class of 1944, and son of Max Koren.

Steven S. Grieco, of Buffalo, N.Y., received the John N. Bennett Achievement Award, presented to the member of the graduating class, who, in the judgment of the faculty and the dean, has exemplified the highest standards of the profession by virtue of scholastic achievement, leadership and dedication to the ideals of the Law School. The award is named in honor of John N. Bennett, Class of 1934.

Lourdes M. Ventura, of Corona, N.Y., received the Dale S. Margulis Award, presented to a student of the graduating class who has contributed the most to the Law School and the community. Dale S. Margulis, a member of the Class of 1982, died suddenly in August 1982. To honor his memory, his classmates, family and friends established this award. Candidates are nominated by members of the graduating class, and the recipient is selected by the deans.

Kathleen M. Bennett, of Waterloo, N.Y., received the Charles Dautch Award, presented to the graduating senior who has demonstrated the greatest proficiency in courses, examinations and independent research in the area of commercial property. Charles Dautch, a well-known lawyer in Buffalo for 61 years, graduated from the Buffalo Law School in 1919. He was widely respected for his public service activities. The award has been endowed by his family.

Jodyann Jackson, of East Aurora, N.Y., received the Adolf Homburger Law Alumni Association Award, given to a graduating senior whose academic achievements in civil procedure and whose compassion for people best exemplify the qualities that Adolf Homburger sought to instill in his students. Professor Homburger, a native of Austria, practiced law in Vienna before coming to the United States in the late 1930s. He then attended UB Law School and graduated in 1941. He served the Law School with exceptional distinction as a member of the faculty from 1960 to 1977. The Law Alumni Association supports the award.

Angela M. Zwirecki, of East Amherst, N.Y., received the Judge Matthew J. Jasen Appellate Practice Award, presented to the graduating senior who in course work and Moot Court competition has shown outstanding achievement in appellate advocacy. The award is given in honor of Judge Jasen, Class of 1939, and is supported by his friends and former clerks.

Kristin J. Long, of Buffalo, N.Y., received the David Kochery Award, provided by the family and friends of David Kochery, who taught at the Law School from 1953 to 1980. It is presented to the graduating senior who has taken an active part in the student community through service and involvement in one or more student organizations, and who has performed exceptionally well in courses in civil procedure and remedies.

James E. Hanlon, of Clarence, N.Y., received the Laidlaw Law Alumni Association Award, which commemorates William Laidlaw, a beloved professor and practitioner. Professor Laidlaw taught on the law faculty from 1926 to 1962. The award is given to the student who has the best performance in the area of commercial law, as described by the faculty, and is provided by the Law Alumni Association.

Lourdes M. Ventura, of Corona, N.Y., received the Kenneth A. Gomez Memorial Award, presented in memory of Kenneth A. Gomez of the Class of 1990, who died suddenly in the summer of 1989. The award is presented to the law student who exemplifies Kenneth’s ideals of equality and justice for all minorities. The recipient is chosen by the Latin American Law Students Association.

Kristin J. Long, of Buffalo, N.Y., received the Birzon Prize in Clinical Legal Studies, presented in honor of Israel and Irene Birzon, parents of Paul Birzon, distinguished lawyer and adjunct faculty member at the Law School. The prize recognizes a member of the graduating class who has demonstrated excellence in the Law School’s clinical and trial advocacy program.

The Robert J. Connelly Trial Technique awards are presented to those students who have the best performance record in the course in trial technique, as selected by their instructors. The award is presented in honor of Robert J. Connelly, who was an exceptionally able trial lawyer prior to his tragic and untimely death at age 44. The awards are presented by the Erie County Trial Lawyers Association. The Robert J. Connelly Trial Technique Awards for 1997-98 were presented to Betty Calvo, of Buffalo, N.Y., Jonathan Chung-Ray Chui, of Bayside, N.Y., Michael L. D’Amico, of Cheektowaga, N.Y., Peter J. Eisenhauser, of Buffalo, N.Y., Steven S. Grieco, of Buffalo, N.Y., Shannon M. Heneghan, of West Seneca, N.Y., Jason P. Jaros, of West Seneca, N.Y., Thomas P. Kawalec, of Buffalo, N.Y., Thomas M. Kent, of...
Eric C. Naegely, of West Seneca, N.Y., Veronica Rodriguez, of Amherst, N.Y., and Angela M. Zwirecki, of Amherst, N.Y., received the Alden Award is presented to the senior who received the 27 years. The Hapern Award is given to a graduating senior for excellence in writing established to recognize outstanding efforts and accomplishments in the pursuit of lesbian and gay visibility, dignity and civil rights. The Lavender Gavel Award is presented by the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Law Students Association. The 1998 Lavender Gavel Award recipient was Kristin J. Long, of Buffalo, N.Y.

Kathryn Brock Friedman, of Buffalo, N.Y., received the Carlos C. Alden Award. Carlos C. Alden was dean of the Law School from 1904-1936 and Professor of Law from 1904-1955. The award is presented to the senior who made the greatest contribution to the Buffalo Law Review, as decided by the Law Review members.

Corinne A. Carey, of Buffalo, N.Y., received the 1998 Justice Philip Halpern Award. Prior to becoming a justice of the New York State Supreme Court, Justice Halpern was dean of the Law School and a member of the faculty for 27 years. The Halpern award is given to a graduating senior for excellence in writing on the Law Review. The winner is determined by the Law Review members.

The Lavender Gavel Award was established to recognize outstanding efforts and accomplishments in the pursuit of lesbian and gay visibility, dignity and civil rights. The Lavender Gavel Award is presented by the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Law Students Association. The 1998 Lavender Gavel Award recipient was Kristin J. Long, of Buffalo, N.Y.

Anne Marie Bevilaqua, of Buffalo, N.Y., received the Prentice-Hall Award, given to the student whose academic performance in the area of taxation is outstanding, as recommended by the faculty. The award is composed of books on taxation provided by Prentice-Hall.

Jennifer L. Berger, of Smithtown, N.Y., received the Maurice Frey Award, given annually to that member of the graduating class whose academic performance in the area of family law is most exceptional. It is named to honor the memory of Maurice Frey, a prominent attorney who cared deeply about legal education and taught at the Law School for a number of years. He also worked tirelessly in the community to ensure that our legal system served and protected all members of our society.

Berger also received the Ethics Award, selected by the dean upon recommendation of the faculty members who teach courses in legal profession and professional responsibility based on either the best "written article, essay or other exposition on the subject of legal professional responsibility or legal ethics" or "a substantial action or activity in furtherance of legal professional responsibility or legal ethics."

The Order of Barristers is a national oralsists honors society. The members include students who have shown dedication and who have excelled in the art of oral advocacy and service to the Moot Court Board. Each year, 10 students are elected to membership in the organization. The newly elected members of the Order of Barristers include Jennifer L. Berger, of Smithtown, N.Y., D. Christopher Decker, of Rochester, N.Y., Jessica A. Desany, of Buffalo, N.Y., Darci A. Falsioni, of West Seneca, N.Y., Leanne M. Gramlich, of Amherst, N.Y., James E. Hanlon, of Clarence, N.Y., Thomas M. Kent, of Williamsville, N.Y., Christopher S. Nickson, of Amherst, N.Y., Max T. Raterman, of Amherst, N.Y., Jennifer C. Ruppel, of Buffalo, N.Y., and Angela M. Zwirecki, of East Amherst, N.Y.

Jennifer L. DeCarli, of Mineola, N.Y., received the UB Law Alumni Association’s GOLD Group Award, presented to a graduating law student who has demonstrated outstanding leadership skills in advancing the mission of the Law School and enhancing its reputation for excellence in legal education. The winner’s name is inscribed on the GOLD Group plaque, which is displayed in the Law Library. The recipient also receives a special GOLD Group watch and a small, commemorative plaque.

Mickey H. Osterreicher, of Williamsville, N.Y., received the 1998 Moot Evidence Award, which is presented for the best performance in the area of evidence as determined by the faculty. The award is given in honor of Welles and Caroline Moot and in remembrance of Adelbert Moot, who taught evidence in the founding years of UB Law School.

Bridget E. Niland, of Williamsville, N.Y. and Elaine M. Spauld, of Rochester, N.Y. were presented jointly with the Judge William J. Regan Award, presented to members of the graduating class who have demonstrated the greatest proficiency in estates and surrogates’ law, and who are motivated by a strong concern for public service and public welfare. The award is named in honor of Honorable William J. Regan, Class of 1938, Erie County Surrogate from 1963 to 1981. During his long career in practice and on the bench, he served the community with great distinction. This award is supported by a fund donated by friends of Judge Regan.

Law Faculty Awards are presented by the faculty to those graduating seniors who have made outstanding contributions to the Law School community. The 1998 recipients include: Frank J. Jacobson, of Williamsville, N.Y., and Jay S. Ovsovitch, of Amherst, N.Y., in recognition of their outstanding contributions to the establishment of UB Law’s New Curriculum, in particular the criminal law concentration and the Buffalo Criminal Law Center; Kenneth Patrick Maher, of Buffalo, N.Y., in recognition of his excellence in the Affordable Housing and Community Development Law Concentration, combining intensive coursework, clinical practice and research; Corinne A. Carey, of Buffalo, N.Y., for her distinguished record of scholastic excellence and publication, and her lasting contributions to a wide range of Law School activities and organizations; Kristin M.
Nowadly, of Orchard Park, N.Y., and Shawn C. O'Buckley, of Elmira, N.Y., in recognition of their extraordinary contribution of time, energy and commitment to making the BPILP auction a financial success, and Leila Hila!, of Petoskey, Mich., for her invaluable contributions to the Human Rights Center, the International Law Concentration, the National Lawyers Guild, and to scholarship and activism in human rights.

Law Faculty Awards were also presented to D. Christopher Decker, of Rochester, N.Y., for playing a leading role in galvanizing and directing fellow students in the area of international law and human rights; Kristin J. Long, of Buffalo, N.Y., for acting as a courageous spokeswoman for lesbian and gay rights and women's international human rights, and for her work on issues connected with special education and disability; Erin M. Barclay, of Rochester, N.Y., in recognition of her contributions to the areas of domestic violence and women's international human rights; Kathleen M. Bennett, of Waterloo, N.Y., for her unstinting work to reinvigorate the Buffalo Environmental Law Journal and to strengthen the Environmental Law concentration; David R. Fallace, of Amherst, N.Y., for his tireless work to bring about improvements in the relations between the Law School and the School of Management; and Bridget E. Neland, of Williamsville, N.Y., for her exceptional contribution to the initial legal work of the Buffalo City Charter Revision Commission and as a delegate to the NCAA.

Latin Honors Graduates for 1998

The following members of the 1998 graduating class at the University at Buffalo Law School received Latin honors.

"These students have demonstrated not only exceptional talent, but also outstanding commitment and self-discipline," said UB Law School Dean R. Nils Olsen Jr. "We expect them to make a major contribution in their communities."

SUMMA CUM LAUDE: Corinne A. Carey and Steven S. Grieço

MAGNA CUM LAUDE: Kathleen M. Bennett, Kevin M. Doane, Kathryn B. Friedman, Jodyann Jackson Galvin, Brian D. Gwitt, Bernard R. Hurwitz, Frank J. Jacobson, Joel J. Java Jr., John J. Koeppel, Carol Messito and Elaine M. Spaull