Law Alumni Association Honors Six

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At its 36th annual meeting and awards dinner, the UB Law Alumni Association honored five notable alumni, and one non-alumnus, for making significant contributions to their colleagues, their communities and the legal profession.

The association's board of directors created the Distinguished Alumni Awards in 1963. Honorees are selected each year based upon their individual accomplishments, their impact on the community and their dedication to the practice of law.

This year's dinner was held on May 14, at the Hyatt Regency Buffalo. Each honoree was introduced by a colleague and presented with an engraved plaque.

• Award for the Judiciary —
Hon. Paul L. Friedman '68

A United States District Judge for the District of Columbia, Judge Friedman was honored for "his conscientious and diligent performance in the judiciary." Throughout his legal career, he has served as an administrative assistant U.S. attorney (the fourth-ranking position in the office), an assistant to the solicitor general of the United States and associate independent counsel for the Iran-Contra investigation. Prior to assuming his duties as a U.S. District Court judge, he was the managing partner at the Washington, D.C., office of White and Case, where he maintained an active appellate practice.

In presenting the award, Hon. David G. Larimer, chief justice of the Western District of New York, said, "Paul Friedman left Buffalo certainly as a shining star... He is an extraordinary, capable lawyer and is representative of Buffalo and this fine law school."

"When I came to UB Law," said
When I was privileged to graduate from this law school, I never dreamed that I might someday be honored by the alumni for my achievements in business.

— Hon. Michael A. Amico
Friedman, "I wasn't sure I wanted to be a lawyer ... I wasn't confident where the future would lead. Teachers like Jack Hyman, Lou DeCotto and Ken Joyce taught me that the law was intellectually interesting, that the law was practical, and that much good could be done."

• Award for Private Practice —
Peter J. Fiorella Jr. ’63

Senior partner at the Buffalo law firm of Fiorella, Palmer & Zakia, Fiorella was recognized for “his leadership by example as a private practitioner.” Hon. M. Dolores Denman ’65, presiding justice of the Appellate Division, 4th Department, New York State Supreme Court, presented the award to Fiorella, saying: “Every association and every community needs a Peter Fiorella. He has been in the vanguard of so many innovative ideas, so many programs, so many projects ... He is the first man there with a helping hand. He is an enormously compassionate, warm human being.”

Fiorella is a respected matrimonial practitioner. He is vice chair of the Western New York Matrimonial Trial Lawyers, past president of the UB Law Alumni Association and co-chair of the Erie County Democratic Party Judicial Screening Committee. He is also actively involved with the United Way, the Juvenile Diabetes Association and the National Conference for Community and Justice.

Fiorella thanked Judge Denman for her inspiration as a colleague and friend. “Judge Denman taught all of us that we are judged by others by our honesty, integrity, and most important, loyalty to friends, family and colleagues. I try faithfully to follow that advice and to instill those traits in my private life as well as my law practice on a daily basis,” said Fiorella.

• Award for Public Service —
Professor George M. Hezel ’73

Associate Clinical Professor at UB Law, Hezel was honored “for his commitment to public service.” Director of the Law School’s Affordable Housing Clinic, he co-teaches courses in affordable housing transactions and community development law. He has received public service awards from Niagara University and Housing Opportunities Made Equal, and serves as a judge in the Town of Aurora.

Dean R. Nils Olsen presented Hezel with the award and spoke proudly of his friend and colleague. “George has exemplified the legal profession’s obligation to provide professional services directed toward the public good and has demonstrated to his students that it is possible for an attorney to do well and to do good during a lifetime of sophisticated individual practice,” said Olsen.

"If UB Law stands for anything,” said Hezel, “I think it stands for love and service to the public ... I count it a privilege to teach at a law school where it is not only possible but appropriate to emphasize public service. Helping students find their own version of legal practice that is shaped by an understanding of the public good and enabled by finely honed skills is its own reward..."
— a reward I take home every day I work.

**Award for Community Service — Paul C. Weaver ’61**

Partner at the Buffalo-based law firm of Jaeckle, Fleischmann & Mugel LLP, he was recognized "for his many contributions to the betterment of our community," Professor Thomas E. Headrick, University provost, enumerated Weaver's achievements in the community, remarking, "It has been Paul's desire to make Buffalo a better place for us all — not a desire for personal recognition — that has driven him to give so much of himself to so many of our community's needs and projects."

A business and corporate law attorney, Weaver has been an active member of the New York State Bar Association's Business Law Section for 29 years. He is a member of the state bar association's House of Delegates and serves on two New York Office of Court Administration task forces. He has been a columnist for Business First for several years, and is active with the United Way and Catholic Charities.

"I am proud of the University at Buffalo Law School for recognizing that community service is an important responsibility of our profession," said Weaver. "It is to me very humbling to be singled out for this recognition in the midst of so much dedicated and beneficial service by so many members of our great profession. I challenge my younger colleagues to recognize and accept this legacy in community service and to carry on this fine tradition."

**Award for Business — Hon. Michael A. Amico '58**

Chairman of the board of Valu Home Centers Inc., Amico was celebrated "for his exemplary achievement in business." Amico had a notable career in law enforcement before turning to the world of business. He joined the Buffalo Police Department in 1947 and is a former Erie County sheriff. Known for his tough position on organized crime and illegal narcotics, Amico was named "Man of the Year" by the Buffalo News. He later co-founded Valu Home Centers Inc. and he is now chairman, president and chief executive officer of Orchard Park Distributors, chairman of Arena Distributors Inc., and vice chairman of JMA Distributors Inc. and Dick Urban Distributors Inc.

"Mike Amico is an individual whose hard work and extraordinary ability allowed him to have two highly successful careers," said Vice Dean Alan S. Carrel. "Even more important, while he was amassing an enormous string of accomplishments, he remained a wonderful, honest, sincere person, who truly cares about and regularly helps others."

Amico attributes his success to an early start in business. "As most of you probably know, my public career was devoted to law enforcement," said Amico. "What most of you probably don't know is that for most of my life and almost exclusively for the past 20 years, I have been a businessman. Before law school, I ran a very successful shoe shine operation at the age of 12 ... But even when I was privileged to graduate from this law school, I never dreamed that I might someday be honored by the alumni for my achievements in business."

**Aaron N. Bloch Memorial Award for Service by a Non-Alumna — Sen. Mary Lou Rath**

State senator for New York's 60th Senatorial District, she was the sole non-alumna to receive special recognition at the event. Rath was honored for "her outstanding service to the community by a non-alumna." Elected to the Erie County Legislature in 1978 and the state Senate in 1994, she serves as chair of both the Senate's Committee on Local Government and the Administrative Regulations Review Commission. She is the founder of the Welfare/Medicaid Reform Coalition and the Bipartisan Alliance of Western New York Legislators for Welfare/Medicaid Reform.

Professor William R. Greiner, University president, introduced Rath saying, "Over the course of 15 years in the Erie County Legislature, Mary Lou Rath established herself as a happy warrior and leader of the minority in the Erie County Legislature who stood for good things in this county. Now she is in the upper house of the legislature. Mary Lou has been an extraordinary representative for the people of Western New York. She has done an enormous amount of good for us in terms of supporting our Institute for Local Governance and Regional Growth at the University."

Rath praised the accomplishments of the UB Law Alumni Association and in particular its 1997-98 president, Samuel L. Shapiro, for successfully securing a $1.8 million legislative appropriation for the Law School. She predicted great success for the future of UB Law. "You can primarily thank Sam Shapiro for making sure that (bill) got through Albany this year," said Rath. "You are looking for this law school to compete nose to nose with the best law schools in the country," she said. "I think you have set the base. We are poised to make that happen."

**Special Award of Appreciation — Barry B. Boyer**

Outgoing dean of the Law School, Boyer was presented the final award of the evening in tribute to his leadership. President Samuel Shapiro presented the award, which read: "Presented in appreciation to Barry B. Boyer for his support of the UB Law Alumni Association and for his outstanding contributions to the University at Buffalo Law School during his 1993 to 1998 tenure as dean."

Boyer thanked the alumni for their commitment to the Law School, emphasizing the importance of nurturing the strong bond between the Law School and its alumni. "In the intervening years, I have come to understand what a truly extraordinary group of alumni we have," said Boyer. "People here work together, lift each other up, try, not always successfully, but at least consistently, to uphold those high ideals of the profession that inspired so many of us to go to law school years ago. The success of the Law School is going to depend very much on its strong partnership with the bar and the community."

"You are our future as well as our past and our tradition."