Happy Birthday, Gold Group: UB Law's Golden Child Celebrates A Decade
Ten years ago, a small group of UB Law alumni convened, united by a common trait—each was a recent graduate of the Law School. Sharing stories about their first few years of practice, they quickly discovered the need to assist fellow alumni during that transitional period from law student to lawyer. Under the leadership of Catherine T. Wettlauffer '85, Rosemarie A. Wyman '81, Ilene R. Fleischmann, executive director of the Law Alumni Association, and Alan S. Carrel, a steering committee of 25 graduates was organized.

"While our young alumni are viewed as the future leaders of the Law Alumni Association and the wider legal community, they were not receiving the nuts and bolts educational support or networking events they required to grow," says Fleischmann. "Our goal was to fill those needs by creating an arm of the Law Alumni Association just for them."

"They tended to become disengaged from the Law School, so we thought it was important for them to have their own group," adds Carrel, now a vice dean at the Law School. "Cathy really took the lead initiating the process and was truly the driving force behind the group's development."

"We scheduled brainstorming sessions and shared ideas on how to appeal to the needs of recent alumni," explains Mark E. Brand '88, a member of the initial steering committee. "We found that activity with the Law School's alumni association tended to be limited to more experienced alumni, who were at a later stage of their careers."

After several months of planning, the GOLD (Graduates of the Last Decade) Group was born. The committee decided membership in the GOLD Group would be automatic and free upon graduation, and would remain in effect during the graduate's first 10 years out of law school. The Law Alumni Association would help to underwrite their activities.

The GOLD Group's inaugural event was a dinner and Buffalo Bills game where more than 125 alumni/ae attended. It was immediately clear that recent graduates were eager for a forum to reunite and reconnect.

The group's first educational program was welcomed with the same enthusiasm. Named a Practical Skills seminar, the group organized a three-hour program at the Law School. "It was before the days of mandatory CLE, and yet we filled a large lecture room with over 100 in attendance," remembers Brand, partner at Phillips, Lytle, Hitchcock, Blaine & Huber, LLP.

The GOLD Group was soon approached by the Erie County Bar Association and asked to co-sponsor a 2½-day program for newly admitted attorneys. Survival Strategies for Life After Law School was modeled after the GOLD Group's Practical Skills seminars. NYS Chief Judge Judith Kaye praised the program and called it a model for the rest of the state. Offered each spring, it is popular with new attorneys who are required to take a transitional legal education program under New York State's mandatory CLE requirements.

"The formation of the GOLD Group has provided an opportunity for new attorneys to become significantly involved in matters affecting the legal community across New York State," says Douglas W. Dimitroff '89, GOLD Group president from 1994-95 and partner at Phillips, Lytle, Hitchcock, Blaine & Huber, LLP. Through its UB Law Downtown breakfast series, the group has expanded its role locally as an educational provider. The series includes several one-hour programs each year offering an informative and practical lecture along with materials, breakfast, and one CLE credit.
From the beginning, the GOLD Group has included informal and inexpensive social events on its agenda to ensure that members have an opportunity to get together in a relaxed environment. Since the group's inaugural year, members have met at the races at Fort Erie, enjoyed tips on stress reduction at a local coffee shop, and attended a number of cocktail parties hosted at the favorite local hotspot of the moment.

Over the years, the GOLD Group and the Law School have developed a mutually close and productive relationship. GOLD members act as coaches for the Career Services Office, give tours of the Law School to prospective students, and assist the Law School's admissions office with the recruitment of applicants from across the nation and overseas.

"The GOLD Group has meaningfully contributed to harnessing and asserting the collective voice and power of recent UB Law graduates," says Wendy M. Irving '91, president from 1999-2000 and director of gift planning at the University at Buffalo. "It has evolved into an organization that effectively advances individual professional growth and alumni service, along with the full integration of new lawyers into the larger legal community."

A shared set of goals and a high level of dedication have bred the Law School's most active, vibrant and growing resource. "A core group of recent graduates undertook this initiative with the assistance of the Law School," says Stephen L. Yonaty '94, president from 1997-98 and attorney at Hodgson, Russ LLP. "They nurtured the GOLD Group from success to success with the addition and participation of new members and leaders into a nationally recognized organization which caters to the needs of its constituents - newer members of the bar."

Says Fleischmann: "The future of the GOLD Group is only limited by the goals of its members."