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Alumni Association

A lawyer's lawyer

James L. Magavern '59 receives
2001 Jaeckle Award



In the decades since he first set foot in a UB Law School classroom, James L. Magavern '59 has never been away from the school for long. In addition to his thriving private practice with Magavern, Magavern & Grimm L.L.P., he has taught full time, and part time as an adjunct professor, since 1963.

That service to the Law School and the Western New York legal community was honored Nov. 3, 2001, when Magavern received UB Law's highest honor, the Edwin F. Jaeckle Award.

Magavern has concentrated his practice in the areas of health care, corporate, and state and local government law. In the public service, he has served as counsel to the New York State comptroller, as

Erie County attorney and as assistant attorney general of New York State. He also has served as president of the Bar Association of Erie County and as a member of the New York State Commission on Government Integrity. He co-chaired the Citizens' Council on Human Relations and was chair of the City of Buffalo's Charter Revision Commission.

Internationally, in the 1970s, Magavern served as a legal consultant and expert for the United Nations Development Program in the Philippines and as a legal adviser on national housing policy for the government of South Korea. He also served as a senior fellow at the East-West Center in Honolulu, Hawaii, in its program on law and the city.

At the awards ceremony in the Hyatt

Regency Buffalo, UB Law Dean Nils Olsen called Magavern "a member of our extended family." Among other contributions, Olsen said, Magavern brought his work with the Charter Revision Commission into the classroom in a clinical seminar. "Students had an incredible opportunity to learn municipal law and see it applied in practice," Olsen said. "It was a great experience for all of us and once again showed Jim's total commitment to the intellectual aspects of his practice as well as the public service.

"Jim is an individual who represents the very best of the tradition of the legal profession as a profession," Olsen continued. "The cornerstone of being a true professional is having special knowledge and ability that is important to the public,

that the public can't provide for itself — and then sharing that knowledge and ability with all of the community. Jim has always done this to an extraordinary degree.

"To me, he is a lawyer's lawyer, and he is also a true and valued friend of the Law School."

The honoree's brother and partner, William J. (Bill) Magavern II '62, spoke of James Magavern's "passion for pro bono work." "Jim does not have to have the last word, but usually he has the right words for resolution of a problem in the law," said Bill Magavern.

He also spoke of the honoree's personal side — how he and his wife, Robin, "remain devoted city dwellers"; how his nieces and nephews call him "Uncle Frosty"; how, when a grandson was having some academic troubles, he quietly tutored the boy twice a week for two years in math and social studies.

Buffalo Mayor Anthony M. Masiello pointed to, among other accomplishments, Magavern's work as legal counsel to the Joint Schools Construction Board, which is overseeing \$50 million in improvements to the Buffalo Public Schools.

Magavern, said the mayor, is "the best taskmaster, and gets the most and best out of people, because he always expects the most and best out of himself."

Said former UB Law Dean Jacob D. Hyman: "I have been able to think of no one who approaches the range of professional contributions that Jim has manifested other than John Lord O'Brian."

And former Dean Thomas E. Headrick, who has known Magavern for more than a quarter-century, spoke of two occasions on canoe trips when Magavern risked his life to help his friends.

"I also recall," Headrick said, "the sheer enjoyment of many conversations, whether on a canoe trip, on a hike, on the deck of their property in Eden, or after a set or two of tennis. Jim and Robin's thoughtful, reflective engagement with their community and the wider world is what makes it fun to be with them. Their conversations always turn to serious topics. It is their sincere conviction that if good people work together, somehow the world can become a better and more humane place."

Following a standing ovation, Magavern spoke of the legal powerhouse for whom the Jaeckle Award was named. "Ed Jaeckle was a political leader of a by-

gone era," he said. "He created the Erie County government as a regional government. Now our hope for regionalism in this era lies in county government, and the foundations for that were laid by Ed Jaeckle years ago."

He spoke with pleasure of the Western New York bar, of "my fellow lawyers who maintain a civility, a respect, even a mutual affection in the practice of law that make it a pleasure to practice law in this community."

And he recalled the Law School of the late 1950s: "As a law student here, I had the good fortune to be both immersed in



the local practice and the local community in the downtown Law School site. We also had professors like Adolph Homburger and Al Mugel who were great scholars, but also set an example of the standards of local practice.

"At the same time, we got something equally important: We got exposure to the great issues of law, politics, justice, of the world. I remember particularly well the course in constitutional law from Jack Hyman. The Law School has always represented that combination of immersion in the local community and the wider perspectives and issues of the world. That is good education. It trains good lawyers.

"Today, the Law School is absolutely thriving in both dimensions."

"To me, James Magavern (left) is a lawyer's lawyer, and he is also a true and valued friend of the Law School."

— Dean Nils Olsen