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Marie Nesbitt Promise Prize
established by Vikki L. Pryor '78

Annual award created in memory
of grandmother for law student of
African descent

Vikki L. Pryor '78, president
and CEO of SBLI USA Mutual
Life Insurance Company,
Inc., has established the an-
nual Marie Nesbitt Promise
Prize for a student of African descent who
has shown academic achievement and
professional promise at the University at
Buffalo Law School.

The prize is created in memory of Pry-
or's grandmother, Marie Nesbitt, who was
a great-granddaughter of slaves and
whose formal education stopped at the
third grade. Having lived through the
Great Depression, World War II, the Jim
Crow and the Civil Rights eras, Pryor's
grandmother was a woman of strong
opinions and deeply held principles who
was an inspiration to everyone who
knew her.

The award is bestowed annually. The
first $5,000 award was presented to
Josephine Noble in October 2002 at the
20th Annual Awards Dinner of the Minor-
ity Bar Association of Western New York.
The second $5,000 award was presented
in September 2003 to Monique Black-
wood, also at the Minority Bar Associa-
tion dinner.

Noble is a single mother and graduate
of Harvard University who was orphaned
at an early age and raised with four sib-
lings by her older brother in New York
City. She was identified for her potential
while in the fifth grade and was accepted
into Prep for Prep, an educational pro-
gram for minority students. She then went
to The Brearley School, an independent
preparatory school in NYC. There she be-
came president of the student council and
captain of the girls' varsity volleyball team.

Noble's long-term commitment is to
establish a not-for-profit organization fo-
cused on the rights of underprivileged
children and families.

Monique Blackwood is a native of the
Bronx. Blackwood worked as a summer
intern in the Bronx County district attor-
ney's office, and while earning her BA at
Cornell University, worked for Lawyers
for Children, Inc., a New York-based or-
ganization that provides free legal services
for children in foster care. She has been
involved in a wide range of community
service activities that involves her in
everything from day care to soup
kitchens.

"Despite the difficulties that my grand-
mother endured, she was an inspiration
for me and for every person she
touched," says Pryor. "Marie Nesbitt
taught me to reach for the stars by doing
my best, to stand up for what I believe in,
and to never give up.

"Establishing the Marie Nesbitt
Promise Prize is a way to keep my grand-
mother's spirit alive, by rewarding the
'promise' of greatness every year that can
be found in a second year University at
Buffalo Law School student of African de-
scent."

Pryor, a member of the Class of 1978,
was recently appointed to the Dean's Ad-
visory Council, and was honored in 2002
by the Law Alumni Association with its
Distinguished Alumna Award for exem-
plary performance in business. Her ac-
complishments have been recognized
with numerous other honors, including
the University of Illinois Chancellor's
Award, The Girls Scouts of America Lead-
ing Woman's Award and the Boston
Chamber of Commerce Emerging Execu-
tive Award.

SBLI USA Mutual Life Insurance Com-
pany, Inc., of which she is president, is a
financial services company licensed in 41
states and Puerto Rico. With $1.3 billion in
assets, $1.32 million in surplus capital, 240
employees and over 440,000 customers,
the company is committed to offering af-
fordable, flexible and easy-to-access
products as it expands nationally.