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Honor the boss
UB President Greiner receives 2002 Jaeckle Award

University at Buffalo President William R. Greiner was back among friends on Nov. 2, 2002, receiving the highest award bestowed by UB Law School and its Alumni Association. Greiner, a longtime UB Law professor, received the 2002 Edwin F. Jaeckle Award in recognition of his contributions to the Law School and the University.

The president was called "a unique combination of erudite legal scholar and incredibly approachable regular guy" by Law Alumni Association President Lynn Clarke '83, a student of Greiner's in her Law School days. He taught at UB Law from 1967 to 1983, and then began a career in University administration that culminated in his ascendance to the presidency in 1991.

Longtime colleague Professor Kenneth Joyce called upon his specialty, the law of taxation, in assessing Greiner's contributions. "In tax law," Joyce said, "there is the concept of realization of gain and loss. Basically, it is moving out of an old situation into what the Supreme Court calls a materially different situation. It is my thesis that when Bill left the Law School in 1983 and moved into what has now been almost a two-decade career in University administration, the Law School community, faculty, administration, students, professors, the whole legal community in Western New York suffered a realized loss, while at the same time the University realized a gain."

Professor and former dean Thomas E. Headrick knew the honoree when both were at Yale, where Greiner earned a master's degree in economics as well as the J.D.

"I was amazed then, and I am now, at his vast knowledge," Headrick said. "His mind seems to have an infinite capacity for absorbing and retaining information. Bring up some complicated medical issue and he can explain it. Mention an old film and he can tell you who acted in it. Run into a household repair problem and he can tell you how to fix it. Above all, he has always been incredibly politically astute about people and processes."

Under Greiner's leadership, Headrick said, UB has become "the largest, most comprehensive, most nationally acclaimed SUNY university."

Among the president's accomplishments in a decade, Headrick listed "a public service initiative, major research initiatives, major university athletics, significant private support, strong undergraduate programs and a real campus community now home to nearly 10,000 students. But his signal contribution has been to conceptualize and create a University that is multifaceted and balanced, as all great universities have to be."

The honoree's wife, Carol Greiner, added a personal note in reminiscing about the couple's 35 years in Western New York. "Nothing means more to Bill than his family and friends," she said, "and the people who make up the community that is our home. As long as I have known him, Bill's first passion is to be able to make a difference."

Mrs. Greiner recalled her husband's entrepreneurial streak — he sold sandwiches door to door at Yale Law under the firm name " Equity Chow" — and his unstinting involvement in their children's pursuits: building balsa wood race cars in Cub Scouts, rooting passionately from the stands at basketball games. She mentioned a thank-you note from one less-than-athletic boy Greiner coached in Little League: an invitation to his commencement at Harvard, from which he graduated summa cum laude. The young man thanked his old baseball
coach for giving him the confidence that he could accomplish anything.

In summation, Mrs. Greiner described her husband thusly: "a person who can step on people's shoes without ruining their shine."

Law School Dean Nils Olsen focused his remarks on Greiner's signal contributions to the Law School as a professor and administrator "during the time I consider to be its adolescence. Bill set about as an agent of change within the Law School."

Among those contributions: drafting the school's bylaws and standing orders; the 1975 academic plan; helping to establish the Edward F. Jaedicke Center for State and Local Government and the Baldy Center for Law and Social Policy; coordinating interdisciplinary activities in the Law School and establishing the school's first joint degree programs; and as associate dean and then associate provost, hiring "extraordinary faculty with broad interdisciplinary skills and significant scholarly potential."

"It is clear," Olsen said, "that Bill has been not only an architect and a visionary leader of the University, but he has also been responsible for establishing the course and unique identity that the Law School has maintained over the past 35 years."

After presentation of the award, Greiner extended copious thanks and a wry summation: "This has been a very enlightening time. When it is time for me to go, just lay me in a box and play that tape. I cannot get any better than this."

On a personal note, he mentioned that among his four children and their spouses, "they have 10 degrees from the University at Buffalo, including two J.D.s." As well, he said, "I have been so blessed to have colleagues at the Law School who are both intellectually stimulating, smart as hell, but also great people to work with. We have maintained a kind of family in the Law School faculty at the University at Buffalo which I think is quite unusual, and I thank them for their support."

Finally, Greiner praised the alumni's part in the school's evolution: "Our alumni have been extraordinarily supportive over the years, and none more so than the law alumni. Take pride in your Law School, because it is going nowhere but up."

Professor William R. Greiner and his wife, Carol.

Greiner returning to UB Law

UB President Bill Greiner has decided to end his time in the president's office - and return to his old haunt, O'Brian Hall, as a UB Law School professor. He also will teach in the Graduate School of Education.

Greiner, who is in his 13th year as the head of SUNY's flagship campus, will be succeeded in January, 2004, by John B. Simpson, Ph.D., executive vice chancellor and provost of the University of California, Santa Cruz.

"Carol and I came to UB and Buffalo Niagara in 1967, full of anticipation and hope for a bright future for us, our children, and UB," Greiner wrote in a memo to University faculty, staff and employees. "We had no inkling how wonderful and rewarding our life here would be.

"UB has been our special neighborhood, our special family. And what a wonderful family, composed as it is of an extraordinarily diverse community of scholars, students, staff, alumni and volunteers.

"We can all be proud of the many outstanding advances made during this time that I have had the honor and privilege of serving as faculty member and university administrator and leader. All of us have benefited from the work of present and former colleagues and we built and are building on that foundation."