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## Uncommon Service for the Common Good: Two UB Law Alums with Key Roles in Buffalo's Resurgence

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# Alumni Profiles

## Uncommon service for the common good



Thomas R. Beecher '59

### *Two UB Law alums with key roles in Buffalo's resurgence*

**U**B Law School has long prided itself on instilling a spirit of public service in its graduates, whether or not work in the public sector is their primary legal career. But recent graduates have a long way to go before they can begin to approach the community service delivered by two of their fellow alumni – lawyers who have poured their hearts into projects for the betterment of Buffalo.

**Thomas R. Beecher Jr. '59** and **Christopher T. Greene '74** have made their living in private practice – Beecher with the Buffalo firm Phillips Lytle, from which he has retired as a partner and is now of counsel, and Greene as managing partner at Damon & Morey. But it is in their community work that each has found rewards for the soul.

*UB Law Forum* visited Beecher and Greene to ask what drives them to channel their time, energy and enthusiasm into complex development projects that are key to the revival of Western New York's

economy.

For Tom Beecher, recipient of this year's Jaeckle Award, it started with a call from Buffalo's mayor, Anthony Masiello. The mayor needed someone to kick-start the moribund High Street Medical Corridor, an aging collection of buildings and land that included Buffalo General Hospital and Roswell Park Cancer Institute.

"It was a natural outgrowth of my interest in health care," says Beecher, who had previously served as chairman of the Kaleida Health board of directors and, before that, of the Buffalo General Hospital board.

Since that call from Masiello in 2000, Beecher has overseen development of what is now called the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus into what many call the crown jewel of Buffalo's hoped-for renaissance. Located on 100 acres, the campus includes not only Kaleida Health and Roswell Park, but the newly built Hauptmann-Woodward Medical Research Institute building and many other stakehold-

ers, including the Buffalo Hearing & Speech Center, the Buffalo Medical Group Foundation, the Olmsted Center for the Visually Impaired, and small start-up companies looking to commercialize some of the basic science being done on the campus.

With more than 8,000 workers and \$600 million in annual expenditures, the medical campus has an enormous local economic impact. As well, it has been a positive presence in its Fruit Belt neighborhood, and that presence will be extended into nearby Allentown with a recent \$9 million federal grant to extend Allen Street across Main Street and into the medical campus area.

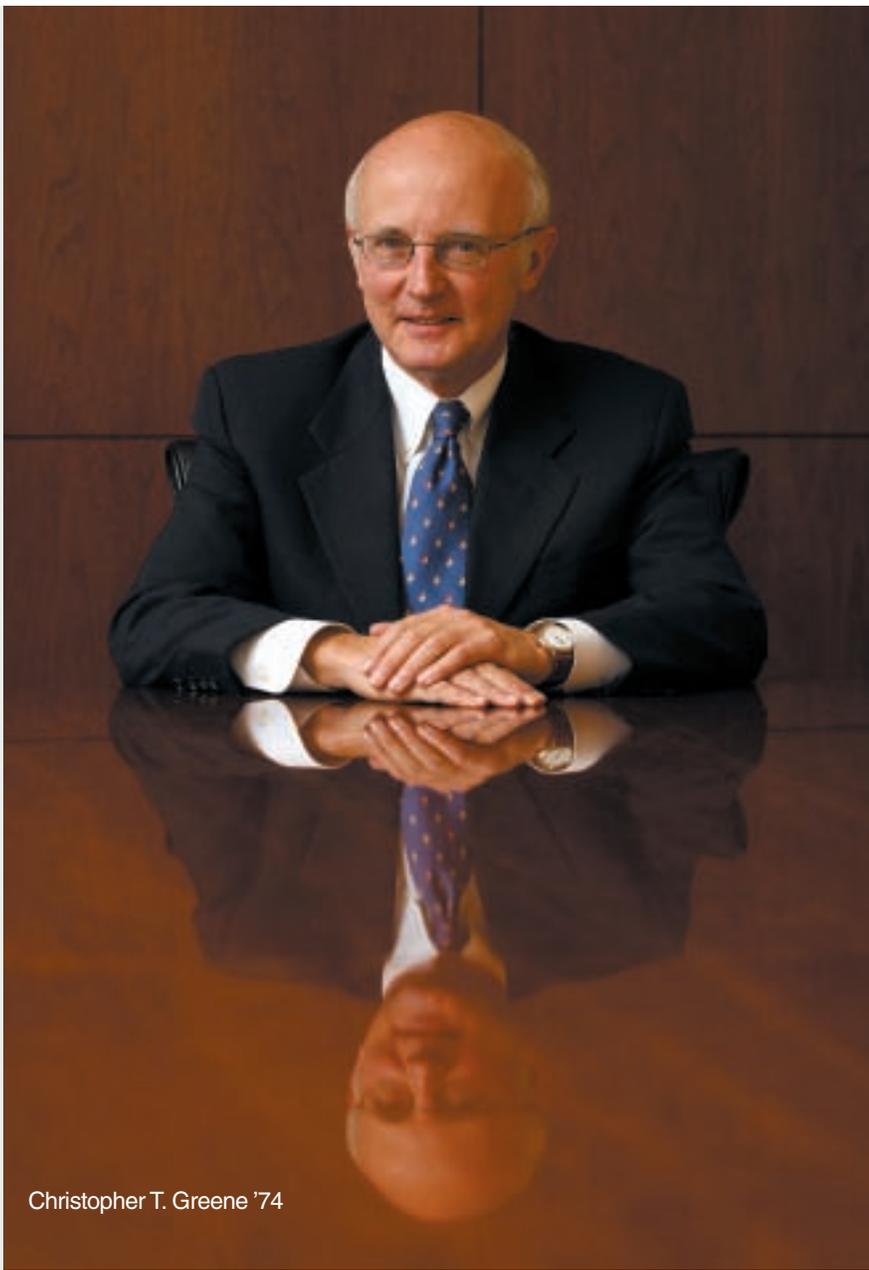
All this in a city where government and political inertia has long been a vexing frustration. Beecher says it started with UB Law Professor Al Mugal's initial advice: Restrict the number of players at the table to people who will actually be on campus. Make people pay; they will have a stake in the project's success. And invite the neighbors.

The trick, he says, is "getting a group of very powerful people to gather around a table and make some concessions for the public good. The medical campus brings the institutions together around common interests. There are a lot of things we can help them accomplish." The regional economic impact, he says, is important but secondary to his board's primary mission: "to create a world-class medical campus for teaching, clinical care and research."

Good hiring at the key institutions has been vital, too. Says Beecher: "I love to associate myself with people brighter than I and find people who are experts in their fields. I like to work with young, bright people, and that includes lawyers.

"I still see lawyers as very public-spirited and active in the community. I think lawyers are uniquely capable of fulfilling that role; they have some unique characteristics."

Law-school training in critical thinking, he says, is most useful. "The first thing they teach you in law school is to find the problem. The problem that a lawyer often



Christopher T. Greene '74

finds is less apparent than what the businessman would see.”

Also helpful is the breadth of knowledge that legal education provides: “You are trained in a broad variety of areas, many of which you do not use in your practice.”

One other aspect of the lawyer’s life, Beecher says, makes it possible to pour oneself into community service: the freedom to manage one’s own time. “The law is a tough way to make a living,” he says, “but I have always prided myself on being in charge of what I did. I could choose to take a client or not. For business people, it is much harder to control your time.

“Life is filled with choices. There are a lot of things you can do, but you have to make choices. There are dozens of lawyers in our community who take substantial roles. Hopefully this encourages younger members of the bar to see the opportunities not only to have a success-

ful law practice but to be successful in getting involved in their community as well.”

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“The point is, many of us feel that we have been given something special by being able to go to law school,” Chris Greene says. “I am speaking on behalf of many alumni. There are some higher goals here. We all play out that desire to give back in many different ways.”

For Greene, one of those ways has been as board chairman of the Hauptmann-Woodward Medical Research Institute. Construction of the institute’s architecturally spectacular new building on the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus – a building just completed this year – has highlighted his service as a major player in Western New York health care. It is an accomplishment that excites him as much as it does the researchers now doing high-level research in 73,000 square feet of bright, efficient laboratory space.

It was a decade ago when a friend asked him to serve on Hauptmann-Woodward’s board. He was soon made chairman. A strategic planning exercise revealed that the cramped former facility constrained the possibilities for the institute’s future, and thus was born an all-out effort to raise the money for a signature new building.

After a foundation grant provided seed money, New York State provided substantial funding for the \$24 million project. As Greene tells the story, three years ago Gov. George Pataki came to town, walked into the Roswell Park auditorium, and “I did not know what he was going to do. But I noticed that he had a Hauptmann-Woodward necktie on, and I said, ‘I think it is good news.’ He announced an \$8 million state grant for the building, and then \$6 million the next year.”

Part of the satisfaction of that, Greene says, is that the building’s advocates managed to overcome the generally fractious politics at the state and county levels. “The gratification of seeing a project succeed through collaboration and goodwill among all participants is very exciting,” he says. “In Buffalo, it is wonderful to see people working together. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts.”

Now at 65 employees, the institute plans to grow to 100 over next five years. The University at Buffalo has partnered with Hauptmann-Woodward to run its department of structural biology – “a good example,” Greene says, “of cooperation between a very large university and a very small research institute.”

Lawyers can do such intensive community work, Greene says, because “we are trained to look at some of the larger issues and community issues. Also, being self-employed, lawyers may have more opportunity to participate. We can make the time to go to a board meeting or a planning retreat, even to go out of town on board business. We have the opportunity sometimes to have a more flexible schedule. It all comes down to balance and balancing your obligations.”

In addition, he said, a law school education includes a large component dealing with ethics, which serves board members well. “You learn a lot in law school that goes beyond the vocation,” he says.

And in his community service work, he has found plenty of company in UB-trained attorneys. “Many of the people on those boards are lawyers from UB and elsewhere,” Greene says. “They do it because they feel indebted to the community and feel good about the community, and they want to give back.

“There is an old saying: With privilege comes responsibility.”