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# Alumni Association

## Denise O'Donnell Recognized by State Bar for Promoting the Status of Women

**D**enise E. O'Donnell '82 of Buffalo, a partner in the Buffalo office of the international law firm Hodgson Russ LLP, and a candidate for State Attorney General, received the New York State Bar Association's 2005 Ruth G. Schapiro Memorial Award.

The prestigious award, given annually to honor an Association member who has made a noteworthy contribution to the concerns of women through pro bono work, service to bar associations or other community organizations, writing, or other related activities, was presented Jan. 28 during the NYSBA House of Delegates meeting at the New York Marriott Marquis hotel in Manhattan.

Immediately following, O'Donnell, president of the Law Alumni Association in 2003–2004, joined the Association at their annual NYC luncheon held this year at the Waldorf Astoria. Alumni heard Hon. Victoria A. Graffeo speak.

"Denise is an outstanding attorney whose ability to successfully balance her professional commitment with her community activities and personal life serves as an inspiration to all of us," said Donna M. Petrucelli of New York, chair of the Committee on Women in the Law, which confers the award. "Her life, professional experiences, and commitment to improving and protecting the status of women have quietly enriched the Buffalo community."

At Hodgson Russ, O'Donnell concentrates her practice across New York State in government regulatory investigations and white-collar crime, with an emphasis on health care law, qui tam actions (a federal law allowing private citizens to file a lawsuit in the name of the U.S. government charging fraud),



Denise E. O'Donnell '82

and corporate compliance.

Before entering private law practice, President Clinton had nominated her to serve as U.S. attorney for the Western District of New York (1997-2001), where she directed all civil and criminal prosecutions for the federal government in the 17 counties between Buffalo and Rochester. She was the first woman to be appointed U.S. Attorney in upstate New York.

Her work won the attention and respect of then-U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno, who asked O'Donnell to serve as vice-chair of an advisory council that provided guidance and made key policy recommendations to the Department of Justice.

During her nearly 17-year career in

the U.S. Attorney's Office, O'Donnell personally handled and supervised a number of significant prosecutions, including the Western New York investigation of Timothy McVeigh in the Oklahoma City Bombing case and the international investigation of James Kopp, who was on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted List for the murder of Dr. Barnett Slepian.

**A**s U.S. Attorney, O'Donnell formed a program in the office to work with local agencies to prevent housing discrimination against women, particularly single mothers with few resources who are most often the targets of such discriminatory practices. She brought community leaders and law enforcement officials together to implement Project Exile, a unique program designed to help reduce gun violence. O'Donnell also helped form a community coalition to reduce youth violence and homicides, and provided the leadership to create the first Hate Crimes Task Force in Western New York.

She maintains professional affiliations in the Bar Association of Erie County (former treasurer), Women's Bar Association of the State of New York (founding member), New York State Bar Association (member of the Criminal Justice Section), American Bar Association, Western New York Trial Lawyers Association, Trustee of the University at Buffalo Foundation, and member of the Dean's Advisory Council of UB Law School.

She serves on the boards of directors of a number of organizations including the National Women's Hall of Fame (secretary) and the Western New York Chapter of the National Conference for

# State Court officials honor executive director and alumnae

Community and Justice.

Her contributions to the profession and community have resulted in awards from the Eighth Judicial District (Women in the Courts), Women Lawyers of Western New York (Lawyer of the Year), Planned Parenthood (William B. Hoyt Award), Executive Office for U.S. Attorneys (Directors Award), and the Bar Association of Erie County (Criminal Justice). She is a member of the Western New York Women's Hall of Fame.

O'Donnell has extensive experience as an instructor, faculty member, and lecturer in various facets of legal ethics and trial advocacy. Her impact is best summed up by what her daughter, Maura, said at her swearing-in ceremony for U.S. attorney: "To us, she is Supermom. People often remark that we (she and her brother Jack) have big shoes to fill, but we prefer to think of it as having a great set of footprints to follow down the path."

She received her undergraduate degree from Canisius College, a master's degree in social work from the State University of New York at Buffalo, and a law degree, graduating summa cum laude, from the University at Buffalo Law School, where she was senior editor of the *Buffalo Law Review*.

**D**uring law school, she was a legal assistant for the plaintiffs in a landmark school desegregation case in Buffalo and later went on to serve as a confidential law clerk to Appellate Division Justice M. Delores Denman (1982-85), a prior recipient of the Schapiro Award.

Previous recipients of the Schapiro award, which was established in 1992, also include Chief Judge Judith S. Kaye and former NYSBA presidents M. Catherine Richardson of Syracuse and Maryann Saccomando Freedman of Buffalo.

The 72,000-member New York State Bar Association is the official statewide organization of lawyers in New York and the largest voluntary state bar association in the nation.



Ilene R. Fleischmann

**I**lene R. Fleischmann, executive director of the Law Alumni Association and associate dean of the University at Buffalo Law School, was presented with a Women in the Law Award from the Eighth Judicial District of the State of New York United Court System, Gender and Racial Fairness Committee. Hon. Sharon S. Townsend, chief administrative judge of the Eighth Judicial District, presented the award on May 25 at the fourth annual Celebration of Women in the Law luncheon in the Adam's Mark Hotel.

Fleischmann was recognized for her "pioneering achievements, outstanding leadership, dedicated commitment and service, which have significantly impacted the legal profession, women in the law, and the WNY community."

In addition to Fleischmann, eight Western New York female judges, court officials and lawyers, and a deceased Niagara Falls attorney, also were honored. All 10 recipients were selected by the local judicial and legal communities for their outstanding contributions to the bench, bar and community, Townsend said.

UB Law alumnae who were honored include Hon. Rose D. LaMendola '55, retired State Supreme Court Justice; Hon. Judith S. Claire '75, Chautauqua County Family Court Judge; Hon. Janice M. Rosa '75, State Supreme Court Justice who is the judicial overseer of Western New York divorce courts; Joann M. Wahl '81, Chief Clerk of the Fourth Department Appellate Court; and Anna L. Scott '83, a Buffalo attorney noted for free legal work for the poor.

Since 1985, Fleischmann has served the UB Law Alumni Association, Inc. as its first executive director, providing professional staff support for its officers, board of directors and committees in planning and implementing its events, programs and activities. Simultaneously, she has risen through the administrative ranks of the University at Buffalo Law School to become an associate dean, directing the Law School's alumni affairs, public relations, publications and communications.

She is editor of *UB Law Forum*, and UB Law Links, the Law School's quarterly e-mail newsletter. She works collaboratively with the Law School's faculty, professional staff, students and alumni to produce creative marketing and public relations materials for recruitment, career services, fund-raising and academic programs. She is responsible annually for dozens of special events that enhance the image and reputation of the Law School, and strengthen the relationship between the Law School and the broader legal community.

An East Amherst resident, She currently serves as a director of the WNY Chapter of the American Jewish Committee and as a director of the Jewish Family Service, in Buffalo. She is a graduate of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Citizens Academy, class of 2005.