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Annual Return: Alumna Manages Development Campaign

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Beth-Anne C. Diodato '03 says that even in the short interval between leaving the school as a graduate and returning as an employee, she noticed that things had changed for the better.

"When I came back for my interview," she said, "I was amazed at how good the school looked. The improvements are astonishing."

The changes—improvements to O'Brian Hall including the Francis M. Letro Courtroom and refurbished named classrooms, as well as less readily apparent improvements such as a broader range of course offerings—are part of the school's ongoing improvement plan being spearheaded by Dean Nils Olsen. Diodato, as Assistant Dean for Development, oversaw the Law School giving program that largely funds such improvements—the Annual Fund.

"I felt privileged to oversee the Annual Fund," she said, "because I know good things are happening at the Law School. It is exciting to see that there is a plan in place, to take part in that plan, and to know we are heading in the right direction."

More than 25 percent of Law School alumni contribute to the Annual Fund, which pays for such amenities as financial aid and scholarships, student activities, faculty research and facility improvements. That is a giving percentage better than at such elite private law schools as Georgetown, New York University and Columbia, Diodato points out.

"Our alumni want to see the school improve itself," she said. "That means improving the building, offering new courses, bringing new faculty on board, and offering scholarships to attract and retain well-qualified students. The Annual Fund also helps us keep classes small, which is very important to the quality of education offered to current and incoming students."

She notes that only 32 percent of the school's operating budget is covered by state funds through the State University of New York system, so "we really need the alumni to come through for us."

The Annual Fund is a yearlong campaign involving direct contacts with alumni, the phonathon staffed by alumni volunteers and student callers, mailings and other solicitations. For the school's fiscal year that ends June 30, the campaign goal is $900,000, or a $50,000 increase over last year's goal.

But participation, not necessarily the dollar amount, is paramount, Diodato says. "I think our alumni give because they believe in what is happening here," she said. "Even small gifts to the Annual Fund mean a lot to the school. The fact that so many alumni give back to the school is a demonstration of their commitment to our continued success and growth. It sends a clear message to our administrators, faculty, and staff, as well as the legal community, that our graduates believe in and support the work being done to help UB Law reach its fullest potential and compete nationally."

Diodato, who grew up in Rochester, majored in political science, psychology and women's studies at the University of Rochester. It was in her second year at UB Law that she realized she did not want to follow a traditional legal career and entered the joint J.D./MSW program in law and social work. After graduation, she worked at Gateway-Longview, a Western New York agency serving children, youth, and families. There she rose to Director of Corporate and Foundation Relations.

"The Annual Fund program is a team effort," Diodato says, and she is thankful for the support she received from her colleagues in the Development Office and across the school. She is quick to note that "in the end, the alumni are the Annual Fund. It is their commitment and willingness to give back to UB Law that moves the school forward."

This year's volunteer chairperson of the Annual Fund is Pamela D. Heilman '75, a partner in the Buffalo law firm Hodgson Russ. More information about the campaign and the benefits of the Annual Fund can be found on the Law School's Web site, www.law.buffalo.edu; click on "Alumni & Giving," then "Supporting UB Law."

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