Five of A Kind: Distinguished Alumni Honorees Share A Passion for Service

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Recommended Citation
Available at: https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/ub_law_forum/vol19/iss1/57
The 4th annual meeting and dinner of the UB Law Alumni Association proved one thing: When a Buffalo Sabres playoff hockey game is on the night’s TV schedule, the speeches tend to be shorter. But hockey fever did not detract from the main business of the evening, honoring five Law School alumni for their good work and their good works way too hard to be a judge. … Erickson pointed to her current position in the judiciary. “Although a busy lawyer, he has always made time for the Law School,” she said, noting that since 1991 Graber has taught bankruptcy law as an adjunct professor at the Law School.

Garry M. Graber ’78, managing partner of the Buffalo law firm Hurwitz & Fine, “for his exemplary performance in business.” Fine has extensive experience in the purchase and sale of business entities, including stock and asset transactions; business valuation; and in transactions involving major financial institutions, including industrial bond matters. Former vice chair of the board of directors of Roswell Park Cancer Institute, he is secretary of the Erie County Industrial Development Agency, and former chair of the Hauptman-Woodward Medical Research Institute.

Hon. John P. Lane ’53, former vice chair of the board of directors of the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus, the Buffalo State College Foundation and the National Conference for Community and Justice, Western New York Region. “Chris has keen devotion to our community, and that is why he is here tonight being honored,” Wick said. “Damon & Morey continues to flourish and prosper under his leadership. Within his firm, Chris is noted as being the hardest-working attorney and a mentor to many. His personal skills and knowledge, but also his dedication to charities together.”

Hon. John P. Lane ’53, outgoing president of the Alumni Association. Dean Nils Olsen noted that four of the five honorees have served on the Dean’s Advisory Council, adding, “What has made the Law School succeed over the last 10 years is the extraordinary support of our alumni and the wonderful quality of our students.”

Co-chairs of the event were Gayle L.V. Eagan ’85 and Sharon L. Wick ’84. Along with Curran, they introduced the honorees. The alumni were displayed on a screen.

The 2006 honorees: Hon. John P. Lane ’53, New York State Supreme Court justice; “for his conscientious and diligent performance in the judiciary.” Lane is supervising judge for the Supreme Court’s 8th Judicial District. He served as Amherst town attorney from 1971 to 1996, and served on the state Court of Claims before being appointed to the Supreme Court. He also was in private practice from 1953 to 1996.

Curran noted that Lane is the son of two UB Law graduates: John F. Lane ’16 and Mary A. Blakely Lane ’20. “He has authored dozens of opinions and is certainly one of most active judges on the circuit,” Curran said. “He oversees 20 or more jury trials every year. Frankly, he works way too hard to be a judge.”

John Lane is hard working and a man of great integrity. He is a judge and a lawyer who truly cares about getting it right. What else do trial lawyers want? I am convinced that his confirmation name had to be Fairness.”

Garry M. Graber ’78, for his leadership by example as a private practitioner. Graber, a partner in the Buffalo law firm Hodgson Russ, specializes in bankruptcy and corporate restructur- ing, commercial and corporate litiga- tion, and general business law. He is immediate past president of the Upstate New York Chapter of the Turnaround Management Association, and a past president of the Bar Association of Erie County, the Volunteer Lawyers Project and the UB Law Alumni Association.

“On a scale of 1 to 10, Garry, you are a 10-plus,” said Wick in her introduction, noting that Graber has been listed in The Best Lawyers in America since 1990. “Although a busy lawyer, he has always made time for the Law School,” she said, noting that since 1991 Graber has taught bankruptcy law as an adjunct professor at the Law School.

Hon. Elena Cacavas-Schietinger ’85, administrative law judge for the New York State Public Employment Relations Board, “for her commitment to public service.” After practicing labor and employment law in Buffalo with Hodgson Russ, Cacavas was appointed to her current position in New York City. She also serves on the Dean’s Advisory Council at UB Law, and has raised a significant amount of money for his breast cancer research.

Eagan noted that Cacavas built her career while she and her husband, George, raised three sons. When they were auto buyers, Eagan recounted, Cacavas was on her way into a hearing room when a colleague called her, “Judge, you have a Barney sticker on your office door.”

“To a person,” Eagan said, “those who work with Elena at PERB are amazed at the way she is able to take on additional work above and beyond her caseload, willingly and at ease, in a department that is understaffed. No one questions her integrity, her precise and well-reasoned writing, and the sheer quality of her work.”

Cacavas also works with her husband on a foundation that brings schoolchildren from impoverished and war-torn areas of Africa to the United States to be educated. “So far 45 children have benefited,” Eagan said. “Many of them have done so well that they have obtained scholarships for college. At least one made it to the ranks of professional basketball.”

Robert P. Fine ’68, managing partner of the Buffalo law firm Hurwitz & Fine, “for his exemplary performance in business.” Fine has extensive experience in the purchase and sale of business entities, including stock and asset transactions; business valuation; and in transactions involving major financial institutions, including industrial bond matters. Former vice chair of the board of directors of Roswell Park Cancer Institute, he is secretary of the Erie County Industrial Development Agency, among other development entities. Fine noted that Fine “started out in the world of business play-acting with his cousins at the three desks that were set up in the Fine family playroom.”

The firm he co-founded, she said, has grown from three to 26 lawyers, and “just as his law firm grew, so did his reputation soar as a corporate attorney.” She also noted that Fine has served as secretary of the Erie County Industrial Development Agency under two administrations, having been appointed once by a Democratic county executive, then reappointed by a Republican. “Obviously Bob’s talents have transcended politics.”

Christopher T. Greene ’74, managing partner of the Buffalo law firm Damon & Morey. “For his many contributions to the better-
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The 2006 Distinguished Alumni Awards were presented following the May 10 dinner—a full house—in the Hyatt Regency Buffalo.

“We honor these five special people not only for being distinguished in their individual careers, but also to express our sincere gratitude on behalf of the Law School and the Law School Alumni Association for the honor and the distinction their careers have brought to our Law School,” said Hon. John M. Curran ’84, outgoing president of the Alumni Association. Dean Nils Olsen noted that four of the five honorees have served on the Dean’s Advisory Council, adding, “What has made the Law School succeed over the last 10 years is the extraordinary support of our alumni and the wonderful quality of our students.”

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Eagan recounted, Cacavas was on her way into a hearing room, when a colleague called her “Judge, you have a Barney sticker on your desk.” Cacavas replied, “To a person,” Eagan said, “those who work with Elena at PERB are amazed at the way she is able to take on additional work above and beyond her caseload, willingly and at ease, in a department that is understaffed. No one questions her clarity of thought, her precise and well-grounded writing, and the sheer quality of her work.”

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Christopher T. Greene ’74, managing partner of the Buffalo law firm Damon & Morey, “for his many contributions to the betterment of our community.” Greene is active in immemorial charitable and civic organizations, notably as the former chair of the Hauptman-Woodward Medical Research Institute (where he led fund-raising for the institute’s $24 million building project) and current chairman of the Hauptman-Woodward Foundation. He is a board member of the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus, the Buffalo State College Foundation, and the National Conference for Community and Justice, Western New York Region.

“Chris has keen devotion to our community, and that is why he is here tonight being honored,” Eagan said. “Damon & Morey continues to flourish and prosper under his leadership. Within his firm, Chris is noted as being the hardest-working attorney and a mentor to many. He is regularly recognized for his excellence and his personal skills and knowledge, but the public service, Chris has not only the technical skills and knowledge, but he personal skills and knowledge, but the public service, Chris has not only the technical skills and knowledge, but he personal skills and knowledge, but the public service, Chris has not only the technical skills and knowledge, but he personal skills.”

Concluded Curran, addressing all the honorees: “Thank you for letting us claim you as our own. The celebration, a video celebrating the alumni and photographs of recognition of the Classes of 1946 and 1956. Dennis R. McCoy ’77, president-elect of the UB Law Alumni Association, presided over another first: a drawing for an iPod, donated by Lexis/Nexis. Close.