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Beecher '59 Receives UB's Norton Award; Blacks' Gift Endows Prestigious Professorship

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Blacks’ gift endows prestigious professorship

Thomas E. Black Jr. ’79 has covered a lot of miles to get to where he is today. He and wife Bridget have lived in Buffalo, Hartford, Fort Worth, Washington, D.C., and Irvine, Calif., as he built a legal and business career.

Now that they’ve spent 15 years in the Dallas area, where Black is managing partner of the hugely successful mortgage servicing firm Black, Mann & Graham, the odometer doesn’t spin quite so fast. But in a sense, the couple have never left Western New York behind.

That is nowhere more apparent than in their support for UB Law School, culminating this year in a $1 million gift to establish a named professorship at the school. The first Tom and Bridget Black Professor will be Angela Harris, a renowned scholar in criminal law and critical race theory.

“These are positive times,” says Black, who as chair of the Dean’s Advisory Council is intimately familiar with the workings of the Law School. “I’m a firm believer that Dean Mutua is going to accomplish his goal of making us a top 50 law school, and I believe it’s going to happen in the next five years. The dean has the right formula to get us back there. I could have made a not-so-meaningful gift, but the Law School is meaningful to me, and I needed to step up.”

For his part, Dean Mutua says alumni investment on this scale is crucial to faculty development, a major component of law school rankings.

“This gift signals to our junior faculty and to others in the legal academy that UB is a school on the rise, a place where academic excellence is rewarded with the highest recognition,” the dean says.

Black’s early career was in banking law before he moved into mortgage lending. “I tripped into where I was,” he reflects. “But because of my law background, I was able to get into a position to learn management and customer service skills and learn how to deal with business issues. It was a good combination. It has allowed me to apply those same principles to the practice of law.”

After a series of positions with mortgage companies nationwide, in 1997 he opened his firm in Flower Mound, Texas. Now Black, Mann & Graham is the largest document preparation law firm in Texas, where preparing a mortgage loan document requires an attorney. The firm represents major mortgage companies and banks, preparing their mortgage loan documentation and counseling them on regulatory compliance issues.

“Tom and Bridget Black have two children: Ryan, a Notre Dame graduate who is now a second-year student at UB Law, and Erin, a senior theater major at St. Mary’s College, Notre Dame’s sister school.”

Black, a 2008 recipient of the Distinguished Alumnus Award for his performance in business, sees alumni giving as a way to stay invested in the school that made their careers possible. “Dean Mutua has a crystal-clear vision of where this law school needs to go,” he says, and he has done a great job of communicating that vision to a lot of alumni, including me. When the dean talks about areas of need, one is scholarship opportunities to attract top students. But in addition to that, in order to make it a top 50 law school, we’re going to have to attract the top talent in the teaching profession. Endowed chairs and professorships allow us to bring in people who might not otherwise consider UB Law. Guys like me, who have been given a great education and a very affordable education, need to step up to the plate and support that.”

Beecher ’59 receives UB’s Norton Award

Thomas R. Beecher Jr. ’59, chairman of the board of Barrantys LLC, received the Chancellor Charles P. Norton Medal, UB’s highest award, during the university’s 164th general commencement on May 9.

The Norton medal is presented annually in public recognition of a person who has, in Norton’s words, “performed some great thing which is identified with Buffalo … a great civic or political act, a great book, a great work of art, a great scientific achievement or any other thing which, in itself, is truly great and ennobling, and which dignifies the performer and Buffalo in the eyes of the world.”

Beecher is a founder and first chairman of the board of directors of the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus (BNMC), a non-profit corporation established to cultivate a world-class medical campus in downtown Buffalo. Under his leadership, and in partnership with its member institutions, the BNMC has implemented a master plan for development of the Buffalo Life Sciences Complex and for scientific recruitment and entrepreneurial development on the medical campus.

As board chairman of Buffalo General Hospital from 1991 to 1994, Beecher helped lay the groundwork for the hospital’s merger with Millard Fillmore and Women and Children’s hospitals into the Kaleida Health System. He chaired that system’s board in 1999 and 2000.

He co-founded BISON, the Buffalo Inner-City Scholarship Opportunity Network, which funds scholarships for low-income students seeking private secondary education. He also served on the boards of directors of Canisius College and the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra.