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He Had A Huge Heart': Michael H. Doran Student Lounge Dedicated with Words of Gratitude

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The name of a larger-than-life figure whose life was cut short has found a permanent place in his Law School alma mater. The newly renovated student lounge in John Lord O’Brian Hall was dedicated May 22 in honor of Michael H. Doran ’82, who died in 2009 when the plane he was piloting crashed in Ohio. Gifts from family and friends, and a bequest from Doran’s estate, funded the creation of the student-friendly lounge just off the bustling heart of the Law School’s first floor.

“Our goal was to create an attractive and welcoming area that conveys some of the gravitas of a place where law is studied and legal professionals are trained,” said Vice Dean James A. Gardner, who convened the dedication ceremony. “The hub can be a little busy and noisy sometimes. Law students view this lounge as a peaceful oasis in their midst.”

After a framed photo and brief biography of Doran was unveiled – it will hang permanently in the student lounge – several speakers testified to a personality as likable as he was unforgettable.

“Michael would be very proud indeed,” said Thomas Doran, his brother, who worked with Michael Doran at the Doran & Murphy law firm for many years. “Michael was deeply passionate about SUNY Buffalo Law School. His devotion and admiration for this school may be demonstrated by the amazing number of law students he hired as clerks: three or four a year for 17 years, and the firm carries on that tradition today.”

Christopher Murphy ’93 said that a student lounge – a place where people gather – is the perfect memorial for his law partner and close friend. “Mike loved to get together with friends, and he was pretty darn good at it – parties at his house, sunset cruises on Buffalo waterfront,” Murphy said, citing Doran’s personal motto: “Lovin’ livin’ and livin’ lovin’.” “He went from case to case and adventure to adventure. He was always rushing from thing to thing, trying to squeeze it all in. Mike lived life on his own terms.”

“Mike was only 51 years old when...
he died," Murphy said, "and the story of Mike Doran reminds us all that life is really too short. We should live every day with purpose; we should live for the present. And if we do, we’ll all be happier for it. We’ll all have less unfinished business."

Said Hon. Paula L. Feroletto ’82, Doran’s classmate and friend: "The word ‘passion’ for me describes Mike. Back in law school Mike was passionate: organizing the softball team, organizing a trip to Rudy’s Pump Room for chicken wings, or to Nicole’s for a party after exams were done…. There were so many lives that Mike touched, and so many of us would not be the people we are today or be where we are without Mike and without his passion. So thank you to the Doran family for the gift of Michael."

Francis M. Letro ’79, a fellow member of the trial bar and friend of Doran as well, said that for him, the defining word was “natural.” “He’s really one of the outstanding, extraordinary graduates of this law school,” Letro said. "Mike was a natural. He was a natural lawyer, a natural friend, a natural athlete, everything about him—he was one of those persons who had a natural ability about him.

And this Law School identified that and nurtured that along with his parents and his family…. Every visitor from this day on who comes to this law school will be reminded about Mike Doran and read about him and see that handsome face in there, and aspire to be the type of lawyer that Mike Doran was."

Vice Dean Alan S. Carrel ’67 also spoke about Doran’s legal success. "It was great seeing him become a star in his profession," Carrel said. “He cared deeply about his clients, was passionate about giving them the best representation possible, was meticulous in his preparation, and used his exceptional ability to obtain one great result after another.

“Mike had energy, enthusiasm, charisma and a remarkable zest for life. But above all he was a person, a people magnet. Everyone liked him, and the reason is understandable: He was always extending himself, always wanting to be of assistance, and never asking for anything in return. He had more close friends than anyone I ever knew."

“He had a huge heart and he wore it on his sleeve. When you were his friend, you stayed his friend.”