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SUNY BUFFALO LAW COMMENCEMENT 2014

Senator points to a bright future

“**Y**ou will never forget this day,” **Dean Makau W. Mutua** told the Law School’s newest crop of graduates, and indeed it was an unforgettable celebration as 200 law degrees were awarded at Commencement 2014.

The ceremony, held May 17 at a packed Center for the Arts, honored the achievements of 191 students receiving the J.D. degree and nine others receiving master of laws degrees.

“The law is the pivot of our democracy,” Mutua went on. “It is that which makes impossible tyranny and extreme human suffering. You came to the Law School for the right moral reasons. And I know that nothing we have taught you here has vacated the noble reasons that brought you our way.”

The keynote speaker – introduced by Dean’s Advisory Council Chair **Thomas E. Black Jr. ’79**, who was his roommate at Notre Dame – was **U.S. Sen. Joe Donnelly**, Democrat of Indiana. Donnelly, who practiced law and ran a small business before entering Congress and then winning election to the Senate, focused not on the past three years but on the nation’s future.

“We have amazing challenges in front of us, but amazing opportunities also,” he said to the graduates. “You’re going to be the ones who lead us into that future. You look at each other and you see your classmates and your friends. But I look at you and I truly see where America is going to be, what we have to accomplish, the things we have to overcome, the opportunities we have. I see our future, and it is incredibly exciting to me.”

In terms of medical research, he said

he expects that cures will be developed soon for cystic fibrosis, arthritis, diabetes and Alzheimer’s disease. “We are on the verge of complete energy independence and medical breakthroughs that will take your breath away,” Donnelly said. “and you are inheriting the chance, almost the obligation, to make things right.”

That leadership, he said, happens not necessarily in grand gestures but in small acts of moral courage. Donnelly held up as an example former Army sergeant Kyle White, who was awarded the Medal of Honor for pulling two wounded comrades out of harm’s way during a firefight in Afghanistan. “You don’t have to be president, you don’t have to be a senator, you can lead by what you do,” Donnelly said.

In legal practice, he said, that includes “going the extra mile for a client in need. Completing an adoption for a couple that could change their life forever. Solving a legal problem that’s overwhelming a family. Helping serve the Thanksgiving meal at the local shelter.”

Graduating senior **Daniel DeVoe** gave the student address, citing the value of the old adage “This too shall pass” – advice that gained special poignancy in his own life when his sister passed away during his final year in law school.

“Life is about accepting loss: losing someone we love, losing an important trial,” DeVoe said. “We all do know deep down that everything in life is only for now. It should make us strive to give the gift of our total presence, not just to our loved ones and our future clients, but to ourselves. . . . Really be there each day of your personal and professional lives. Ask, have I found my flow? Am I like a conductor who is lost in the music? If not, go out and find that, even if it’s outside of the law.”

Two alumni received major awards during the ceremony.

The Dean’s Medal, recognizing a commitment to justice and the rule of law, was awarded to **Vikki L. Pryor ’78**, principal of the thought leadership company Create Change Transform. “Today’s award is a reminder to me that I stand on the shoulders of others,” Pryor said. “To create a life of broad shoulders, which I entreat you to do, requires



Dean Makau W. Mutua, left, and keynote speaker Sen. Joe Donnelly



UB Provost Charles F. Zukoski conferred the degrees on the graduates.

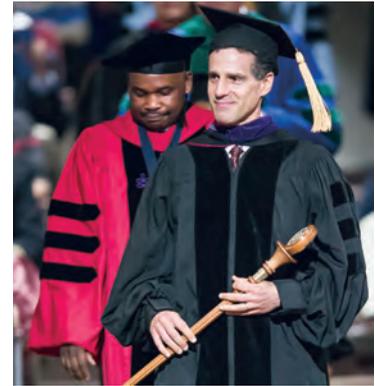
To watch a video and view photos, www.law.buffalo.edu/forum/extra



Vikki L. Pryor '78 received the Dean's Medal.



Ken Joyce Excellence in Teaching Award recipient Hon. Thomas P. "Tim" Franczyk, left, with Joseph L. Nicastro '14.



SUNY Distinguished Professor James A. Gardner led the procession.



Law School graduates who are new members of the Order of the Coif, left to right: Brooke D. Leone, Peter D. Cantone, Sarah E. Fenster-Rich and Andrew W. Dean.



Left to right, UB Provost Charles F. Zukoski, Sen. Joe Donnelly and Thomas E. Black Jr. '79



Faculty Award recipient Christine P. Bartholomew and Daniel DeVoe, who gave the student address.



Clinical Professor Suzanne E. Tomkins, left, with daughter Emily Dinsmore, recipient of the Dale S. Margulis Award.

courage and risk taking. It means taking the road less traveled. It means standing up for what you believe in. There's one important voice that you must always listen to, and it's yours."

The Ken Joyce Excellence in Teach-

ing Award was given to **Hon. Thomas P. "Tim" Franczyk**, co-director with Christopher J. O'Brien of the Law School's trial advocacy programs. O'Brien noted that from humble beginnings, the school now sends eight trial

teams to competitions nationwide. He also strapped on his guitar and, with fellow musician Joseph L. Nicastro, a graduating senior, sang an original song about the rigors of law school. "Crying, waiting, hoping" was the hook.

This was the first Buffalo Law Commencement at which the top 10 percent of the graduating class were honored with membership in the Order of the Coif, the prestigious legal honor society. The Law School became the organization's newest member this year.

The three top awards in the graduating class went to: **Andrew M. Dean**, who received the Max Koren Award for scholastic achievement and leadership; **Peter D. Cantone**, who received the John N. Bennett Achievement Award for the highest scholastic average; and **Emily Dinsmore**, who received the Dale S. Margulis Award for contributing the most to the Law School and community.