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Justice Pigott Accepts Jaeckle Award at Gala NYC Luncheon

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Forty years to the day after he was admitted to the New York State bar, one of SUNY Buffalo Law School's most distinguished jurists accepted the school's highest honor.

Hon. Eugene F. Pigott Jr. '73, senior associate justice on the state Court of Appeals, was presented the Edwin F. Jaeckle Award at a New York City alumni luncheon on Jan. 31. The award, given annually to an individual who has distinguished himself or herself and has made significant contributions to the Law School and the legal profession, made special note of the justice's commitment to the advancement of minority attorneys.

Pigott, a native of Rochester, graduated from LeMoyne College in 1968 and then served as an Army captain in Vietnam until 1970. After graduating from the Law School, he practiced with the Buffalo firm Offermann, Fallon, Mahoney & Adner, served as Erie County attorney, then became chief trial counsel for Offermann, Cassano, Pigott & Greco. He was appointed to the state Supreme Court in 1997, elected to a full 14-year term, then was designated to the Appellate Division, Fourth Department, and appointed presiding justice in 2000. His nomination to the Court of Appeals, New York's highest court, was confirmed by the State Senate in 2006.

At the luncheon, following welcoming remarks by master of ceremonies Thomas E. Black Jr. '79 and Law Alumni Association President Terrence M. Gilbride '88, the honored's boss – New York State's chief justice, Jonathan Lippman – paid tribute to Pigott's role on the high court.

“Gene really epitomizes what the Court of Appeals is all about,” Lippman said. “There isn't a case that comes up that he doesn't put his unique stamp on it. We all look to Gene for his practical take on what the case means in the real world and for real people. It's so helpful to have someone who has such a practical understanding of the law.”

Dean Makau W. Mutua reported to the attendees that the Law School is “in good health,” pointing to progress in faculty hiring, building renovations and the academic quality of the student body. Noting that applications to law schools nationwide have dropped by half, the dean said legal education will almost certainly undergo changes. He announced that the University has given its assent to reducing the Law School's enrollment to 600, down from the current 750. The dean also shared the happy news that the Campaign for SUNY Buffalo Law School has raised more than $22 million toward its $30 million goal.

In introducing the honoree, Francis M. Letro '79 pointed to Pigott's human qualities, saying, “He enjoys an extraordinary legal career well balanced by his family, by his friends, and by having lots of fun along the way as a lawyer and a judge.”

Especially, Letro said, Pigott has worked tirelessly “for the benefit of the profession and its day-to-day practitioners. While his job is to be the last word on the Court of Appeals when it comes to application of the law to the specific facts of a case, he also sees his job
As a future in international business, he knew that an additional U.S. law degree would be a key qualification. After much research, he found himself in a New York state of mind.

A law graduate of Universidad Panamericana, Urbán was director of procedures for the Ministry of Finance and Public Credit in Mexico’s Office of the General Tax Attorney.

“When I decided to move from public service to private practice,” Urbán says, “I was looking for a master’s degree in law in the United States. I evaluated different options, focusing especially in New York State, because to pursue a career in corporate law it was necessary to learn New York law. New York law is very useful for a foreign lawyer, because it’s so important in international transactions.”

Urbán now serves as senior legal counsel for a business that works in more than 50 countries worldwide.

In his new position, Urbán still oversees the company’s tax work. But his main focus is in transactional law. He negotiates and oversees contracts for the sourcing of materials and services, including involvement in the competitive bidding process; manages contracts with the company’s information technology suppliers; and ensures that data privacy is respected.

Urbán says he and his family still have fond memories of their time in Buffalo, and he is working with Law School staff to spread the word about the opportunities available at SUNY Buffalo Law School for lawyers and would-be lawyers in other countries.