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Mayor Stephanie Miner '99

A powerful advocate for Syracuse

By Phil Fairbanks

Blunt talk and passionate advocacy are as much a part of Stephanie Miner as her Irish heritage and deep roots in New York State politics.

Is it any wonder then that Syracuse's first female mayor would use the word "crisis" no less than six times and offer a dramatic, even dire, assessment of the city's future in a high-profile speech earlier this year.

"The day of reckoning is not coming; it has arrived," Miner said during her second State of the City address.

To those who know Miner '99, the first woman elected mayor of any of New York's Big 5 cities, powerful words and compelling arguments are a part of her very being.

It's essential to her lifelong role as an advocate, whether as a lawyer representing unions and employees or as a politician eager to lead Syracuse out of its fiscal doldrums and into a new, post-industrial economy.

"I'm a shy person but someone who believes strongly in justice and who's willing to take risks to be an effective advocate," she said in a telephone interview.

She credits UB for giving her the tools to make good on her promises, first as a lawyer and later as a politician.

"They taught me the fundamentals of how to be a good advocate," she said, "and how to construct good arguments to be a good advocate."

Even before her run for mayor two years ago, she gravitated toward politics, a passion she acquired stuffing envelopes for local candidates as a young girl in her Grandmother Cooney's kitchen.

In the early 1990s, she helped run Geraldine Ferraro's upstate campaign when she ran for U.S. Senate and later



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served as Gov. Mario Cuomo's point person in Central New York.

Miner started at UB Law in 1996 after finding herself in a different type of classroom. She was part of a team of trustees overseeing Laborers Local 210 in Buffalo, whose charge was to rid the union of corruption and cronyism, and reform a leadership unwilling to change or bow out.

"It was interesting to say the least," Miner said. "It was an on-the-job training ground for federal labor law, employee benefits and criminal justice. It was both interesting and exciting."

When she left UB, she returned to Syracuse and spent the next 10 years practicing labor law with the firm of Blitman & King. She ran successfully for a citywide seat on the Common Council in 2001 at the age of 31 and

eight years later ran for mayor and won again.

Today, much of her advocacy is directed at leaders in Albany in hopes of changing many longstanding state mandate and pension policies she believes are driving Syracuse and other cities into fiscal ruin.

"I submit to you tonight that I believe Syracuse will never give in, will never relent, and will never stop fighting for the better future we know we can have," she said in her State of the City speech. "As your mayor, you have my promise never to give up that fight."

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