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# Mayor Tom Roach '86

## *A happy public servant in White Plains*

By Phil Fairbanks

Even now, decades later, Tom Roach remembers what his Aunt Peg told him shortly after his graduation from UB Law School.

"You know," she said out of the blue, "I'm so proud of you."

Roach, who always felt he had it easy compared to his parents and grandparents, told her he felt fortunate to be the first in his family to get a four-year degree, never mind go to law school.

"Yeah," she answered, "but you didn't squander it."

Talk to Tom Roach '86, the newly elected mayor of White Plains, for any length of time about his years at UB and chances are good you'll hear him talk about gratitude, appreciation and, yes, opportunity.

"The quality of education you receive there is second to none and it's offered to a group of people who might not otherwise get that education," he said. "There's an attitude that you don't take that lightly. You don't squander it."

There's that word again. For Roach, not squandering it meant starting out as a legal aid attorney and later a career as a trial lawyer specializing in personal injury law.

He spent almost every day of his first 24 years as a lawyer in a courtroom and, amidst the inherent ups and downs, always found cases that helped get him up each morning.

"It's funny," he said. "A lot of it is internal. There's great satisfaction in winning, of course, but there also are times when you know you've done something special, when you know you've made a difference."



Tom Roach '86 says that as mayor of White Plains, his goals include maintaining the city's fiscal stability and preserving its diversity.

It was that same motivation that got him involved in grass-roots community activism and eventually politics and public service.

He was elected to the White Plains Common Council in 2001 and, while serving as Council president this year, suddenly found himself thrust into the role of mayor. His appointment followed the resignation of then Mayor Adam Bradley, who had been convicted of a domestic violence charge involving his wife. A special election soon followed and Roach won easily in a three-

man race.

"He's a public servant in the FDR mold," said Gary Farrell '86, a longtime friend who helped manage Roach's campaign. "He totally can't be bought and is so immune to the notion that politicians are for sale.

He's really all about doing the right thing."

As mayor, his mission is to maintain the city's fiscal stability and exploit its growing role as a retail and corporate center while preserving what he calls its greatest trait – its diverse population.

The challenges are significant but he attacks them from the perspective of a cancer survivor. It was about two years ago that he finished successful treatment of a rare form of nose and throat cancer.

"I'm going to turn 50 in December," he said, "and I can tell you that it will never occur to me to be depressed about a birthday. In fact, when I turn 80, I'll be a very, very happy man."

*"The quality of education you receive [at UB Law] is second to none and it's offered to a group of people who might not otherwise get that education."*