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Leadership Giving

Retired Starbucks CEO honors Professor Bill Greiner with major gift to the Law School



Professor William R. Greiner and benefactor Orin Smith

A single undergraduate course, taught half a lifetime ago, has resulted in an extraordinary gift to UB Law School in honor of one of its best-loved professors.

The course was Constitutional Law, and it was taught not at UB but at the University of Washington. The instructor was a young Bill Greiner, who of course became a law professor, the 13th president of UB, and now continues to teach in the Law School.

The student? A senior by the name of Orin Smith, who would go on to a distinguished career in finance. He served as chief policy and finance officer of the state

of Washington, and completed his career as chief financial officer and then president and CEO of the coffeehouse pioneer Starbucks.

Now retired, Smith has designated a major gift of \$200,000 to UB Law in honor of his long-ago professor. In recognition, the Law School named its elegant new faculty reading room, on the fifth floor of John Lord O'Brien Hall, the Professor William R. Greiner Law Faculty Reading Room.

The newly renamed reading room was dedicated with a ribbon-cutting Nov. 30. "We happily made our toasts with Starbucks coffee," says Dean Nils Olsen.

"This is a nice recognition of Bill Greiner and his teaching. It is very special, and it is particularly appropriate because Bill has played such a role in building up the campus, adding to the quality of student life through the departments and all the other building that happened during his tenure as president," says Olsen.

"It was completely and totally unexpected – almost dumbfounding, really," Greiner said. "I remember Orin as a student, when I was in my early teaching days. We had lost touch for a long time, then he dropped me an e-mail. He wrote me this overwhelming note, and I was blown away.

"What more can a teacher ask than to have a student say, 'You made a great deal of difference for me'? It is really quite stunning, and it is a great honor."

It was in 1965 that Smith, in his final year at the University of Washington, happened upon an honors course in constitutional law, and enrolled. "It was class of 10, 11, 12 people, a pretty intimate setting," he says. "We had a great time in that class. The interaction was terrific, and we had a great instructor. He challenged us with the issues of constitutional law, forcing us to think and speak and articulate our position. It was such a challenging course, like nothing any of us had had before."

Great experiences, including surviving the Socratic method, build camaraderie, and the students became friends as well. Greiner came to their parties. He invited Smith to his house a couple of times, and a friendship developed. Greiner served as a mentor to the young business and political science major in his senior year.

The course also jolted Smith into thinking more deeply about his future. Where before he had expected to graduate and plunge immediately into the working world, he found himself aiming higher.



Professor William R. Greiner and Orin Smith cut the ribbon.

“People in that class were applying to law schools or to graduate business schools,” he says. “I had been thinking about going to law school but had not done anything about it. But it was really as a result of that class that I ended up applying to Harvard Business School. I was a late applicant, so I charged in and took the admission test at the next opportunity. I was accepted in June.”

They kept in touch for a little while. Greiner moved on to Yale Law School, and Smith once or twice made the trip from Cambridge to New Haven for a visit. But then they went on to their respective careers. Smith returned to the Pacific Northwest, worked at the accounting firm Touché Ross & Co. for 12 years, served the state of Washington as chief policy and finance officer, then took a pay cut to join the fledgling Starbucks Corp. and its entrepreneurial young leader, Howard Schultz.

It was a natural fit. Where Schultz was all ideas, Smith was all execution – the steady, experienced hand behind the scenes of the company’s meteoric rise to an international food service company. In his business memoir *Pour Your Heart Into It*,

Schultz calls Smith “an executive who can build the infrastructure the company needs without sacrificing the need for innovation. But [he is also] someone who understands the value of unconventional thinking.”

Smith was known for always carrying a pen and notebook in his pocket, to capture good ideas. But at a company like Starbucks, it was not always conventional business. He got his share of whipped cream in the face, for example, at the company’s annual pie-throwing contests to build employee morale.

He was promoted from CFO to president in 1994, and helped guide the company through its period of most explosive growth before retiring in March 2005.

“I had wanted to get away from 70- and 80-hour weeks,” he says. “The travel was pretty constant. I wanted to spend more time with my family, and travel a little bit where I could see something other than the inside of hotel rooms.”

In retirement, he has continued his involvement with charitable causes, particularly educational institutions. Having made several substantial donations to the University of Washington, he is chairman of the UW Foundation and is on the uni-

versity’s School of Medicine board. He also serves on the boards of Disney and Nike, and chairs the philanthropic Starbucks Foundation, carrying on the push for social responsibility that he championed at the company. He also is on the board of Conservation International, which funds the work of about 1,000 scientists in tropical areas, trying to establish ways to draw sustainable income from rainforest areas and so protect them against clear-cutting.

But as he thought back over his remarkable life’s journey, Smith began to wonder about his old professor. “I had thought about him a number of times but really did not know exactly where he had gone and what he was doing,” Smith said. “When I retired, I Googled him, and there he was. I had no idea he was president of the University. I had heard that he had gone to teach in a law school, but I was not sure where that was.

“Because he had had such an influence on my life and career, I decided that I would contact the school and make some kind of contribution, so I called the development office.”

Now Smith’s gift will put Professor Greiner’s name before his colleagues as they use the reading room, with its collections of legal periodicals and faculty publications. For Smith, it is a fitting use for his donation.

Greiner, he says, was able to make constitutional law “a great experience.”

“My impression was that he thoroughly enjoyed being in the classroom,” Smith says. “Unlike a majority of the professors I had, he took a lot of time outside of class; he was always available and always interested, and always imaginative in his presentation. Taking that class was a really influential experience in my life that I wanted Bill to know about.”