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Alumni Association



Parting accolade

2007 Jaeckle Award goes to departing Dean Olsen

Left to right: President John B. Simpson, Dean Nils Olsen and Provost Satish K. Tripathi.

In the waning months of his tenure as dean, Nils Olsen had some loose ends to tie up. UB Law School and the UB Law Alumni Association tied up one of their own: They honored Olsen with the Edwin F. Jaeckle Award, UB Law's highest honor. The award came Nov. 13 at the Twentieth Century Club in downtown Buffalo. The Tuesday evening dinner and presentation was a departure from the traditional Saturday-morning event that is coupled with a Continuing Legal Education opportunity.

Emceed by Margaret P. Gryko '77, president of the Law Alumni Association, the event featured a succession of speakers who discussed aspects of Olsen's life and work – everything from his accomplishments as dean to his famously rumpled style of dress.

Erie County District Attorney Frank J. Clark '67 told of a Dean's Advisory Council meeting at which University President John B. Simpson said, "I cannot imagine the Law School without Nils Olsen as dean."

"No one said anything. It was silent," Clark said. "Everyone just nodded. It was a given. It was black letter. Whenever you thought of the Law School, you thought of Nils. I cannot think of a higher compliment than that.

"When I think of him and the Law School, I see how the Law School reflects his personality in so many ways. Everything he has done, in whatever he does, he puts his

own personality into it. It is not just the school and the curriculum that is important to him, it is the students.

"If he has always been there for me, I can imagine over the years how many students have turned to him for those very same things, always to find him right there, more than supportive, more than encouraging. And what a wonderful legacy that is, perhaps his greatest legacy. A personal relationship, teacher to student, year after year."

School of Management Dean John M. Thomas, a 1976 UB Law graduate, spoke about the collaboration between the two schools, which includes a thriving JD/MBA

joint degree program and a joint program in international finance and banking in New York City. A third program, in arts management, is run in conjunction with the College of Arts and Sciences, and in that Thomas highlighted the contributions of "the other celebrated Olsen at UB" – Dean Olsen's wife, Sandra, director of the UB Art Galleries.

"Nils' legacy at the University has been his leadership in linking the professional schools to other schools and departments," Thomas said. "Nils has led the way in making sure that UB is a university that can take great pride in the extent to which it values collaboration across academic boundaries."

Speaking on behalf of the law faculty, Charles Patrick Ewing, SUNY Distinguished Service Professor, noted that scholarly productivity and community service by the faculty have reached all-time highs. "With your guidance and your motivation," he said to the dean, "we have become one of the most intellectually productive and respected law faculties in the country. That is no exaggeration. Nils has figured out exactly what strings

Some highlights of R. Nils Olsen's tenure as dean of the UB Law School:

to pull to motivate us, to reward us; he knows when to prod us; and most important of all, he knows when to get out of our way. He is not a boss but a colleague.”

Ewing also noted Olsen's success in rebuilding the loyalty and involvement of the school's alumni: “He has done everything imaginable to make our alums feel part of their alma mater. He was able to reach out to the alumni in large measure because he is a lawyer and has been in the trenches. Nils is someone who speaks the language of practicing lawyers, knows his way around the courtroom, can tell and appreciate a good legal war story, and is a true professional role model for our students and our alums.”

UB President Simpson, calling Olsen a “transformational” dean for the Law School, expressed appreciation for Olsen's guidance. “I have been here now nearly four years,” he said, “and during that time I have almost without fail, when I have needed a wise friend, a colleague, to help me unravel the University's mysteries or to understand various aspects of how Buffalo works, I have turned to Dean Olsen. He has been for me a remarkable colleague and mentor as well as being a friend.”

Simpson also cited Olsen's participation in the development of the UB 2020 strategic plan, and his support for the University's renewed commitment to civic engagement. “If I could have a faculty with a hundred people the equivalent of Nils,” he said, “I would have an absolutely remarkable university.”

It was University Provost Satish K. Tripathi – saying, “For the University, he has truly been dean of deans” – who presented the Jaeckle Award to Olsen, with a sustained ovation from an appreciative audience.

Dean Olsen told of the first deans meeting he attended. “I had shown up at work as usual in a Grateful Dead shirt, blue jeans and running shoes,” he said. “I ended up borrowing a jacket, a button-down shirt with a collar, and boots from Phil Halpern. The provost at the time was heard to mutter that he could not believe that the acting dean of the Law School dressed so poorly. He actually muttered it to me.”

But more seriously, Olsen said, “This institution has nurtured me, supported me, and certainly taught me everything I know about teaching, about educational administration and the practice of law.”

He added, “A great law school does not stand in isolation, nor is it the product of individual administrative excellence. It is a unique organization that is the result of the symbiotic relationship of a number of dis-



Dr. Sandra H. Olsen congratulates her husband after he receives the 2007 Jaeckle Award.

- Appointed dean effective for the academic year 1998-99, after 21 years on the faculty. He is the 18th dean in the school's history.
- Expanded the academic administrative ranks of the school by naming several vice deans.
- Spearheaded an overhaul of the Law School's signature building, John Lord O'Brian Hall, including a refurbished student lounge and the recent additions of the Francis M. Letro Courtroom – one of the only working law school courtrooms in the nation – and an elegant faculty reading room and conference facility, as well as six new classrooms. Made O'Brian Hall the first building on campus to offer wireless Internet access.
- Greatly expanded the number of joint degree programs in which the Law School participates, established the school's first two Master of Laws programs, and grew the number of academic concentrations offered.
- More than doubled the number of applicants, raised median LSAT scores and GPAs significantly, and attracted more applicants both from top undergraduate schools and from outside New York State. Increased student enrollment by 25 percent.
- Oversaw full implementation of the groundbreaking New Curriculum, designed to help bridge the gap between law school and practice.
- Greatly increased alumni support for the

school, reducing dependence on state funding. The Annual Fund, with a stellar participation rate of nearly 26 percent, now raises about \$1 million each year. Oversaw successful \$13 million capital campaign.

- Created the Law School Village and other on-campus apartment housing reserved for law students.
- Grew and developed the Dean's Advisory Council to draw on the expertise of distinguished alumni in guiding the Law School's academic program.
- Established a mentoring program that pairs each first-year student with an alumni mentor.
- Held leadership positions for several key University initiatives, including serving as chair of UB's Intercollegiate Athletics Board and the Corrigan Committee, which is studying the future of UB's intercollegiate athletics programs. Provided leadership to the UB 2020 strategic planning group charged with strengthening UB's focus on civic engagement and public policy.
- Successfully lobbied New York State for professional-school tuition for the Law School, and reinvested tuition revenues into new services and facilities for students.
- Among many alumni initiatives, began an annual luncheon for all alumni who graduated 50 or more years ago from the Law School.
- Oversaw the inauguration of UB Law's New York City Program in International Finance and Law, a partnership with the School of Management.
- Championed the Law School's thriving clinical legal education program, which combines the University's missions of education and service to the community.
- Among professors hired: Mark Bartholomew, Irus Braverman, Rebecca French, James Gardner, Jeffrey Malkan, Lynn Mather, James Milles, Athena Mutua, Rick Su, Winnifred Sullivan, and Mateo Taussig-Rubbo.

crete elements.” Those elements, he said, include “an extraordinarily talented and gifted community of scholars and teachers”; the support of the wider University community, and of students and alumni; and the talents of a series of administrators and staff members, many of whom he named individually.

“When you honor me,” he concluded, addressing the alumni in attendance, “you are in fact honoring our faculty, our students, the great research university we are a part of, our administrators and, not in consequence, yourselves. I will always treasure

and keep close your kind words and generous support.”

The Jaeckle Award is named for UB Law alumnus Edwin F. Jaeckle '15. It is given annually to an individual who has distinguished herself or himself and has made significant contributions to the UB Law School and to the legal profession.

The 2007 Edwin F. Jaeckle Dinner Committee was co-chaired by Laurie S. Bloom '83 and Mary M. Penn '99.