A Point of Pride for Judge Howe

UB Law Forum
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For Hon. Barbara Howe ’80, UB School of Law’s highest honor came as a punctuation mark in a distinguished legal career.

The story continues for Howe, who has now entered private practice after 30 years as a New York State judge, including 14 years in Erie County Surrogate Court. And as she accepted the Edwin F. Jaeckle Award, she took the occasion to reflect on the system to which she has devoted her professional life.

“I think there’s an exquisite orthodoxy to the law,” Howe remarked in the award presentation ceremony, held Jan. 26 in Manhattan. “And then, of course, I love the agility of the law to bring common sense to the table and get the job done in ways that are lawful and proper.

“My love of lawyers is real,” she said. “I have seen lawyers do magic with their craft, and work in so many situations where they ended up doing it pro bono, whether they planned to or not.”

The Jaeckle Award is given annually to a person who exemplifies the highest ideals of the School of Law and the Law Alumni Association, and has made significant contributions to the school and the legal profession. Those contributions are on full display with Howe, who is now senior counsel with the Buffalo office of Woods Oviatt Gilman.

As a supportive alumna and former president of the UB Law Alumni Association, Howe has maintained close ties with the law school throughout her academic and judicial career. She has taught several courses, as well as actively promoting and participating in the law school’s mentor program.

And as a judge in one of New York State’s busiest courts, Howe has frequently assumed leadership roles on numerous statewide committees. A member of the state Office of Court Administration’s Legislative Advisory Group, she helped to initiate and implement legislation making Erie County Surrogate’s Court the state’s first to allow e-filing. She has also played an active role in shaping legislative proposals relating to estate and surrogate’s court practice while serving on the OCA’s Surrogate’s Court Advisory Committee.

Howe, who became Surrogate Judge in 2004, began her judicial career on the Buffalo City Court bench in 1988, and was a New York State Supreme Court Justice from 1992 through 2003. Before she joined the bench, she was a tenured faculty member in UB’s Department of Sociology. She has authored numerous articles on sociology and the law, and more than 50 of her judicial decisions have been published by the New York State Reporter.

A Phi Beta Kappa graduate of the University of Connecticut at Storrs, where she earned a bachelor’s degree with highest honors, Howe also has master’s and doctoral degrees in sociology from Cornell University, in addition to her J.D.