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Being a lawyer is a special privilege, Connors tells Jaeckle Award audience

A high-profile and highly effective Buffalo trial lawyer has received the Edwin F. Jaeckle Award, the University at Buffalo School of Law and Alumni Association’s highest honor.

Terrence M. Connors ’71 accepted the award on Jan. 29 at the Union League Club in New York City, as part of the school’s annual New York Alumni Luncheon. The Jaeckle Award is given annually to “an individual who has distinguished himself or herself and has made significant contributions to the Law School and the legal profession.”

Connors, founding member of the Buffalo firm Connors and Vilardo, has been active with the Law School in many ways, including teaching aspects of trial technique. He is a major investor in the school’s newly formed Advocacy Institute and serves as chairman of the institute’s advisory board. Additionally, Connors has served on the Dean’s Advisory Council, which consults with the Law School dean on curricular and other matters.

After greetings from the event’s master of ceremonies, Hon. Eugene F. Pigott ’73, and Law Alumni Association President Robert P. Heary ’91, interim Dean James A. Gardner gave an update on the Law School, noting that the employment rate for our new graduates is at 90 percent and that the number of applicants has increased modestly even as law school applications nationwide have declined. “We are exceptionally busy,” Gardner said. “We’re working hard to keep the school secure, its product top-notch and its graduates well-prepared to take their place alongside you, other alumni and the entire legal community.”

UB President Satish K. Tripathi gave a similar update on the University as a whole, noting that applications are up about 11 percent. Of the honoree he said, “Terry exemplifies what it means to be a great alumnus, a distinguished leader in the legal community who offers an inspiring example to our current and future students, and a deeply engaged University citizen who cares professionally about the Law School and has committed himself to actively advancing it. He is a proud example of everything we try for our students to achieve when they become alumni of UB.”

In his introduction, Dean Gardner characterized Connors as “a lawyer’s lawyer,” “incredibly well-prepared in every case he takes,” and someone “distinguished by his genuine compassion for both clients and the people around him.” He also noted Connors’ deep involvement in the school’s newly formed Advocacy Institute, both as a donor and as chair of the institute’s National Advisory Board.

“This is such an exciting initiative, and we have Terry to thank for supporting it in so many tangible and intangible ways, and for exemplifying the kind of advocate we want to help our students become,” Gardner said. “In his practice and with the Law School, Terry is the real deal.”

Accepting the award, Connors expressed gratitude to the Law School’s foundational role in his career. “The Law School means a great deal to me,” he said. “When I was there I valued the education I was receiving, I valued the inspiration that I received from the law professors who taught me, and I know that what I learned there pushed me down a path that I have been so pleased to travel over the last 40 years. It’s been a wonderful journey for me, and I know that I would not have been able to take that journey without the University at Buffalo School of Law.”

He also spoke of the experience of interviewing new lawyers as part of the Eighth Judicial District’s Committee on Character and Fitness for Applicants for Admission to the Bar. “They all want to know the same thing,” he said. “They want to know what’s it like 30, 35, 40 years into practice. I tell them that being a lawyer is a very special privilege. If I had the power to go back and select any profession at the beginning of my career, I’d take our profession in a heartbeat. It wouldn’t even be close. Every day we have an opportunity to make a difference, to change someone’s life, to stand between two parties and help two sides stand up for themselves. It’s stimulating, it’s intellectually challenging, and it’s incredibly rewarding.”