Coming Full Circle to Strengthen the Law School

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In many ways, says Loraine Yates, her new job as a development officer for University at Buffalo School of Law is like coming home.

Yates, a Western New York native, was a UB undergraduate before finishing her bachelor’s degree in human development at SUNY’s Empire State College. And she worked in development for UB’s other professional school, the School of Medicine, before spending nine years doing similar work at Buffalo State College. “I always really did want to come back to UB,” Yates says. “I always thought of it as being the place to work or go to school.”

She has a particular connection to UB Law: her daughter Jennifer Yates is a 2013 JD/MBA graduate. “Her experience helped me make the decision,” Yates says. “I could see that the faculty were wonderful, and she shared how much she really loved the opportunity to be here.”

With the official title of major gifts officer, Yates works with alumni who, she says, “have the capacity or the inclination to do something significant, something that will have a great impact. Typically, these are people who are interested in leaving a legacy. I present opportunities for them to become a part of the Law School, to really know the inside scoop and know that their gift is going to have a lasting impact.”

Often that conversation involves planned giving, an expertise she has developed over the course of her career in development. “It’s a journey you work on with people,” she says. “It’s finding out what they want to do first – what do they want to accomplish? And you can keep presenting them with ways to do things that they might not have thought about.”

It’s a process made easier, she says, in working with Law School alumni, because they have a common interest in fostering the excellence of their alma mater. “There are a lot of alumni who love the Law School and are willing to take time out to have those conversations,” Yates says. “If I’m reaching out to 100 people to arrange a visit, I get a flood of responses. It’s not a cold call in the Law School, because of the communications that they’re getting, they’re staying in touch, they’re being invited to things. The law alumni are engaged – I am able to get to the heart of things with them.

“It is wonderful to learn of their interest to volunteer, teach, mentor, support financially. It is equally important to raise awareness and keep them in the fold. It’s more of a relationship than a transaction.”

Yates and her husband, Jeffrey, who also has made a career in development work, now live “out in the country” in East Aurora. Their three daughters, Leah, Eryn and Jennifer, are all grown, and the focus now is on the family’s first grandchildren, Leah’s fraternal twins. They’re 18 months old. There are more than a few pictures of them in Yates’ office. And one as well of the Yateses’ other baby: a tennis-ball-obsessed golden retriever named Bailey.

As a development officer, Yates is on the road a lot – Florida, D.C., Atlanta, New York City and the upstate corridor. But Western New York runs deep. “I am proud to say this is my hometown,” she says. “With all the traveling I do, I love coming back to Buffalo.”

Yates is in 414 O’Brien Hall; she can be reached at (716) 645-2354 or llyates@buffalo.edu.