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Stand-up guy

Thomas E. Black Jr. '79 accepts the Jaeckle Award with a smile and a challenge

The weather was frightful but the company was delightful as UB Law School alumni, administrators and friends gathered in New York City to present the 2011 Edwin F. Jaeckle Award to Thomas E. Black Jr. '79.

The Jan. 28 luncheon and award presentation took place at the elegant Union League Club, where the speakers stood beneath an oil painting of Abraham Lincoln to present the highest honor that UB Law School and its Alumni Association can bestow.

Black is managing partner of Black, Mann & Graham, LLP, a law firm he founded in 1997. Concentrating in mortgage servicing, the firm has over 130 employees with offices in Dallas, Houston and Flower Mound, Texas. Black has served on UB Law's Dean's Advisory Council since 2002 and has been its chairman since 2007. A major gift from Tom and his wife, Bridget, will establish a named professorship at the Law School.

Family members and members of his firm were present for the event, emceed by Dennis R. McCoy '77.

Dean Makau W. Mutua gave an update on progress at the Law School, Francis M. Letro '79, vice chair of the Dean's Advisory Council, shared his own welcome, and University at Buffalo Provost (now President) Satish K. Tripathi noted the tremendous loyalty and support that UB Law alumni feel toward the school.

Dean Mutua's wide-ranging introduction of the honoree converged on one key point. "There is one secret to Tom's success," the dean said, "and that is the way he treats people, whether it be his clients, his colleagues or his staff. I saw this myself when I visited Tom's offices in Dallas, where I could see, as Tom walked around with me to introduce me to various staff members, that he was not acting as a boss but as a colleague."

Black is known for beginning each meeting of the Dean's Advisory Council with a carefully chosen piece of humor, and this day was no exception. He told how he had been wait-listed by the UB Law admissions department and had already enrolled at another law school when, days before classes were to begin, he got a call from Buffalo. "I was the very last student



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accepted off the waiting list that year," he said. "On paper, I was the least intelligent person in my class. That never bothered me until one day, at a Dean's Advisory Council meeting, former Dean Tom Headrick pointed out that, on the whole, the Class of '79 was not a very bright class."

He credited the values of his parents – Tom and Claire Black, who were in the audience – for taking him so far. They scrimped to put him and his brother, Sean, through Notre Dame and UB Law School, and they taught important lessons, Black said, about integrity and respect and humor and generosity and compassion. "This award is truly a recognition of those values rather than this individual," he said, thanking also his children, Ryan (a current UB Law student) and Erin, and "my trophy wife of 27 years, Bridget. Her support, advice and love have made today possible."

Black challenged his fellow alumni to be an active part of UB Law's renaissance, saying, "Volunteer your time, lobby your legislators, write a check. Get involved. Join us in this noble cause."

And he quoted Ralph Waldo Emerson's definition of success, which included "the ability to laugh often and much and to win the respect of intelligent people."

"Today," Black said, "I feel successful."



Bridget Black