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## Following Their Passions: from UB Law to A World of Good in the Community

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# Following their passions

## *From UB Law to a world of good in the community*

**A**ging seniors. Literary-minded folks. Dogs. And one of Buffalo's most important historic churches.

What do they have in common?

They're all benefiting from the volunteer efforts of UB Law faculty and staff members, who are using their training and their hearts to make good things happen in Western New York and beyond.

As the University deepens its strategic strength in community involvement, and even as the Law School's clinical program does enormous good in the community, these individuals have taken on cherished personal causes with time and talent.

Professor **Anthony H. Szczygiel**, for one. He serves on the board of Canopy of Neighbors, a newly formed not-for-profit agency that coordinates services in Buffalo's Elmwood Village neighborhood so senior citizens can remain in their homes and maintain their independence as long as possible.

Says Szczygiel, a specialist in elder law and a resident of the Elmwood Village: "The idea is to take a geographical area, look at the local knowledge base and resources, and ask, what can we do to make this a more livable area? We've got this neighborhood, we've got people who are aging and need more support – what sort of coordination of services can we do to keep people in their homes?"

Many such services are available, he notes – such supports as rides to the grocery store and to medical appointments, and help in dealing with the health care and health insurance system. But the patchwork of these services is crazy-quilt. Canopy of Neighbors aims to coordinate services and fill gaps, partly with volunteers, partly by making available paid workers for specific tasks.

So, for example, the group has identified retired nurses who are will-



Professor Anthony H. Szczygiel is on the board of a neighborhood group.

ing to go with a patient to a doctor's appointment and take notes, then talk to the patient's family, to ensure a flow of good-quality information. Other volunteers and paid providers are available to do home repairs, walk the dog, run errands, help with computers and remote controls, and check in daily with an older person.

Nationally, "a lot of forces are coming together to say, now we have to get serious about this," Szczygiel says. "We have to consciously reinvent the support system that historically people have taken for granted." The home care movement is also growing in response to cost pressures elsewhere in the health care system – it's a whole lot cheaper for people to stay at home, with appropriate support, than to enter an assisted-living facility.

Szczygiel says his work with Canopy of Neighbors is about "using a lawyer's skills in a way that is broader than litigation or traditional legal work. This is mainly a social work model, not a legal model. But it's terribly satisfying to pull together this information. For me, this is one little way of using my energy, my talents and my time to make a difference in the quality of life that's available."

**O**ne look at her German shepherds, Kelsey and Aspen, and it's evident: **Nancy Babb** loves dogs.

Babb, cataloging librarian and Web manager for the Charles B. Sears Law Library, puts that love into action in her work with dog rescue groups and as an SPCA volunteer.

She started at the SPCA as a dog walker, then became part of an enrichment program. "It's designed to help the dogs be as happy as possible in the kennels so they will be happy and healthy when they're adopted," she says. Now she mainly works with people who come in wanting to adopt, helping them choose a dog and helping dog and human scope each other out. "When you're able to help folks make that connection, it's a wonderful thing," she says.

She also volunteers with a rescue organization called Big Dogs Big Hearts, which is kind of like an Underground Railroad for unwanted dogs at risk. Western New York's dog population is well-controlled, she says, and for the SPCA Serving Erie



Librarian Nancy Babb

County, the policy is not to euthanize any healthy animal. But that's not the case in the South, where a lot of hounds, especially, are abandoned as unwanted. Rescue volunteers, coordinated

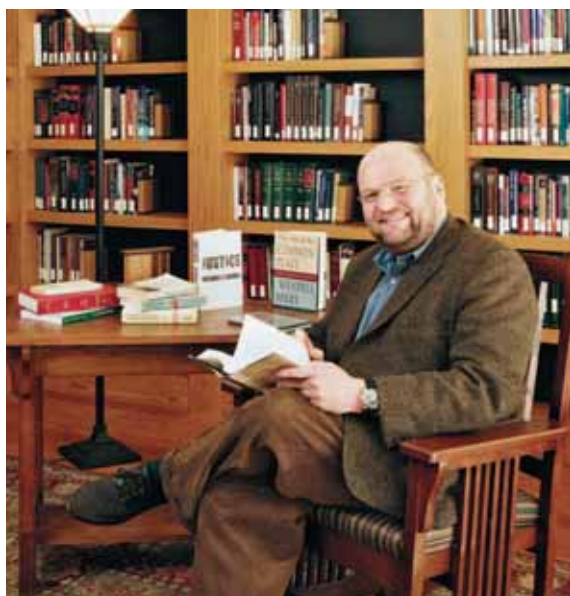
by e-mail, arrange a series of car trips for many of these dogs, taking them from unsafe conditions in states such as Tennessee, Ohio and Georgia and driving them in shifts to Buffalo or on to Rochester, Syracuse, Watertown, even Vermont.

So she'll open the hatchback of her Toyota Yaris and do some driving, sometimes two dogs at a time. "They just curl up and go to sleep, just like my dogs," she says. "It's amazing how

calm they are.”

Her work with animals, she says, also keeps her involved with the law, including a new caucus on animal law as part of the American Association of Law Librarians.

“There’s so much trouble in the world that I can’t do anything about,” Babb says. “I can’t reform state government. But just a few hours of volunteering can make a tremendous difference, and you can see the results, and it’s really gratifying.”



Patrick J. Long '00, lecturer in Legal Analysis, Writing and Research

**P**atrick J. Long '00 brings his experience as an English teacher at the private Nichols School to his work as a legal analysis, research and writing instructor at UB Law. That love of the written word also led him to volunteer with Just Buffalo Literary Center, Buffalo’s premier literary organization. Long was president of the non-profit for three years and remains on its board.

Long first joined the board in

2001, in keeping with the community service push at Hodgson Russ, where he was practicing law at the time. Just Buffalo was struggling financially; “the first couple of years, we weren’t sure if we could keep the lights on,” he says. But under Executive Director Laurie Dean Torrell, the organization has flourished. Now, Long says, “Just Buffalo occupies this really special place in the Buffalo cultural community. We’re the only people who speak for words in Western New York.”

With a minimal staff of three full-time employees and one part-timer, Just Buffalo sponsors the literary reading series called Babel, which has brought to Kleinhans Music Hall such high-profile international writers as Salman Rushdie and V.S. Naipaul. Its Big Night gatherings – poetry, music, video and food – have become hugely popular. And its program to put working writers into the Buffalo Public Schools has, Long says, the potential to change lives. “Kids get to meet a living, working artist, and some kids get the opportunity to see their poems in print. Suddenly they have a different view of what their life might be.

“One of the wonderful things about not-for-profits,” Long says, “is that people in the business community are able to use the skills they’ve learned to help others, and not just for profit. They need expertise in many disciplines.”

**F**or Professor **Stephanie Phillips**, her work with the Buffalo Niagara Freedom Station Coalition is both personal and professional. The coalition is dedicated to restoring the Michigan Street Baptist Church, one of the most significant sites on the Underground Railroad and a church Phillips’ father, the Rev. Porter W. Phillips Jr., served as pastor beginning in 1953.

“I grew up in that church, and I was baptized there,” Professor Phillips says. “My early childhood was in that building at 511 Michigan Ave.”

The church still needs some cosmetic work, she says, “but the board saved it from literally falling down. We got some money to shore up the walls and patch the roof, but we need to begin some more serious restoration.”

Many historic sites, Phillips says, are “trying to get ourselves spruced up and coordinated” in preparation for this year’s national conference in Buffalo of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

The church, she says, is also “a gold mine for the scholar,” and Phillips will work jointly with Professor Lillian Williams, chair of UB’s department of African and African-American studies, to compile an edited volume of essays about its history. They will draw from the papers of the Rev. J. Edward Nash, pastor of the church from 1892 to 1952. “He was an extraordinary person,” Phillips says, “a scholar but also a person who was connected to the major African-American political and social leaders during that period. There is correspondence with Booker T. Washington and other prominent people. He really established the church as a place not only for religious worship but also for social action.”



Professor Stephanie Phillips