

Hon. William Q. Hayes
Class of 1983

Current Onondaga County District Attorney and past Law Honors medalist William Fitzpatrick L’76 warmly remembers William Hayes as an applicant to become an Assistant District Attorney under then Onondaga District Attorney Richard Hennessy. Judge Hayes made it to the final round of interviews along with another candidate, Glenn Suddaby L’85. Deciding between the candidates, Fitzpatrick remembers that Hennessy quipped that, “neither candidate would amount to very much.” Fortunately, Hennessy was proven quite wrong: both would go on to become federal district judges. Indeed, Judge Hayes’ career in the decades since, both before and after he took the bench, tells a very different story.

A native of Bronxville, NY, Judge Hayes has the rare distinction of being a “Triple Orange,” earning all three of his undergraduate and graduate degrees from Syracuse University. He received his Bachelor of Science degree in 1979, and remained on campus to earn both his J.D. from our College of Law in 1983 and an M.B.A. from the Whitman School of Business in 1984.

After graduation, Hayes moved west, beginning in Denver, Colorado, where he worked in private practice for three years. In 1987, he found his calling in public service, moving farther west to San Diego, California, as an Assistant United States Attorney for the Southern District of California. After 11 years, he became the Chief of the Criminal Division, with direct supervisory responsibility over dozens of Assistant United States Attorneys for the prosecution of all federal criminal cases in the district.

He served in that role until 2003, when he was appointed by President George W. Bush, and confirmed, to be a United States District Judge for the Southern District of California. In addition to maintaining an active criminal and civil docket in a notoriously busy district, Judge Hayes has authored dozens of published judicial opinions—including two precedential opinions while serving by designation on the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit.

But Judge Hayes’ judicial experience and legal acumen on the bench tells only part of his story. As Senator Orrin Hatch of Utah noted of his nomination to the federal bench, “despite the demands of his career in public service, he has nevertheless found the time to teach at both the undergraduate and law school levels.” Judge Hayes has held adjunct faculty roles at institutions in both California and Colorado, including at the University of San Diego School of Law and the University of Colorado at Denver.

Maintaining his active interest in legal education, Judge Hayes’ story can only be completed by acknowledging his allegiance to the College of Law, where he has mentored countless students. Miles Bottrill of the College of Law’s development office describes this affection for our law school by noting that Hayes regularly mentors Syracuse students and hires its graduates as both summer interns and law clerks. He routinely breaks from a busy court schedule to visit Syracuse and to judge the final round of the prestigious Mackenzie Hughes LLP Appellate Advocacy Competition.

As his nominator says, “There is no better steward and representative of the College of Law than Judge Hayes. It is true that he is a terrific jurist who remains dedicated to fairness and public service each day. But what makes Judge Hayes especially deserving of this award is his warmth and generosity towards the College of Law and its students. His passion for Syracuse University makes me incredibly proud to hold a degree from the College of Law, as it should for us all.” We proudly second the sentiment.

In recognition of his distinguished career, commitment to public service and education,
and dedication to the College of Law,
Syracuse University College of Law is proud to honor
Judge William Q. Hayes
with the Syracuse Law Honors Medal.