Celebrating Syracuse Law Leaders in Public Service

In Memoriam
H. Douglas Barclay L’61
1932 - 2021
When Joseph R. Biden Jr. L’68 was sworn in as President of the United States, it was a moment of immense pride for Syracuse University and the College of Law. At 11 a.m. on Jan. 20, 2021, President Biden became Syracuse University’s first alumnus to reach the highest public office in the United States and only the seventh US president to graduate from a law school. He also became living proof of what we often tell our students: there is simply no limit to what a Syracuse Law graduate can achieve.

In this special issue of the Stories Book, we mark President Biden’s achievement by interviewing his College of Law classmates, teachers, and friends. For them, his election is the culmination of a lifetime of service and leadership, the beginning of which was evident at Syracuse in the late 1960s. We also highlight the voices of our current students and learn about the strength and inspiration they draw from President Biden’s example.

Alongside President Biden in this issue, you will find profiles of other, exemplary public leaders. Among them are US Rep. John Katko L’88; New York State Minority Leader Will Barclay L’95 and his late father Ambassador H. Douglas Barclay L’61; former FBI Special Agent John Hartmann L’88; US Department of Interior Chief Diversity Officer Erica White-Dunstan L’98; and US Department of State Operations Planning Specialist Adom Cooper L’12.

Their stories vividly illustrate the many reasons why our alumni enter public service: to effect meaningful change; to help the less fortunate; to keep communities safe and prosperous; to act as stewards of public commons; to uphold the rule of law; and to expand professionalism, ethics, and trust in public agencies.

The College of Law prepares students to serve in these roles with dignity, courtesy, wisdom, and responsibility. As Representative Katko says so eloquently, “I learned very quickly that there was a lot of good that someone could do with a law degree, and you could tell the College of Law deliberately worked to instill this lesson in us. All Syracuse Law students should know that it’s a distinct honor to serve the public.”

This edition of the Stories Book also includes our regular features about alumni lives outside the office. Following up on our last issue’s exploration of the connections between literature and the law, we include interviews with alumni-musicians whose experiences integrate music and the law. This topic has special resonance for me. I began playing piano as a second grader, and still enjoy playing to this day. I find music-making to be a great stress therapy, and I enjoy losing myself for an hour or two playing Chopin or Rachmaninoff. I agree with David Miller L’69—himself a successful public sector attorney and accomplished jazz pianist—that a good lawyer is a well-rounded lawyer. “Be multidimensional,” he says, and don’t let go of your creative pursuits.

So, whether you take your inspiration from our stories of public service, the leaders we profile in “View from the Corner Office,” our “Lawyers in Love,” or the wise words of our alumni-musicians, I hope you enjoy this issue. And I hope you note the bright threads woven among these stories that illuminate the many ways that the lives of our College of Law alumni intersect across the years.

If you have a story you’d like to share, please don’t hesitate to reach out to us at SULaw@syr.edu.

Very truly yours,

Craig M. Boise
Dean and Professor of Law
The College of Law is proud of its many alumni who have dedicated all or a portion of their careers to public service, in all of its forms.

State Judiciary
US Attorneys City Councils
County Councils Federal Agencies GSA
Commissions and Bureaus State Agencies
Federal Judiciary Local Agencies Local Judiciary
Health Care Workers Teachers
Chiefs of Staff Legislative Branch DA and ADA Appellate Judge
Community Volunteers Tasks Force and Committees
POTUS Executive Branch US Navy DEI
Department of Commerce Department of Justice
Public Defender Law Enforcement Trial Judges
US Army Department of Transportation
Environmental Protection Social Services
Civil Servants Coast Guard Elected Officials
JAG Fellows NGOs

In this issue of the Stories Book we celebrate alumni in public service.

We begin with reflections by friends, teachers, and classmates of President Joseph R. Biden Jr. L’68 who in January 2021, became the first University and College alumnus to reach the highest office in the United States, and only the seventh US president to graduate from a law school.

We then catch up with other College of Law alumni in public service, including in this section, US Rep. John Katko L’88 and New York State Minority Leader Will Barclay L’95.
In his final speech before leaving for his Jan. 20, 2021, inauguration in Washington, DC, President Joseph R. Biden Jr. L’68 referenced Syracuse, as he recalled the beginning of his life in public service:

“When I came home after graduating from Delaware and then going on to law school in Syracuse, I came home after law school to Wilmington, to our county. And it had gone dark. Dr. [Martin Luther] King was assassinated. Wilmington had been in flames. The National Guard patrolled the streets. That turmoil inspired me to become a public defender: a step I never anticipated would lead me towards this improbable journey” (as quoted in Syracuse Post-Standard, Jan. 19, 2021).

Biden may have called his journey from law student, to public defender, to Delaware councilor, to senator, to vice president, to the first Syracuse alumnus elected to the nation’s highest office as “improbable.” But to some of those who know him best, the steps President Biden first took in law school always pointed in that direction.

In this article, we deliver a profile on President Biden in the words of his Syracuse friends and professors who taught him or later worked with him, and a new generation of students who are inspired by his story and his service.

Themes emerge through these vignettes, traits that can be seen as touchstones for anyone considering public service in any form, including deep empathy that balances focused ambition, an ethical core that underwrites trust in public institutions, and faith and self-assurance that help to overcome obstacles and, in President Biden’s case, multiple tragedies.

Syracuse University and the College of Law are proud to count a President of the United States among our alumni. But public service is no exception among our Orange family. However you serve your community—whether as a volunteer; a public defender; in the military, the judiciary, or public office; or in any other way on the front lines or behind the scenes—we dedicate this profile to you, and we thank you for your service.

“A job is about a lot more than a paycheck. It’s about your dignity. It’s about respect. It’s about your place in your community.” —President Joseph R. Biden Jr. L’68
In Their Words: Classmates and Other Friends

William J. Brodsky L'68
Chairman, Cedar Street Asset Management, LLC; Former Chairman & CEO of Chicago Board Options Exchange (CBOE)

“The only political race I ever lost was to Brodsky,” has come up many times. I didn’t know Joe well during my first semester of law school, but I beat him by one vote even though I had never run for Class President before. Later I learned that Joe had held that position all through his high school and college years.

Years later, I held a fundraiser for him in Chicago with high-level executives such as Jamie Dimon, and Joe would publicly announce: “That SOB Brodsky was the only guy who beat me.” It was my political claim to fame!

I remember conversing with Joe in the school lounge sometime before graduation. All of us were focused on the bar exam and finding a job. I asked him what his plan was post-graduation and he said, “I’m going into politics.” My thought was “that’s not a job!” In hindsight, it is clear that he knew exactly what he wanted to do. At that time to me, success meant finding a legal position.

Our lives intertwined in many ways over the years, and that has led to a long, pleasant, and warm relationship. I supported him financially in every election he was in after graduation. Later, two of my sons interned for Joe. My oldest had interned for a member of the House of Representatives. When my son, Michael, and I ran into Joe as we were walking around on the Hill one day, Joe asked who Michael was interning for, and Mike said the congressman’s name. Joe then said to me, “Your other two sons, Stephen and Jonathan, make: run for governor or the US Senate. The Senate played into his long-term goal.

I first met Joe in 1965 while I was a Resident Advisor in my first year of graduate school. Joe was Assistant Resident Advisor to me in Watson Dormitory. We were only a few doors apart. After activities, we’d spend time talking as peers, and we became friends. In fact, I knew of Joe’s ambition to run for political office early on. In 1972, he had a decision to make: run for governor or the US Senate. The Senate played into his long-term goal.

I joined his ’72 campaign as a volunteer, helping with communications and advertising. That period further solidified my relationship with Joe and the Biden family. When he became a senator in January of 1973, I was appointed Administrative Aide (similar to a Deputy Chief of Staff today) for his Washington, DC, office, and I commuted with him to Delaware for a while. When you travel with someone, you get to know them in a way that others don’t.

There’s consistency in his personality. Joe’s the same person in public as in private. He is smart, confident, charming, and opinionated. He stands by his convictions. He’s strong in his ambitions, but not arrogant. His confidence was always contagious, without a hint of superiority. His presidency brings attention and pride to the University, and it bucksthe Ivy League trend.

Clayton Hale L'68
Partner and Co-General Counsel, Mackenzie Hughes LLP

Joe and I were good friends. We had a lot of fun hanging out together. He’s a nice guy. In law school, it was obvious he wanted to get into politics. He had a stutter, so he spent a lot of time talking to high school groups. As a little kid, you might dream about being president, but somewhere along the way that changes, so it’s an awesome thought that someone I used to hang out with holds that office.

Jeffrey Harris L'68
Managing Partner, Rubin, Winston, Diercks, Harris & Cooke LLP

I recall being in the White Hall lounge one day and asking Joe what he was going to do after law school. He said, “Go home and be elected to the Senate.” That answer stuck with me—it wasn’t the answer I expected: we were just looking for jobs and to pass the bar!

As a classmate, he was an affable guy. The same traits you see today were how he was in law school: a regular guy, fun to be with, easy to talk to. He’s made for this moment. He has the qualities that are needed, and they are the same ones he had in law school.

Two years out of law school, I ran into Joe at a New York City Bar meeting. He was running for Newcastle County Council. Why? Joe explained that Delaware is a small state and Newcastle County is the premier county, so it would give him statewide recognition if he ran for Class President, he made sure to meet everyone, and he got along with everyone.

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Ed Moses L’68
Partner, Mackenzie Hughes LLP
Joe was conscientious. He and I were close in law school. I met him on our first day and asked what he wanted to do with his law degree. Joe’s idea was to run for office. His goal was clear: to get into politics in order to help his community.

When he was a 1L, as a Resident Advisor, he was always looking out for the isolated kids. He’s a compassionate guy, and he genuinely cared about the well-being of those who didn’t seem to fit in easily. He helped them tremendously. His empathy serves him well.

Robert Osgood L’68
Partner, Sullivan & Cromwell LLP (Ret.)
Looking back now on his journey to Washington, DC, Joe’s rise in politics seems very natural. He was personable as a student, with a winning personality and the best smile in politics. He was friends with everyone! In one class, when he was called upon by the professor, the professor said “Mr. Bidden.” In 1965, it was gutsy for a first-year, first-semester law student to correct a stern professor in class, even if was over the pronunciation of one’s name. It was slightly brash but done with a dazzling smile.

I recall that Joe was co-chair of the students’ Speaker’s Committee, and he’d look for opportunities to go into the city of Syracuse and speak to people. It was an indicator he’d pursue a political career. He was good at it. His character is not a fabrication, it’s real. I’ve been in the Senate lunchroom with him and seen how he jokes and throws his arm around Republican members as if they were brothers.

“I’m very proud for the University; having an alum at the highest level will be very good for the law school’s future.” —President Biden, Congratulations video to the Syracuse University Class of 2021.

John T. (Jack) Owens L’68
Former Deputy Attorney General of Pennsylvania
Chairman, Mediguide International LLC
Joe and I spent up to an hour and a half in the locker room talking during our first encounter. We hit it off. I grew up on Long Island and had some interest in politics, but here’s some guy from Delaware saying he was going to be a senator. He’s a compassionate guy, and he genuinely cared about the well-being of those who didn’t seem to fit in easily. He helped them tremendously. His empathy serves him well.

SYRACUSE LAW LEADERS IN PUBLIC SERVICE

Joe and his first wife Neilia lived on Stinard Avenue (Neilia taught at the nearby Bellevue School) and I lived on South Geddes Street. He got to know all the guys in the neighborhood.

I made lifelong friends here at the law school, including my best friend Jack Owens, who ended up being my law partner and my brother-in-law.” —President Biden, Congratulations video to the Syracuse University Class of 2021.

President Biden speaks at the 2016 Law Commencement.

Joe may not have been too serious about books in law school but over time, he became a very serious person. He does not get enough credit for how bright he is. The truth is he’s very smart and strategic. He’s focused on getting things done correctly, and he’s a natural-born leader who draws people to him. His son, Beau, was the same way.

His first wife Neilia deserves a lot of credit for helping him pass the Delaware bar on the first try. Delaware was one of the tougher bars at the time, and she helped him prepare for the test. Neilia was a star. Plus, Joe had the boys [Hunter and Beau] to keep him motivated.

After Neilia died, my wife—and Joe’s sister—Valerie, became the boys’ second mother. When Valerie and I were engaged, we moved in with Joe and the boys, and we lived together for two to three years. During these tough times, not a single cross word was passed between us.

Richard Boddie L’70
Vice President, Coast Community College Association
I remember my Orientation days in 1967. It was crowded in the old building, but I heard what I thought was this Black guy talking. I couldn’t wait to meet this brother. It turned out to be Joe Biden holding court in the room. We became close friends. I remember political discussions in the law school, and it would often be me and him “against” 10 classmates. Joe and I were generally the only two or three voices in any debate regarding what is now called “social justice,” and know that I am still trying to understand and accept that term.

In law school, I knew Joe would have success in politics. He said even back then he’d be the youngest senator ever. He had name recognition in Delaware because his father had the largest Chevy dealership in the state: Biden Motors. In fact, in my day, the law school parking lot had lots of Chevy Corvettes in it—about 15 to 20 of us had them: we got them at cost through Joe!

The Hon. Joseph E. Fahey L’75
Onondaga County Court (Ret.)
The friendship between Judge Fahey and Joe Biden began back in the 1960s. The pair lived in Syracuse’s Strathmore neighborhood, while Joe finished law school and while Judge Fahey was heading into his freshman year at Onondaga Community College.

Joe and his first wife Neilia lived on Stinard Avenue (Neilia taught at the nearby Bellevue School) and I lived on South Geddes Street. He got to know all the guys in the neighborhood.

He’d play stick-ball and basketball with us. Anytime the Biden name comes up, we talk about how Joe was my neighbor in law school and what a nice, great guy he is. (As told to the Syracuse Post-Standard, March 23, 2019, and WSYR, Jan. 19, 2021).
Robert M. Hallenbeck G’80, L’83
Chair, College of Law Board of Advisors
Becton, Dickinson & Co. (Ret.)

In 2009, when Joe Biden was sworn in as Vice President, I took even greater pride in my degree from the College of Law. Every time I saw the life-sized cutout of him grinning in the Admissions office, I couldn’t help but return his smile.

Twelve years later, although few of us have been able to get to campus in a long while, I still smile when I recall that cutout. Along with all of the other Orange alumni, I feel immense pride in the accomplishments of someone who walked the same halls I did.

President Biden’s election reinforces the pride I feel in the accomplishments of so many of our amazing fellow alumni. From judges to legislators, from entrepreneurs to corporate executives, from the military to public service, and from firms large and small, the College continues to admit, educate, and graduate individuals who through their time, talent, and treasure have made their communities better places.

Michael Hoeflich
John H. & John M. Kane Distinguished Professor of Law,
University of Kansas School of Law
Dean, Syracuse University College of Law, 1988-1994

I got to know the Bidens when they stayed with me while Beau was a law student and I was Dean. Speaking of Beau, he was my Research Assistant during his 2L and 3L years. There was pressure on him coming from a public family, to be sure.

One memory I have of Joe and his wife, Jill, was of a dinner together at the Brewster Inn in Cazenovia. I had asked the owner to find us an area away from the main dining room, to help avoid the predictable traffic jam. As we walked through the dining room, Joe spent an hour going from table to table since he was so friendly and wanted to connect with people.

“One The University, its law school, its public policy school, and all its components, value, inspire, and nurture those who serve the public in all walks of life.”

—The Hon. James E. Baker

The Hon. James E. Baker
Director, Institute for Security Policy and Law

One of the things I respect about the University and President Biden is they share a common belief that public service has something to do with serving the public, not oneself. Service is not measured by the attainment of a particular position, but by what you do in the position you attain.

In the case of President Biden, this is reflected in his response to the COVID pandemic. He has mobilized the nation; he has communicated clearly and consistently; and he is relying on fact-based science, public health specialists, and logistics professionals.

I also value and respect all University and College of Law graduates who have gone on to serve the public, whether in the military, Peace Corps, public health work, teaching, or elective office. I respect the College as much for the hundreds of lawyers it has sent into government service as much as I do for the emergence of the 46th President. I do not presume to speak for him, but I suspect President Biden would agree.

The University, its law school, its public policy school, and all its components, value, inspire, and nurture those who serve the public in all walks of life. There is no better academic institution in the world to prepare to do so. And now that Syracuse Law becomes only the fifth law school to graduate a President of the United States and Commander-in-Chief, we have added an exclamation mark to this long tradition.

From left, Professor Emeritus Tom Maroney, President Biden, Don MacNaughton, and an unidentified guest at the Class of 1968’s 30th reunion.
Professor Emeritus William C. Banks

I first met Joe in 1992, when he came to campus to visit Beau. In 1994, he asked me to serve as Special Counsel to the Senate Judiciary Committee that was considering the nomination of Stephen Breyer to the Supreme Court. Even though Justice Breyer’s confirmation was not in doubt, Joe treated the task with the seriousness and dedication that he devotes to all of his public service.

At some point, I either asked him or he volunteered why he was working so hard to learn about Justice Breyer and the issues that he would confront on the Court. He reminded me that he and the Senate need to take the confirmation of justices seriously so as to educate Americans about the role of the Supreme Court. Throughout the process and on the floor of the Senate on the day of confirmation, I could see Joe doing what he does best—providing a basic civics lesson to the American people.

Joe demonstrates a seriousness of purpose; a dedication to our fundamental values of decency, humility, and empathy; and a commitment to make our democracy just a little better.

President Biden’s ascension shows that hard work, persistence, and perseverance has its rewards, and that a law student from Syracuse can go toe-to-toe with anyone and come out on top. No one has overcome the tragedies and picked himself up as Joe has. There has never been a more dedicated public servant. All of us can learn from his example.

Ken Knight L’21
President, Student Bar Association, Class of 2021

There have only been 46 presidents, and to have one of them from the College of Law is historic. We must celebrate our victories. Public service has always been a staple of the College. To see this commitment reaffirmed at the highest level is a confirmation for all who are connected to the College.

President Biden also demonstrates that, with public service, there is always more work to be done. There are times when you will be called upon to follow and other times when you will be called upon to lead, but leadership does not outweigh service. Service must be to all the citizens of our country, and I hope to see action that is very intentional and impactful for the communities that have been disparately impacted over countless generations of oppression.

I hope this administration leads us towards equality and beyond performative justice. I am proud to put that challenge in the hands of a College of Law graduate, and I know that greatness awaits all of our graduates.

Troy Parker L’21
President, Class of 2021

When I think that a College of Law alum is President of the United States, I’m inspired and so proud. President Biden’s stature highlights the strong academic work we are conducting at Syracuse.

It shows that with drive and passion, the degree we’re receiving can make a large impact on people’s lives. And it reinforces that a J.D. gives us immense power and privilege, and that we all have a duty to use it for good. It is an honor to share the same alma mater as the President. Hopefully, he isn’t the last.

President Biden and Professor Emeritus William C. Banks in 2016.

President Biden meets with Syracuse Law students in Dineen Hall, 2016.
Gabriella Kielbasinski, Class of 2022  
President, Class of 2022  
President Biden’s commitment to public service is evidence of something that is already made clear within the College of Law every day: that its students, past and present, have a regular and renewed commitment to serving the community at large. It is encouraging to think that our College of Law played a role in shaping the President who is to meet this unprecedented moment. It makes you think, for what future moment is my present education preparing me?

“It makes you think, for what future moment is my present education preparing me?”  
—Gabriella Kielbasinski, Class of 2022

Kendall Anderson, Class of 2023  
President, Class of 2023  
We have a vast alumni network, people who are dedicated to serving their communities and their country, and President Biden is one of those alums. Whether it was his defense of public housing in the 70s or his work with President Barack Obama on the Affordable Care Act, he has a desire to defend his community, a desire I feel is shared by many in the College of Law community.

President Biden’s election reaffirms my belief that we can do anything we set our minds to. We can be the change we want to see from the world and push it forward. Seeing an alum in this prominent position is nothing short of inspirational.

Chancellor Syverud on President Biden

In his address to the Class of 2021, President Biden talked about his love for Syracuse University and his appreciation for the education he received here. I can attest to the truth of these words and the passion with which he lives them. He credits the College of Law with instilling the confidence that launched his life in public service. He also expressed unwavering faith in our students’ ability to take their Syracuse education and transform their lives, their communities, and the world.

That faith and optimism are character traits that President Biden has exhibited since he was a young law student. I am struck by how the new generation of law students reflect those characteristics in their comments. Their sense of purpose is infectious and inspiring.

President Biden has talked about his feeling, upon graduating from the College of Law in 1968, that he and his classmates were entering public life at a critical inflection point in our history. He believes this is also true for the present generation of Syracuse University graduates. To declare victory over the coronavirus pandemic, to advance justice and equity for all, and to surmount the global challenges we face will require all the talent, hope, and courage our graduates have to offer. It will take greatness.

As we reflect on an alumnus’ ascent to the highest elected office in our land, we can all be proud that Syracuse University produces graduates who rise to the highest levels indeed. We should all stand taller as Orange alumni knowing that leaders and luminaries continue to build their foundation for making an impact here at Syracuse University.

Dean Boise on President Biden

One of the enduring phrases from President Biden’s inaugural address is, “We will lead not merely by the example of our power but by the power of our example.” Reading their reflections on Biden’s presidency, I know that our students have taken this phrase to heart. They recognize and share his qualities of hope, resilience, and confidence whether or not their politics align with President Biden’s. These are traits that those who know President Biden personally recognize as a constant, driving force throughout his life.

Perhaps these shared qualities are driven by a sense of urgency and destiny. Biden himself has drawn parallels between his generation—graduating into the tumult of the late 1960s—and this one: the Boomers and the Zoomers, if you will. Today’s graduates are facing, as Biden notes elsewhere in his inaugural address, a “historic moment of crisis and challenge.” I have no doubt our students can and will meet these numerous challenges and summon the willpower to turn them into triumph. But they can’t do it alone.

Let’s not forget the role we must play as alumni and supporters of our great College, the role President Biden remembers his alma mater playing in his journey. Whether it be service to your community, ethical and inclusive leadership, or offering guidance to aspiring lawyers that cultivates them beyond the classroom, our students appreciate and draw strength from what you do.

As we look forward, let’s strengthen our resolve to support our students in whatever ways we’re able. And like you, they will not only make us proud of their leadership, they will continue to pay it forward.
Elected for a fourth term in the US House of Representatives in November 2020, Rep. John Katko L’88 serves New York’s 24th Congressional District, which includes all of Onondaga, Cayuga, and Wayne counties, as well as the western portion of Oswego County in Central New York.

Currently, Congressman Katko is Ranking Member on the House Committee on Homeland Security—leveraging his years as a federal prosecutor litigating narcotics and gang cases—as well as a member of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

Serving as a Congressman is the latest position in a distinguished public service career for the Central New York native. Today, Congressman Katko resides in Camillus with his wife, Robin, a registered nurse, and is the proud father of Sean (currently a second lieutenant in the US Army), Logan, and Liam.

After earning degrees from Niagara University and the College of Law, Congressman Katko began his career at Washington, DC, firm Howrey & Simon. He then worked at the US Securities and Exchange Commission before becoming an Assistant US Attorney for the US Department of Justice, serving as Special Assistant US Attorney in the Eastern District of Virginia and with the DOJ’s Criminal Division, Narcotics and Dangerous Drug Section. In this capacity, he served as a Senior Trial Attorney on the US-Mexico border in El Paso, TX, and in San Juan, PR.

Later, Congressman Katko returned to Central New York as a federal organized crime prosecutor in Syracuse for the US Attorney’s Office in the Northern District of New York, spearheading high-level narcotics prosecutions.

Throughout his 20 year career as a federal prosecutor, Congressman Katko was repeatedly tapped to train prosecutors in Central and South America, Eastern Europe, and Russia. He also was selected to serve as the only foreign prosecutor to lead an investigation and prosecution of government troops in Albania who shot and killed numerous protestors. He was awarded top prosecutor awards by three different Attorney Generals.

Notably, in the mid-2000s, Congressman Katko led the Syracuse Gang Violence Task Force, which employed the Racketeer Influenced Corrupt Organizations Act, along with other federal statutes, to prosecute gang-related crime in the city. Between 2003 and 2012, the Task Force prosecuted 90 suspected members of six Syracuse street gangs.

While first running for Congress in 2014, Congressman Katko referred to his work breaking up Syracuse gang violence in a Syracuse Post-Standard interview: “If I can get gang bangers to cooperate, I can certainly work with the knuckleheads in Washington and help them straighten things out.”

We recently caught up with Congressman Katko to ask him about his service to his community and the nation, how Syracuse Law prepared him for life as a prosecutor and Congressman, and what it takes to lead in Washington, DC, in the midst of a highly partisan atmosphere.
What led you to pursue a law degree at Syracuse Law?
As a student, I quickly developed an interest in public service and found that I enjoyed working on issues that supported my community and our nation. That, combined with the appreciation I always had for Syracuse University growing up, sort of instinctively led me back to the College of Law after my undergraduate degree, and that turned out to be a great decision.

When did you know you wanted to be a federal prosecutor and later seek public office?
I still remember the first time I was at the podium while serving at the US Securities and Exchange Commission and was introduced as “John Katko on behalf of the United States of America.” That was the moment where everything clicked for me, and I knew what I wanted to do.

How did Syracuse Law prepare you to become a federal prosecutor?
I remember how fired up I would get for trial practice classes, and how much that feeling stuck with me. Those classes really prepared me to pursue a career as a prosecutor.

Why is public service important to you, and what should the public understand about the role of public servants in a democracy?
As a federal prosecutor, it was drilled into your head to always be non-political and to only look at the facts. Integrity and ethics always came first and foremost, and it was important to remember that I was in that role to seek justice, not just to win cases.

Those principles date back to my earliest classes at Syracuse Law. It was hammered into our heads as students that upholding the law is a tremendous responsibility to be entrusted with, and therefore we have to be as objective as possible in every decision we make.

Now, as a member of Congress, I still make every decision by analyzing the facts and assessing the evidence in front of me. Sometimes, that leads to a choice that’s not popular with everyone, but ultimately, I’m here to do what’s right.

Many alumni serve the public—from your perspective, is that a coincidence or the result of a Syracuse Law education?
Syracuse provides a lot of opportunities to serve our communities, such as the legal clinics and other chances to deliver pro bono service to give back and make a difference. I learned very quickly that there was a lot of good that someone could do with a law degree, and you could tell the College of Law deliberately worked to instill this lesson in us.

All Syracuse Law students should know that it’s a distinct honor to serve the public and to realize our ability to have a positive impact on society. There’s no better reward than being able to help people and feel good about the work done along the way.

In your opinion, what makes a good leader? How do these skills relate to your work as a Congressman?
People have to recognize when they don’t have all the answers and learn to value other sides of an argument. In Congress, I interact with a lot of different opinions on just about every issue imaginable. Whether I’m listening to constituents or working on a bill with members of Congress representing different districts across the country, I always want to keep an open mind and find ways to make compromises.

I’ve been fortunate enough to be elected to Washington, DC, and to advocate for policies that help my district. It turns out that writing off half your colleagues as enemies isn’t the most effective strategy to get this done, so I’ve been willing to work with anyone, regardless of party, who shares my concern for an issue.

What are your thoughts on a fellow alum being elected President while you are serving in Congress?
I’m proud of our school. It’s clear that the College provided both President Biden and me with a high-quality education that we’ve relied on for our successes. It’s exciting to see that we’re just two of the many distinguished alumni who have come out of Syracuse Law, and I hope the school continues the tradition of providing a superb education that helps students do good in the world.

How would you define your legacy in public service?
I’m a normal guy who’s been granted some extraordinary responsibilities in my life. I guess I want to be remembered as someone who never let these get to his head and as someone who used his good fortune to give back to the community he grew up in and loved.
Will Barclay L’95
A River Runs Through It
Will Barclay L’95 Reflects on His Family’s Legacy of Stewardship, Leadership, and Public Service

"Think about it. Nine generations. It’s an incredible fact." William A. Barclay L’95, New York State Assemblyman from the 120th District, who currently serves as Assembly Minority Leader, is referring to his deep roots in the small Central New York village of Pulaski, NY. That’s where his family settled on a farm in the early 19th century, on the banks of the Salmon River, known worldwide for its excellent fishing.

Today, Leader Barclay and his family—wife Margaret and sons Harry and George—live on that 500-acre farm, as does his mother Sara (known as “Dee Dee”), wife of the late H. Douglas Barclay L’61. A Life Trustee of Syracuse University and a former New York State Senator in Albany, NY (1965-1984), who served as US Ambassador to El Salvador from 2003 to 2006, Ambassador Barclay passed in March 2021 (see the In Memoriam for Ambassador Barclay on page 60).

If there’s a thread that connects bucolic Pulaski to Syracuse to Albany to El Salvador, it’s the Barclay family’s stewardship of the natural beauty and resources that abound on and around their homestead. In recent generations, care for the land has grown into a sense of duty and service for the people and communities who share and depend on those resources.

“We’re blessed to have these natural resources,” says Leader Barclay. “These are some of the best fisheries in the world. We do our best to protect them, and that really informs how we take care of our property. It’s something that’s in the blood.”

As asked whether stewardship of the land informed his decision to go into public service, Leader Barclay points out that while “people provide for their communities in many ways, be it volunteering at church or for not-for-profits. I naturally enjoy politics, which has given me the ability to be a voice for the community where I grew up, that has shaped so many generations of my family.”

Something Deeper
That enjoyment may come from the fact that Leader Barclay—the youngest of five children—had his formative years during the peak of his father’s political career.

“I’m the only one of my siblings who became an attorney and went into public service,” he explains. “When my older siblings left, I was still with my father. I admired and respected what he did, and that was a big influence on me. I always liked the political side of things, and I would go to events with dad.”

But before Leader Barclay followed his father’s footsteps to Albany, there was Syracuse University, another enduring family legacy. “I am an Orange fan, so going to Syracuse was an easy decision,” he observes. “My dad did have an influence on that decision, but there’s also something deeper that runs in my family.”

Leader Barclay notes that he has uncles who are Orange alumni, “and my grandfather on my mother’s side was a three-sport letterman.” Then there are Leader Barclay’s sisters—Susan Barclay G’91 and Dorothy Chynoweth G’88—and niece Sara Chynoweth ’15 and nephew William Chynoweth ’18, G’19.

Of course, many College of Law graduates will know Ambassador Barclay for the White Hall library named in his honor. “It was sometimes tough to be studying in the Barclay Library at 2 a.m.,” says Leader Barclay, noting the portrait of his father that hung outside. “I got a little ribbing for that.”
A Good Feeling

It’s hard to underestimate the influence Ambassador Barclay had on the University. As a Trustee (1979-2007; Chairman, 1992-1998), he chaired the committee that selected Kenneth “Buzz” Shaw as the 10th Chancellor and President, and he was awarded the George Arents Pioneer Medal for Excellence in Law and Public Service in 1984. He also led the University’s first major capital campaign, surpassing the initial $100 million goal by $60 million, enabling endowed professorships, merit scholarships, and other expansive academic goals to be realized. Ambassador Barclay also served as a College of Law Board of Advisors member.

Nevertheless, Leader Barclay admits there was some trepidation when he stepped on the campus after receiving his undergraduate degree from St. Lawrence University in Canton, NY. “Syracuse University is a much bigger institution, and I didn’t know what to expect,” he says. “But starting with Dean Michael Hoeflich, I always felt I was part of a community at Syracuse Law, which was a big concern for me coming from a small place like Canton, but I made great friends immediately.”

Leader Barclay recalls that in particular professors William C. Banks and Robert Rabin made him feel at home. “I’ve done a few things in my life that left me feeling unfulfilled, but that was not my experience at Syracuse Law. I made great friends, got a great legal education, and I left law school with a good feeling and an important foundation.”

Respect & Compassion

After graduating law school, Leader Barclay served as a clerk for the Hon. Roger J. Miner of the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, before joining the law firm of Hiscock & Barclay, now Barclay Damon, the firm his father first joined in 1961. Whereas Ambassador Barclay specialized in banking and administrative law, the younger Barclay—now a partner—concentrates his practice on business law with an emphasis on contracts and mergers and acquisitions.

First elected New York’s 120th district Assemblyman in 2002, Leader Barclay has risen through the ranks of his Republican conference, taking on a number of key roles. Before being elected Minority Leader by his colleagues in January 2020, he served as Deputy Minority Leader, Assistant Minority Leader, Chair of the Minority Joint Committee, Vice Chair of the Minority Program Committee, and Ranking Minority Member on the Ways and Means Committee.

Asked what influence his father has had on his leadership style in Albany, Leader Barclay is clear: “I watched how my father would manage and treat people. He always treated them with respect and compassion.”

Like his impact on Syracuse University, Ambassador Barclay left an enduring mark across the New York State. In his 19 years in the Senate, he was responsible for more than 500 pieces of legislation, and he served as Chair of the Committee on Judiciary, the Select Task Force on Court Reorganization, and the Senate Republican Majority Conference.

“It’s an honor”

Referring to his own ascension in the state capitol and Republican conference, Leader Barclay says he always looks “at where I can be most helpful, and sometimes that means moving up the ladder.” He notes his father did the same, especially when the call came from President George W. Bush to represent his nation as Ambassador to El Salvador. “My father loves local and state government, but he also thought he could do something on the national level too.”

After his post ended in 2006, Ambassador Barclay turned his attention toward home and to the Central New York economy. He became President of the Metropolitan Development Association (now the CenterState Corporation for Economic Opportunity) and spearheaded the ambitious Vision2010 regional economic plan.

Ambassador Barclay’s collaboration with multiple stakeholders during his time at MDA again left a deep impression on his youngest son. “He’d get really involved, take everyone seriously, and talk to people from the other side of the aisle,” recalls Leader Barclay. “He always spoke highly of them, listened to them, and was empathetic toward them. That kind of understanding is a skill.”

When asked what drives his passion for public service, Leader Barclay turns again to his abiding love of Central New York and a desire to help its citizens. “Pulaski has given us a lot, and there’s something about giving back,” he explains. “I’m rewarded by helping constituents because that’s one thing you can really do. Anything I can do to help, I’m willing to do it. I don’t see it as a burden. It’s an honor.”

And is the torch of public service being passed to the next generation? Yes, says Leader Barclay. “I want my kids to be happy and to feel as though they are contributing something to their community as my parents have done,” he says. “We don’t take things for granted. It takes work, effort, and compassion, but it makes me happy. That’s why I continue to do it. And I know my father felt the same way.”

“Be Flexible”: Will Barclay on Working with the NYS Assembly Minority Conference

There’s no doubt that tough yet finely honed leadership skills are required for the rough and tumble politics of New York State, yet Assembly Minority Leader Will Barclay L’95 knows that getting things done in Albany means listening, collaboration, and not digging in your heels too hard.

“When I have ideas about what I want our conference to accomplish, I strategize on how to do that, get input from staff and policy experts, and then meet with the conference to go over these strategies and get their perspective. You can find you are not always right, and you must be open to other viewpoints. Sometimes you have to let things go.”

“In other words, don’t be so rigid that you can’t adapt. In my business, if you are too rigid, you will lose the faith of your conference. So try to be flexible and don’t take it too personally. If that process means you come out with a better policy, that’s good.”
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- Virtually Litigating: Pros and Cons of Litigation Practices Developed During COVID-19 (CLE – 1 credit)
- Lunch with Judiciary and Alumni Keynote speaker: The Hon. James P. Murphy L’84, NYS Administrative Judge, Fifth Judicial District.
- Supreme Court Preview and Panel Discussion with David G. Savage of the Los Angeles Times (CLE – 1 credit)

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Keep track of events and connect with fellow alumni during LAW with the free Whova App. Visit the reunion website for instructions.

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**ALWAYS READY TO TAKE A RISK**  
Ahmed Hmeedat LL.M.'16 on Using Law and Art to Empower Fellow Palestinians

In his remarks during the Class of 2016 Commencement exercises—at which now President Joseph R. Biden Jr. L'68 delivered the formal address—Ahmed Hmeedat LL.M. ’16 told of growing up a refugee and the importance of the rule of law.

In his speech, he noted the ongoing injustices in Israeli-occupied Palestine, and at its conclusion, he shook Biden’s hand and offered him an open invitation to visit Bethlehem. Biden welcomed the gesture, as well as a gift of a charcoal portrait of himself that Hmeedat had drawn.

After his studies in Syracuse, Hmeedat moved to Washington, DC, to support humanitarian work, first as a legal assistant with Physicians for Human Rights and then at Usilaw, a firm that provides immigration services and solutions.

Although helping immigrants was rewarding, Hmeedat decided to return home, choosing to work at his former undergraduate university, Al-Quds Bard College for Arts and Sciences in Jerusalem. In addition to the role he plays as a member of the College’s administration, he has developed and now teaches a course incorporating his two passions: art and law.

We recently caught up with Hmeedat to see how his career is progressing in Palestine ...

How has your training at the College of Law helped in your current position?

Law school taught me to be organized, professional, and a hard worker. During my time at Syracuse, I familiarized myself with a rigorous study style. I’d spend five to six hours daily at the library after classes. That became a habit even on brutally snowy days.

Also, serving as the LL.M. senator and representative for the Student Bar Association helped my professional journey. In my current role—as an Al-Quds Bard College communication and recruitment officer and a lecturer in human rights and international law—I am constantly applying what I learned at Syracuse Law on different levels. For example, in law school I organized student events, whereas now I organize college fairs and tours. Also at Syracuse, I wrote long legal research papers and practiced presentations; now I teach students the same writing, research, and presentation skills.

What is your fondest memory at the College of Law?

Sharing the Commencement podium with law school deans and Joe Biden and delivering a Commencement speech was a very profound experience. I got to speak to a huge crowd and truly be myself. I loved it because I sensed the trust that my fellow LL.M. students put in me to represent them at that landmark event.

Outside of school, I greatly enjoyed exploring Central New York, and I miss the area’s natural beauty. On Fridays and Saturdays, I hosted gatherings at my home on Ostrom Avenue for international students. These were fun times to socialize and cook together.

What advice do you have for a foreign lawyer who wishes to study in the United States?

I do not like to advise. Advising is about telling people what to do and what not to do. It is like forcing others to try a shoe that only fits my foot. This would not be practical or helpful. I’d rather suggest some thoughts that people might benefit from:

1. Have a five- to 10-year plan thought out and written down before you graduate.
2. Find a mentor and ask about their experience.
   For instance, if you have a passion to be a criminal law attorney, find someone who is working in that field. You can get connections with many alumni through the law school’s LinkedIn page. Then, ask that person for a Zoom or phone call. The goal is to find someone in the same field you dream to work in. When you meet, ask how they feel about their current role and what a typical workday is like. Next, visualize yourself in that position and ask if this is what you envision for yourself? If yes, pursue that path, knowing the law school will point you like a torpedo towards that goal. If no, adjust your plan and use the school to further explore the things you are passionate about.
3. Ensure balance. Try to manage your time to include room for shopping for healthy food, working out, and socializing. Expand your networking circle outside of the master’s degree class. Meet with J.D. students and participate in other clubs. Such connections might help refer you to jobs. You never know when you will use these connections, so always network.

You’ve been described as a gifted artist and presented Biden with a portrait at your Commencement. Do you think it might be hanging at the White House?!

It was the idea of the law school to present my work as a gift from the college. I visited the art store in Syracuse for nearly 30 minutes to buy the needed supplies. I used charcoal to create the portrait, which took me at least four hours. I sat for quite a while to think about how I could make a detailed portrait that would resemble him. It can be quite easy to create a portrait but to achieve resemblance is quite challenging.

I wasn’t allowed to present the portrait directly to Biden, but it was given to one of his consultants who said it would be delivered as a gift. I can’t say if it is now hanging at the White House, but it would be great if I could know where it ended up!

How would you describe the relationship between art and law?

For some, the relationship between art and law might be arbitrary; however, I have found a compromise. I see art as creativity—thinking out of the box, being adventurous, and willing to take risks. Law is about rationalization, circumstances, and reasoning. I like to blend these.

Regarding law, I am always ready to take risks and jump into new tracks. I have used both vocations to create the syllabus for a new course, which I taught in spring 2021. In this interdisciplinary course—“Resistance: Art of Activism and Human Rights”—I bridge the gap between art and law. Students read texts about the Palestinian citizenship legislation, and they study art projects that empower their sense of citizenship.

“"In my current role, I am constantly applying what I learned at Syracuse Law on different levels.”

Ahmed Hmeedat’s LL.M.’16 charcoal portrait of then-Vice President Joseph R. Biden L’68 was given to Biden at the 2016 Commencement.
The College of Law has produced extraordinary leaders throughout its history. Today, our alumni include a president of the United States, congressional representatives, a state attorney general, college presidents, numerous judges, and other public servants, as well as business and nonprofit executives, entrepreneurs, managing partners, and many others in positions of influence.

In this second edition of The View from the Corner Office, we celebrate not only the journeys four alums have taken from the classroom to the executive suite but also their exemplary public service, on local, national, and international stages.

Along the way, we learn that for an Orange lawyer, almost any career benefits from a Syracuse law diploma. Look for more C-suite stories in future issues of the Stories Book!
A career changes go, John Hartmann’s move from a special agent for the Federal Bureau of Investigation to Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of Bed Bath & Beyond and President of buybuy BABY may seem unusual, but in this interview he explains the organic logic of his path and the skills he easily transferred from public service to corporate leadership.

Hartmann’s path from the FBI to BBB began with a senior role at Cardinal Health, a health care services and logistics firm, where he leveraged his skills as an operative and his knowledge of the pharmaceutical industry he’d gained at the Bureau. His time at Cardinal Health led him to the logistics of the home improvement industry, first serving as Chief Executive Officer of Mitre10 then joining The Home Depot and HD Supply, where he had roles in technology, strategy, and mergers and acquisitions.

Tapped to be President and Chief Executive Officer of True Value Company, he led the company—one of the world’s largest hardware wholesalers—through its transition from a dealer-owned co-operative to a network of independent retailers. Under his leadership, True Value implemented a successful “hyperlocal” marketing model and doubled the size of its sales force. It is no surprise, therefore, that Hartmann’s journey eventually led him to his current position at one of the largest houseware goods specialty stores in the nation.

Did you imagine in law school that you’d eventually land in a corporate leadership role?
I knew that my Syracuse education would prepare me for an exciting career, but I didn’t know I’d end up in a senior leadership role. As I progressed through law school, I was preparing for parallel career options. One of them was I was preparing to be a practicing attorney in a law firm or company, but I was also interested in federal law enforcement and intelligence. After I took the bar exam, I became an FBI agent.

I’ve always had a passion for leadership. I was a member of the Army Reserve and President of the Law Student Senate while at Syracuse. During my tenure in the FBI, other leadership opportunities presented themselves. In my final year, I was a supervisory special agent, working with teams across the country and around the globe. I also investigated how foreign governments steal American technology, so economic espionage became a focus, and I learned a lot, about a lot of industries, such as in one particular investigation about pharmaceuticals.

That experience helped my transition to Cardinal Health, where I was exposed to all aspects of business, which led me to The Home Depot in 2002.

How did law school prepare you for your current role?
Everything that is gained in a legal education can be applied to business. That includes critical thinking, listening to different perspectives, learning how to negotiate, and analytical thinking, which helps get at the root causes of business challenges and their solutions.

What elements of your legal training—and your work at the FBI—do you apply in your position at Bed, Bath & Beyond?
Part of the fundamental intersection between my law school training and my experience at the FBI is the critical and analytical thinking, as well as emotional intelligence, that my day-to-day work at BBB requires.

At the FBI, you learn interpersonal and hone investigatory and problem solving skills. The vast majority of an agent’s time is spent interviewing people, searching for truth and data points, and asking pertinent questions. You also gain social experiences by talking to thousands of people from all walks of life, all demographics. In turn, those critical formative experiences help develop emotional intelligence, which is very important in whatever direction you take your career.

In a rapidly changing world, what innovation has most affected your industry?
There’s nothing more dramatic in retail than the proliferation of data and the ability to use that data to satisfy a customer’s desire for prompt and effective solutions. Consumer expectations have changed dramatically. Now transactions take place in stores and online at about the same rate, and that dynamic continues to evolve.

How has your business overcome challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic?
Bed Bath & Beyond pivoted dramatically to continue to serve customers even while the majority of our stores were closed. Our online fulfillment model was already underway, but we accelerated our digital transformation to ship products and to offer curbside pickup and “buy online/pickup in store,” or BOPIS, once stores reopened.

There is still absolutely a place for the store experience, however. Our customers desire it, and they help us inform that experience. We continue to meet the customers where they are and curate an experience that is inspirational, whether online, curbside, or in store. In the end, COVID-19 accelerated the direction retail was already heading.

What memory from your law school days is closest to you?
Thinking of the formal side of law school, there was my experience on the Law School Senate and the superb relationships I developed with professors, especially Professor William C. Banks. I admire Professor Banks not only for the work he did teaching us Constitutional Law but also for his work in national security law and for the United States in general. He’s a tremendous asset to the law school and the country.

Informally, there was a group of us that would go out on Thursday nights together. We weren’t of extravagant means back then, but we would head to a local establishment and talk about our experiences, decompress, and build the kind of Orange experience that Syracuse promises—and delivers.
Art Lussi is President of the Crowne Plaza Lake Placid, a resort in the Adirondack village that hosted the 1932 and 1980 winter Olympics. Restored and expanded, the resort now spans more than 1,000 acres of the Adirondacks and includes 45 holes of championship-level golf.

A Lake Placid native, Lussi excelled in tennis and skiing at Dartmouth College, and during law school he skied in the World University Games in Czechoslovakia. Admitted to the bar in New York State and Washington, DC, Lussi worked as a ski coach in Vail, CO, before returning to Lake Placid to help his family operate the Holiday Inn, now the Crowne Plaza.

A member of the Lake Placid Vacation Corporation since 1991, Lussi was involved in the village of Lake Placid and town of North Elba Community Development Commission, which produced a Comprehensive Plan in 1997, mapping the economic future of the area. He is also a Commissioner for the Adirondack Park Agency and a Board Member of the Olympic Regional Development Authority and New York Ski Education Foundation, having served as the foundation’s Chairman for 10 years.

Did you imagine in law school that you’d eventually land in a corporate leadership role? I thought I would be a sports agent, but I soon learned that you have to be an extremely aggressive negotiator and marketer to be successful, so I decided to coach ski racing after law school. After three years in Vail, teaching, working in a ski shop, and meeting my wife on the chairlift, I decided to join my family in the hospitality business.

How did law school prepare you for your current role? The summer legal educational opportunity program helped me realize that I could become a lawyer, and it was professors Samuel Donnelly and Emil Rossi L’72 who gave me the confidence to lead a business and stand up for environmental protection. Professor Robert Anderson was the zoning guru who prepared me for years as an Adirondack Park Agency Commissioner. Now I lead our family through local zoning issues in resort development.

What elements of your legal training do you apply in your position at Crowne Plaza? Thinking like a lawyer really works! I’m an active listener—to employees, customers, and my family—and I document when the parking lot is plowed and the sidewalk shoveled! I also have defended employees in court when our insurance companies have recommended we retain outside counsel, and those wins have been especially sweet.

In a rapidly changing world, what innovation has most affected your industry? People now make reservations at the last minute in resort areas based on weather reports and real time adjustments, and we are fixated with online reservation services, so keeping up reservation availability and rate structures remains challenging.

How has your business overcome challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic? We are fortunate to be in a remote area where visitors can play outside on our mountains and in our parks, on our golf courses, and on our ski slopes—and still remain socially distanced. We “super clean” our hotel rooms, and we are lucky to be able to provide fresh air directly to our guest rooms through sliding glass doors.

What memory from your law school days is dearest to you? In January 1987 I was selected to represent the College in Alpine skiing in the World University Games in Czechoslovakia, but I needed Acting Dean Stephen Wechsler’s approval. He said, “Young man, you do not take three weeks off to go ski racing in Europe and stay in law school.” However, Professor Peter Bell supported me, and the Dean relented—but he gave me my only D in law school later that spring, in contracts.

There was no internet back then, and I remember on my return, in a cab in DC, asking the driver how the Orange was doing in the Big East Tournament. The driver said, “Man, Where you been? Them Orangemen’s in the Sweet Sixteen of the Big Show.” SU kept on winning, and I ended up flying to New Orleans with fellow classmate—and now judge—Mike St. Leger L’88 for the Final Four!
An expert in civil rights and employment law, Erica White-Dunston is Director and Chief Diversity Officer for the Office of Civil Rights for the Office of the Secretary, US Department of Interior (DOI). As Director, White-Dunston is responsible for developing and implementing workplace strategies that aid DOI in promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion. She also provides oversight to DOI bureaus, identifying and eliminating discriminatory practices via applicable Title VI and Title VII laws.

From 2001 to 2010, White-Dunston worked at the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), first in the Office of General Counsel as a trial attorney in systemic litigations, with collateral duty assignments with the Office of Federal Operations and the Office of Equal Opportunity (OEO). In 2006, White-Dunston was reassigned to OEO, where she performed federal sector review for complaint processing. In 2008, she chaired the agency’s Disability Task Force, which resulted in the restructuring of the agency’s Disability Program.

Recognizing her superior knowledge in human rights and Equal Employment Opportunity laws and training, in 2014 White-Dunston became one of only 11 Internal Revenue Service employees named a Department of Treasury Certified Strategic Partner. In 2015, she became a Presidential Management Council Interagency Fellow, a program to nurture excellence through cross-agency exposure, and she served a six-month detail to the Chief Human Capital Officers’ Council at the Office of Personnel Management. In May 2016, White-Dunston returned to EEOC as the new CEO Director.

As a law student, White-Dunston received the Seely Johnson Award for Outstanding Leadership in an African American student, the Ralph Kharas Award for Outstanding Leadership in Moot Court, and the Order of the Barristers.

Did you imagine in law school that you’d eventually land in a government leadership role?

No! I knew I would be focused on serving underserved communities, but not in this capacity.

How did law school prepare you for your current role?

My class was comprised of a spectrum of races, national origins, and religions, and there was always something to learn from everyone, so I developed skills that focused on collaborative partnerships and the interpersonal and negotiation skills necessary to obtain buy-in from differing points of view.

What elements of your legal training do you apply in your position at the US Department of the Interior?

I use every bit of my legal training when assessing claims of discrimination and delivering findings. I approach questions through the IRAC (issue, rule, analysis, and conclusion) model, which I learned in law school and which I have taught my staff.

In a rapidly changing world, what innovation has most affected your industry?

The ability to electronically file and respond to complaints of discrimination increases opportunities and access to address not only Title VI and VII complaints, but all equity, diversity, and inclusion-related concerns in the workplace.

How has your department overcome challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic?

Because my department was already heavily focused on complying with tech requirements as mandated by the EEOC, we were not as affected by the pandemic challenges. We were immediately able to meet our customer needs while working from the safety of our homes with little to no break in customer service and organizational support.

What memory from your law school days is dearest to you?

The friendships that I still have cannot be over-emphasized, but my dearest memory is of the Hon. James Graves L’60. During one of the Coming Back to Syracuse events, I told him of the challenge I was having with administrative law. Despite his busy schedule, he tutored me by phone. His willingness to help has never been forgotten because it made such a difference for me. I never forgot how a small act of kindness can have a huge ripple effect. Because of that kindness, I strive to provide that type of support daily.

“Really Exciting Time!”

The Role of a Government Diversity Officer Under a New Administration

Erica White-Dunston L’98 become Director and Chief Diversity Officer for the Department of the Interior’s Office of Civil Rights in September 2019. DOI employs 70,000 people across 11 bureaus and seven offices. To understand her critical role within her department and the government—especially under the transition to the President Joseph R. Biden Jr. L’68 administration—we asked White-Dunston to describe her mandate and how it is evolving ...

My mandate is to ensure that every employee has an employee life cycle that provides a work environment that is free from discriminatory animus and hostility. I ensure that Title VII, and all of the discriminatory bases covered by it, are not evidenced in the workplace. To the extent they are, my role is to ensure that the department eradicates and corrects such behavior. We do this in a number of ways, ranging from proactive prevention with training and consultative services for employees and management to findings of discrimination that may result in compensatory damages and/or some form of discipline for bad actors.

With the recent change in presidential administration, there is a significant change in the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) community— as it is known in the federal sector—because of the issuance of executive orders 13985 and 13988 by President Biden.

Those EO specifically reinstate diversity and inclusion training that had been held in abeyance since the former administration issued its Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping order in September 2020. The new EO mandate that every federal agency review its policies, practices, and contracts to determine whether they are being conducted with an EDI consideration.

The Biden EO also require federal agencies to review whether EDI programs are sufficiently funded to combat the disparity in the employee life cycles of underrepresented groups in federal government.

This review is unprecedented in that there has never been a requirement for this level of consideration of EDI in governmental services. Needless to say, I’m incredibly busy because the work of my program is now a department priority. It is a really exciting time!
Eric Sigmund has been Chief Operating Officer at Reddy Vineyards since 2019. “My path to wine came somewhat unexpectedly,” he says. While working in international law in Washington, DC, he took a weekend job at Total Wine & More stocking shelves and selling wine to help pay off student loans.

“Then I made a dramatic shift and took a full-time job at Total,” Sigmund explains, becoming first a sales associate, then a supervisor, then wine manager at the flagship store in Maryland, before landing the role of assistant French Fine Wine Buyer.

An introduction from Sumeet Batra L’12—now a senior business analyst at Amazon who grew up with Akhil Reddy—connected Sigmund with the vintner as he planned to launch the state-of-the-art winery. With his extensive wine experience and mind for new state-of-the-art winery. With his extensive estate-grown Reddy Vineyard wines and build a company’s French wine portfolio. Procurement, logistics, and compliance for the company’s French wine portfolio. How did law school prepare you for your current role? Due to my international law focus, I spent a lot of time with Professor David Crane L’80. He knew how to motivate through honest and direct feedback that would build your confidence, he showed compassion, and he always found a way to elevate my game. Professor Sanjay Chhablani, revered as a no-nonsense teacher, taught me how to truly prepare for a task and to think critically.

Did you imagine in law school that you’d eventually land in a corporate leadership role? My initial career plan looked much different! After graduating, I worked as a legal adviser for the American Red Cross. It was a wonderful and challenging opportunity, but institutional challenges made it difficult to continue our work. At the same time, I had begun to be interested in wine working at Total Wine & More. This interest developed into a passion. I quickly earned multiple promotions until I became Assistant Wine Buyer at the company’s national headquarters, where I was responsible for procurement, logistics, and compliance for the company’s French wine portfolio.

How did law school prepare you for your current role? Due to my international law focus, I spent a lot of time with Professor David Crane L’80. He knew how to motivate through honest and direct feedback that would build your confidence, he showed compassion, and he always found a way to elevate my game. Professor Sanjay Chhablani, revered as a no-nonsense teacher, taught me how to truly prepare for a task and to think critically.

What elements of your legal training do you apply in your position at Reddy Vineyards? The law and the alcoholic beverage industry are intertwined in ways that many people are unaware. Legal compliance touches almost every facet of my job—from production parameters; to how wines are labeled; to taxes, logistics, interstate sales, reporting, and more. Whether it’s navigating the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau’s regulations or strengthening direct-to-consumer sales, I use the research, analytical, and writing skills I developed in law school.

In a rapidly changing world, what innovation has most affected your career? Looking back on my law education, I’d say that experiential learning had the most dramatic impact on my career. Role-plays and simulations prepare students to be far more competent practitioners. In my opinion, experiential learning is the single most powerful tool educators can use to prepare their students for the real world.

What memory from your law school days is dearest to you? The College of Law had a unique way of bringing people at all levels together through openness, respect, mentorship, and a desire to elevate everyone in the school. I am grateful to be a part of the family!

“Eric Sigmund, Chief Operating Officer of Reddy Vineyards, has been with the company since 2019. His background in international law, coupled with his wine industry experience, has been instrumental in shaping the company’s approach to the market.”
Given his current line of work, one of Adom M. Cooper’s L’12 pieces of advice to current law students is entirely appropriate: if you want to enter the field of national security and international affairs, he says, “really think about what risks you are willing to take.”

As an Operations Planning Specialist, High-Threat Programs at the US Department of State’s Bureau of Diplomatic Security, Cooper works in a part of the state department that spends a great deal of time assessing hazards for those who serve abroad in embassies and consulates. His journey to this niche career in public service was itself filled with risk—and plenty of reward.

“Hooked on learning”

At the University of Michigan, Cooper—whose father is an anesthesiologist—was contemplating a science and biology track before he took his first risk and switched to political science and communications. But when he took part in a summer 2008 WorldTeach service project in Namibia, his career began to bend toward the law and specifically its interaction with diplomacy, development, security, and social justice.

“In Namibia, I helped schools and teachers get acquainted with computer literacy and the Internet after the Ministry of Education passed a law mandating that all teachers must have a basic, working knowledge of computers. Many of them had never used a computer before,” Cooper says.
“I can’t tell you how many informational interviews I have done, even with my peers. As an African American, there are constant barriers to entry, and you have to squeeze every resource around you for all they are worth.”

Adom M. Cooper L’12

His post was in the far north of the country, beyond the “red line,” a 600-mile fence (officially for pest control measures) that demarcates the rural north from the former colonial south. “I helped a school get its first Internet connection, and I became hooked on learning how laws worked differently in different countries.”

Returning home to the 2008 economic crash, Cooper decided to take another chance and switch from journalism—where jobs were becoming scarce—toward legal studies and Syracuse.

Another big leap saw Cooper return to southern Africa at the end of his 1L year. “I wanted to get involved in international law, so I studied abroad at the University of the Western Cape in South Africa, as part of a Howard University-run program.” While in Cape Town, Cooper took international law classes, worked at a law firm, and in the evenings enjoyed World Cup games being played across South Africa that year.

Back in Syracuse, Cooper continued to specialize, taking national security classes with professors William C. Banks and David Crane L’80, international law classes—such as Law of the Sea with Professor Tara Helfman—and international relations classes at the Maxwell School.

“Squeeze every resource”
Graduating with certificates in national security and postconflict reconstruction, Cooper spent time networking and shopping his resume, especially at the United Nations headquarters in New York City.

His second piece of advice to students is borne out of these experiences. “Find ways to get connected to people in your chosen field,” he observes. “I can’t tell you how many informational interviews I have done, even with my peers.”

“As an African American, there are constant barriers to entry, and you have to squeeze every resource around you for all they are worth. Many internships and fellowships, which lead to great job opportunities, are unpaid. This instantly rules out candidates from marginalized and untapped communities.”

His determined networking eventually led to a job at the UN Population Fund, where he helped edit a landmark report called “Marrying Too Young: End Child Marriage.” He also coordinated legislative initiatives pushing countries to raise their legal age of marriage to 18 and organized a high-level panel event for the 2012 International Day of the Girl Child, which included luminaries such as Desmond Tutu and Michele Bachelet. “I later packaged up the report and sent it to all 193 member countries,” he adds.

After that essential experience, Cooper moved to Washington, DC, as an International Law Fellow at the American Society of International Law (ASIL). Because of the fellowship’s low stipend, Cooper notes that “I was only able to move to DC as my godparents live here and were gracious enough to host me, changing my career trajectory.”

“A historical lens”
After ASIL, Cooper joined consultants Lee Bayard Group LLC as Legislative and External Relations Director. Then, after responding to an ad on a Syracuse University listserv, he moved to the state department in early 2015.

Cooper says the focus on “high threats” at the Bureau of Diplomatic Security is a response to the 2012 attack on US government facilities in Benghazi, Libya, which led to the deaths of two diplomats and 10 government investigations.

One recommendation from the 2012 unclassified Congressional Accountability Review Board called on the state department to reform its security approach at “high threat posts,” or embassies and consulates in conflict zones. With his background in national security, development, and international law and relations—as well as his experiences abroad—it’s work Cooper is well-suited to do.

Today, in addition to his state department duties, Cooper is a fellow at the Truman Center for National Policy, a leadership development project of the Truman Center for National Policy for which Cooper has returned to another of his vocations: writing.

“The Truman Center encourages its members to get their voices out there. So in 2020, I started writing and publishing more,” says Cooper, whose work has been featured in Just Security, NY Daily News, USA Today, and elsewhere. “I write about things that aren’t often addressed, and I like to look at contemporary issues of national security through a historical lens.”

“Find your tribe”
Cooper’s Just Security article—“US ‘National Security’ Must Apply to the Entire Nation”—is an example of his approach. It connects his maternal grandfather’s service on a World War II submarine chaser to his and his African American compatriots’ experiences before and after the war (“continually exposed to domestic enemies at home, in the forms of institutionalized racism and hate groups”), to the importance of the US “effectively addressing foreign policy and national security challenges and issues” by doing more “to acknowledge, accept, and confront its flawed history.”

Recently, Cooper contributed a personal narrative to a Truman Center report—“Transforming State”—about modernizing and diversifying the state department.

Like his opinion pieces, this narrative also interrogates the nation’s “flawed history.” He writes about his uncomfortable experience passing Confederate flags and monuments while on a temporary tour of duty (TDY) near Charlottesville, VA, at the time of the notorious 2017 “Unite the Right” rally. “The fact that I was working on international security issues during this TDY while there were clear and present domestic security issues close to me is sadly ironic and dysfunctional.”

Cooper urges the state department to find “the personnel, ethos, or resources” to ensure the safety of its increasingly diverse personnel, “and it must address this domestically in the same manner that it does abroad.”

This latter comment brings us to Cooper’s final piece of advice to students, especially “students who look like me interested in this kind of career.” It echoes his “Transforming State” narrative and its call to support people from marginalized and untapped communities in national security.

“you will need a close group of friends to bounce ideas off and to vent to,” he notes, admitting that the path won’t always be smooth.

“Every day, I still connect with three other African American alums—David Chaplin L’13, G’13; Yemi Titus Falodun G’12; and Jonathan Marshall G’11—via a group text we started before we graduated. No topic is off limits, and we support each other. We talk about everything: relationships, finances, sports, politics, and life decisions. So, I’d tell students to ‘find your tribe!’”
Where do you stand on the “left brain v. right brain” debate? Anecdotally, you may know of effortlessly creative people—artists, actors, writers, musicians—who get a little flummoxed by math, and of brilliantly rational minds who wonder at the emotions others feel for paintings, songs, or movies.

But in reality, there is plenty of debate about whether our brains really are wired in such a strict, bicameral way. In fact, when it comes to practicing law, the ability to combine and balance our rational and artistic “sides” might give those entering the profession from creative disciplines special advantages. But what are they?

In the 2020 Stories Book, we explored the nexus of creativity and law with alumni who write fiction and non-fiction. In this issue, we turn our lens on five musician-attorneys—four alumni and one professor, representing a spectrum of instruments—and ask them about how their passion for music has affected their practice of law.

Organizing the article in a form familiar to musicians of all abilities, we present their perspectives in five lessons ...
Lesson 1: Pursue your passions, both within and outside the law.

As a partner at Northern California firm Hanson Bridgett LLP, David Miller L'69 has enjoyed a long and successful career in public agency law. Over the years, he’s provided counsel to the Golden Gate Bridge Highway and Transportation District and the Caltrain commuter rail system, among other high profile clients, and this deep experience has meant invitations to offer his wisdom to graduating students.

“I once gave a commencement address about pursuing one’s passions,” Miller recalls. “I told the graduates that you might be entering a field that you spend a good part of your day doing, but anything that’s an avocation is a vital piece to carry forward, be it acting or music or art. When you go into practice, don’t let go of what drove you into those other areas of your life. Be multidimensional.”

Miller certainly practices what he preaches. His avocation is piano, particularly jazz piano. “I was trained classically, but today I play a range of jazz styles.” His combo has been productive during the coronavirus pandemic, recording two CDs—featuring his daughter Rebecca DuMaine on vocals—for Summit Records, Someday, Someday and The Mask-erade. “Both CDs, but particularly Someday, Someday, include tunes that speak to loss of the types experienced by so many during the past year.”

Encouraged by his musically gifted family—and especially his maternal grandmother—to pursue musical study, Miller admits that the piano lid was closed while he studied law. But as a young attorney in California, his love of playing re-emerged, thanks in part to happenstance. Miller recalls a Hanson Bridgett function that had booked a three-piece jazz combo, but when the pianist didn’t show up, Miller filled in. “That function was 38 years ago. I wound up making a lifelong friendship and partnership [with drummer Bill Belasco] out of that gig!”

After that event, music continued to dovetail with his practice, often because his public service clients requested music at events. “One example was when I worked with former US Sen. Barbara Boxer. Through this relationship, I got to play political events and was invited to Senate retreats, where I would accompany musical shows the senators put on,” recalls Miller. “The connection between work and music seemed natural to me.”

Lesson 2: Music can balance a sometimes stressful occupation.

Also dovetailing—or to use a term familiar to a drummer, syncopating—his law career and love of music is Michael W. Tyszko L’15, a business and tax practice associate at Syracuse, NY, firm Bousquet Holstein PLLC.

Like many attorneys, Tyszko is active in his community, and for him that service has a musical flair. He plays drums in Bousquet Holstein’s company band, which has participated in Syracuse’s Rockin’ the Red House Battle of the Bands fundraiser (for the Red House theater) since 2016. His jazz combo—which includes fellow alum Joseph Frateschi L’14, of Baldwin, Sutphen & Frateschi PLLC, on saxophone—plays local fundraisers and other events, including for the Volunteer Lawyers Project of Onondaga County, the Women’s Bar of Central New York, and the College’s Law Alumni Weekend.

“Rounding out the styles this versatile percussionist plays, Tyszko also has time for a brass ensemble. “Since before law school, I’ve played in the percussion section of the Syracuse University Brass Ensemble,” says Tyszko, who currently serves as Chair of the group’s Board of Directors. “It’s a great community of friends, and I want music to be like this, to be joyful.”

“I always had to prove my chops earlier in life,” says Tyszko, who holds a bachelor’s degree in music education from the University of Michigan and who at one point wanted to be a school music director. “Now I don’t want to take myself too seriously.”

“Law can be such a stressful profession at times,” Tyszko continues, admitting that during his undergrad studies, music “got wound up” with stress too. “I was starting to think of it as a job. I didn’t want my music to be like that, so that was the beginning of my move into law.”

Today, Tyszko says that he sees music as a “balance point” for his legal career, or as he observes—paraphrasing jazz drumming great Art Blakely—“music washes away the dust of everyday life.”

““When you go into practice, don’t let go of what drove you into those other areas of your life. Be multidimensional.”

David Miller L’69 with his daughter, and singer, Rebecca DuMaine. Photo credit: Rosaura Studios.

Mike Tyszko L’15 (drummer) and Joseph Frateschi L’14 (sax) play at the 2019 Law Alumni Weekend.
Lesson 3: Skills required by music can give lawyers an edge.

Miller and Tyszko address how music can both complement and balance a legal career, but what of skills that transfer between the two disciplines? It seems that, like a good duet, there’s plenty of interplay.

“In my opinion there is a great deal of transfer of skills,” says Tyszko, noting that one of these transferable skills is problem solving “which for a musician means working on a passage of music and being aware of how it is performed before presenting it.”

Another skill is what David Miller calls “refinement,” akin to a writer’s editing and shaping process. “What do we learn in law school? To refine our ability to communicate, to be logical and understandable, and to simplify complex issues,” he observes.

To these commonalities, Professor David Driesen offers another: “There’s a special skill both law and music require, to quickly and intuitively respond to a complex situation.” Much like musicians learning to play as an ensemble, lawyers must process and synthesize information quickly. In law, says Driesen, “You need to read a lot of cases, see patterns, and intuitively understand them.”

Like Miller and Tyszko, Driesen was formally trained—he holds a master’s degree in trumpet performance—before switching disciplines and becoming one of the nation’s leading experts on environmental law and the rule of law. Earlier in his music career, he played orchestral works, “but today I play in the SU Brass Ensemble and the Excelsior Cornet Band.”

The latter bills itself as New York State’s only authentic Civil War-era brass band, performing period music on 19th century instruments. That means Driesen must master a different kind of brass: the modern trumpet is a piston valve instrument, but for the cornet band he picks up the rotary valve Bb saxhorn (sometimes called a rotary valve cornet).

Having been a professional musician in his 20s, Driesen says that—like Miller—playing took second fiddle once his law career began. Today, like Tyszko, he sees playing as “a sort of balance thing.”

“If you are working all day in one way, it gets stale. It’s good exercise to flit back and forth between writing and music playing. That’s just good for your mind,” says Driesen. “These days, I don’t have the time for three hours of practice a day and hustling for gigs. With Excelsior and the brass ensemble, I have found a nice balance.”

Lesson 4: A critical common skill is performance—whether playing for an audience or advocating for a client.

Fear of public speaking is a potential barrier for anyone entering the law. Whether being called upon in class, speaking in court, or advocating for a client in front of a stern hearing panel, young lawyers must learn to speak in front of others with confidence and flair.

Musicians call this fear stage fright, something which afflicts even top professionals, such as singer Barbra Streisand and guitarist Robbie Robertson. But it seems that if you can overcome stage fright, public speaking comes more naturally.

“I find public speaking to be a lot easier since I have been a professional musician,” observes Driesen. Similarly, Tyszko notes that, “As attorneys we must persuade and influence a court or third party to be favorable to our client. A lawyer’s work product can be thought of as a performance.”

Vocalist Gabriela Wolfe L’16, an Assistant Public Defender in the Monroe County (NY) Public Defender’s Office, knows the trials of public performance only too well. In fact, pushing through a bad turn and eventually triumphing is at the heart of one of her enduring law school anecdotes.

“It’s tradition for a 3L to sing the national anthem at Commencement,” Wolfe recalls when asked about singing the National Anthem at the 2016 ceremony. That year, Wolfe—who has no formal training in music but grew up singing in church—decided she would audition, not knowing that the speaker would be now President Joseph R. Biden Jr. L’68.

“I was very nervous and remember warming up my voice in my car before the audition,” Wolfe recalls. She hadn’t sung in a while, and initially the audition did not go well. “When I reached a high note, my voice cracked,” she says. “So I yelled an expletive, touched my toes, took a few breaths, and was determined to try again.” The judges looked as though they had seen enough, she says, “but I insisted.” Suggesting they turn their chairs around, the judges let Wolfe have another go. “I sang again, and I got the part.”

Asked whether Biden’s presence made her nervous on the day all over again, Wolfe explains, “By the time I heard he was speaker, I was so nervous in general, it didn’t make much difference!”

In the end, Biden helped Wolfe relax, and her performance was flawless. “I didn’t realize I’d have so much interaction with him. As soon as he shook my hand, it calmed me down.”

The take-away? “For me, performing is about proving to yourself that you are capable,” Wolfe says. “I’m the first in my family to go to college, so I always want to throw my hat in the ring. When showtime comes, I give it all I’ve got. I’m so grateful I didn’t let my first attempt to sing the anthem be the end of it.”

Gabriela Wolfe L’16 meets now President Joseph R. Biden Jr. L’68 at the 2016 College of Law Commencement.
Lesson 5: There’s a reason they call it “practice”.

For pianist and Board of Advisors Member Susan K. Reardon L’76, two threads that bind music and law have intertwined throughout her successful career—which culminated in her serving as Director of International Policy, Worldwide Government Affairs, and Policy at Johnson & Johnson—and into her retirement, which came in 2014.

First is the ability of music to balance stress. “Playing piano requires total concentration, so you are immediately removed from daily and global sources of stress,” says Reardon, who took lessons in childhood at Baltimore’s Peabody Institute of Music and who would sneak into the University’s Crouse College piano practice rooms to play as a student. “When I was working, I still managed to set aside most Sunday evenings to play two or three hours with my duet buddy before I delved into what I had to do in the week ahead. That planning was made less stressful with the lingering joy of music making.”

Second is performance. Although these days Reardon mostly plays solo or with her duet partner, there was a time when she gigged. “That was many years ago at a Gay 90s bar in Ocean City, MD, as part of a trio with banjo and trumpet. That is the only time I was paid to play. We weren’t very good though!”

“Both music and law require, to a degree, showmanship,” Reardon continues. “As a lawyer, I he helped create the Outlaw Country music genre that emerged in the late 1970s. Kompa recalls the three elements—music, friends, and food—that served as the festival’s inspiration.

First was Kompa’s love of music, and in particular the Outlaw Country music made famous by Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, Merle Haggard, and Kris Kristofferson in the Seventies. “I’ve always been a music lover,” says Kompa, whose Law Offices of Mark A. Kompa are in Laguna Hills, CA.

A native of “Music City” Nashville, TN, Kompa recalls his first concert as a triple bill featuring Steppenwolf, The Grassroots, and Chairmen of the Board, a combination that could inspire anyone to try their hand at guitar. By the time he was in law school, his taste had turned to country. In particular, it was Willie Nelson’s famous Fourth of July Picnic, which began in 1972, that gave him the idea for the College of Law’s own music-and-food fest.

The second source of inspiration was Kompa’s colleagues. Fellow first-year classmates—Brigid Carroll Anderson L’80, Marguerette Hosbach L’80, Lon Levin L’80, and Eric Smith L’80—helped him run with the idea, with Hosbach providing the venue. “Marg was living in an apartment building at the time that had a large party room,” remembers Kompa.

The date of the festival seemed particularly fitting for a gathering of friends. “Around Groundhog Day seemed a good time to hold the festival because everybody was settled in for the spring semester. That was a good time to get together and catch up,” Kompa says.

The third element—the food—also came from Nashville. Founded in 1907, Varallo’s Chili Parlor is a well-known gastronomic destination that is famous for serving “Chili Three Ways,” described as by The Tennessean as ”layered combination of spaghetti, tamales, and chili.”

“The first year we charged $5 to cover our costs and about 85 people showed up,” says Kompa, who served as a “Chili Three Ways” chef. Music was also provided by Kompa, joined by Levin and Bruce Wood L’80, whom he remembers as “excellent guitarists.” They covered songs by The Beatles, Neil Young, and others before inviting classmates up to the front to play.

“The second and third year, even more people showed up,” recalls Kompa. “It was a lot of work cooking for that many, but several of my classmates pitched in with the cooking, and it was a lot of fun.”

No wonder Kompa has such good memories of his law school days, although the social scene he helped create was by no means the whole story. “Syracuse was a good place to attend law school. I went when a lot of professors—such as Daan Bravemen and Peter Bell—were just starting. There was a lot of enthusiasm. Syracuse really prepared me for my career.”

Although the Groundhog Day Chili Festival may be gone, it is far from forgotten. It was a topic of conversation when the classmates got back together via Zoom for their 40th anniversary at Law Alumni Weekend 2020. And the stirring of those memories—plus thoughts of retirement after 32 years at his own law firm and attending a concert by another music legend, Sir Paul McCartney—have inspired Kompa to pick up his axe again.

“My Christmas present to myself last year was a Fender Telecaster, and I have also bought myself a Martin D28 acoustic guitar,” he says. Because they say good things come in threes, perhaps Kompa might be adding something else to his guitar collection soon: a country-style resonator guitar, perhaps, or a McCartney violin bass?!
Gunther Buerman L’68 could lay claim to being “The Most Interesting Man in the World!”

Through a legal career that saw him grow the Harris Beach PLLC law firm from 20 lawyers to over 200, to founding and owning the American Rock Salt Company, to his competitive sailing endeavors, to establishing what USA Today calls one of the “10 Best New Attractions in America”—the Newport Car Museum—Buerman also embodies Dean Boise’s belief that a “well-rounded person makes a well-rounded lawyer.”

Buerman’s path to the College of Law started as an undergraduate at St. Lawrence University, where he studied history and government. He thought about teaching, but when he learned his friends were applying to law schools, he took the law boards and scored in the 98th percentile.

“Syracuse was gracious to see what I did in undergrad, and provided me with a full scholarship,” he recalls.

“Be entrepreneurial”
While in law school, business-related courses caught his interest. “Going back to undergrad, I was always interested in learning how to run a business, so courses on Contracts and Financial Transactions have served me well all these years and continue to do so,” Buerman says.

Upon graduating from Syracuse Law, Buerman began his legal career in Rochester, NY. He became Harris Beach’s Managing Partner by age 40 and served in that role and Chief Operating Officer for nearly 30 years, overseeing the tenfold growth in the firm’s personnel.

“The business of running a law firm was a constant in my legal career,” says Buerman. “How does a firm in Upstate New York serve its clients with a good team, and how do you add to that team?” he says. The answer, he reveals, is to be entrepreneurial, and to instill that mindset in the attorneys and staff. Embracing new technologies quickly helps a firm stay on top, he adds.

Along the way, Buerman assembled a sizeable private collection of automobiles. He had become hooked on the art of car design while at St. Lawrence. “I almost majored in fine arts. Cars are kinetic art and a reflection of the culture of when they were built. For example, the 1950s and ’60s cars of the new jet and rocket age had rocket-like fins and tail lights like jet planes, and rocket exhausts. The collection started with an old ’66 Ford Mustang I inherited and fixed up. Then a Porsche, and from there it kept snowballing.” So much so, he had to install lifts in his home garage to store his collection.
“Let’s start a Museum!”
After retiring from Harris Beach, Buerman and his wife Maggie began splitting their time between Newport, RI—where they would race his TP52 and 12 Metre sailboats during the summer weekends—and a home in Florida. Their automobile collection was scattered between the two residences.

“Maggie and I realized we weren’t able to drive and enjoy the cars as much while racing the sailboats, so I said to her that we should sell them or start a museum. Her immediate response was, ‘Let’s start a museum!’” says Buerman.

Using his experience as a lawyer, he and Maggie established the Newport Car Museum, a 501c(3) organization that occupies a former Patriot missile factory in nearby Portsmouth, RI. The Museum opened in 2017 and displays approximately 85 cars representing six decades of automobile innovation.

Having the Museum cars—all of which are from Buerman’s collection—open and accessible to visitors was an important feature for Buerman. Each car is on a platform and without ropes around them, which enables easy access and the ability to have them driven on the Museum grounds.

“Experience life”
Like for other businesses and attractions, the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the Museum. “We closed on March 15 but were open in a limited capacity by early June,” Buerman explains. “You couldn’t just open the doors. We had to put in place a whole new set of COVID-19 protocols. Since we have a lot of physical space, people could be socially distanced.” Now we are fully opened, without any COVID-19 restrictions.

Again, Buerman’s background as a lawyer helped the Museum navigate new regulations on labor issues that became critical during the pandemic. The Museum is seeing a rebound in traffic as vaccines are rolled out and pandemic restrictions are rolled back. Buerman is bullish about the immediate future: “I see a ‘Roaring ’20s scene about to happen again. People are looking for opportunities to get out and experience life. Maybe even the Charleston will come back!”

“Looking back, I was lucky to go to a law school that served me so well and continues to do so,” Buerman adds.
Jay Brown L’95 & Consuela Pinto L’95

Jay Brown, who grew up in the Pacific Northwest and studied finance and economics at Santa Clara University, combined two desires when he came to Syracuse in 1992: the study of law and the experience of going East. He didn’t expect to meet his future wife, Consuela Pinto.

Growing up in North Jersey, Consuela was thrilled to go out of state to Boston University’s Questrom School of Business. She always knew her aim was college, as her first-generation Italian parents desperately wanted their children to become either doctors or lawyers.

She was settled and established in Boston, working in human resources for a bank that wanted her to stay after graduation. However, with law school in the back of her mind, Consuela knew if she didn’t go right after graduation, she may never go.

In their words, Jay and Consuela’s relationship started as a solid, comfortable friendship. Cast together in Professor Richard Ellison’s 1L Law Firm section, they ended up in a small study group.

In the second semester, Jay asked Consuela to have dinner at Pastabilities in Armory Square. There, they started a pastime that still holds after 23 years of marriage—debate, or what Consuela calls “ridiculous discussions.” That night they deliberated over the existence of New Hampshire’s coastline (for the record, the state does have a 1.3-mile stretch of Atlantic shoreline called the Seacoast Region).

Consuela, who had also graduated with an M.P.A. from the Maxwell School, says, “Jay is very calm and I’m the polar opposite, and if there was a point in my life when I needed an infusion of calmness, it was my time in Syracuse.”

After graduation, the couple headed to Washington, DC, where Consuela went to work for the Department of Labor. This was the perfect location for Jay as well, because his focus was antitrust law.

Making their home in Silver Spring, MD, the couple have raised two children. Isabel is in Boston attending Northeastern University, while Matthew is a high school junior studying from home because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Upon leaving the labor department, Consuela, who had been the President of the DC Women’s Bar Association, became a shareholder at FortneyScott, a leading management employment law firm. Her focus is Equal Employment Opportunity compliance, with a specialty in government investigations.

Today, Jay is still steeped in business law as Deputy General Counsel at the US Chamber of Commerce. He says 2020 was a busy year for the Chamber with the discovery that going virtual added the benefit of reaching a larger audience. Before the pandemic, he says, they would draw hundreds to an onsite event, now they virtually reach thousands at a time.

Both have been working from home for the past year, which they say has turned out to be great, adding tremendously to family time. Cutting out the commute, they can even have breakfast together; with the bonus of being available for Matthew if he has study questions.

Referring to his career spent in the nation’s capital, Jay compliments the College of Law’s impact, noting its great alumni network. “Our class had a particularly large group of graduates relocate to DC. Among them are alums who have reached high levels in government agencies, prominent firms, and well-known companies with offices in the capital.”
David Katz L'17 & Danielle Katz L'18

Although David Katz and Danielle (Wilner) Katz took two very different paths to get to the College of Law—where they met in 2016 before getting married in 2018—their journey shared one thing in common: each decided to attend Syracuse Law because of the quality education and collaborative environment it offered.

David, a Cornell University grad, knew since fifth grade he wanted to study law. Danielle, a Toronto native, had landed a job in guest service management after her undergraduate study in Canada but she needed more of a challenge.

So Danielle began researching law schools. She decided on Syracuse, which was the perfect distance from home, and is surprised even today at how much she enjoys living and working in Central New York as a change from her big city roots in Toronto.

“Syracuse is great. I love the person I’m with and the work that I do,” she says. When David and Danielle met in the fall semester, neither of them thought much of each other. Danielle was just starting law school, and David was entering his last year.

But in the spring semester, David came across Danielle stressing over an assignment. He offered to take her to get something to eat. She agreed, but wanted to make it quick, thinking they would swing by McDonalds. But David—a local from Liverpool, NY—was a regular at Phoebe’s, down Irving Avenue from campus, so that’s where he took her.

“I was so stressed, I couldn’t enjoy myself,” Danielle admits.

But after Danielle turned in her assignment, she realized what a great time she had had with David. They became fast friends, so much so that when she couldn’t get home for Passover, David invited her to his family’s home for Easter instead.

“We weren’t dating, but his whole family thought we were,” Danielle recalls. Adds David, “My uncle pulled me aside and said, ‘You think she is just your friend, but there’s more to this!’”

Shortly after Easter 2016, the couple made it official and began dating. In November 2018, they took a weekend off from Danielle’s final semester and were married in Toronto. They held off on a honeymoon until after graduating and settling into their work lives.

Last winter, the Katzes were finally able to honeymoon in St. Lucia. Having had a great time on the Caribbean island, they arrived home just as the whole world was shutting down because of the coronavirus pandemic. After almost a year on lock-down as newlyweds, they have not only survived but thrived during an unprecedented time.

The couple has the alumni community as a support structure and work they share in common and which they love. David is a civil litigation associate at Smith Sovik Kendrick & Sugnet PC while Danielle practices corporate transactions and trusts and estates at Barclay Damon LLP. They couldn’t be happier, they say.

“Because we don’t work in the same area, it’s really cool to get different perspectives on working in the same profession,” David explains.

“Essentially he goes to court and I don’t,” Danielle notes.

Our Back Pages

Do You Remember? Help Us Caption Our Mystery Photos!

The College of Law’s photo archive is a fascinating visual history of your alma mater, full of nostalgia, anecdotes—and a few mysteries. That is, some of our prints and slides lack information or captions.

That’s where you come in. In this feature, we challenge you to help us recall the people and scenes in our mystery photos.

For our new mystery, we’ve chosen a casual-yet-active scene, probably taking place in White Hall. However, there is no information accompanying this print, so if you know any of the students pictured (in the foreground or background) and/or when the photo was taken, please email Director of Alumni Relations Kristen Duggleby at klduggle@syr.edu, and we’ll publish what we discover in a future issue.
In 1984, he received the Syrclay was elected to the Syracuse University Board of Trustees in 1979 and served as a Voting Trustee until 2007. He held several leadership roles during his time with the Board, including chair of the Board from 1992 to 1998; chair of the Board Investment and Endowment Committee from 1985 to 1992; chair of the $160 Million “Campaign for Syracuse University”; and chair of the search committee for the chancellor in 1991. Syrclay was recognized with honorary degrees from Yale University in 1955. He served in the New York State Senate from 1965-84. During his tenure, he chaired the Senate Codes Committee, the Senate Judiciary Committee, the Select Task Force on Court Reorganization and the Senate Republican (Majority) Conference. In 1990, President George H. W. Bush appointed Syrclay a public board member of the Overseas Private Investment Corp. He served there until 1993, when his successor was named. In 2002, President George W. Bush appointed Syrclay to represent the United States at the inauguration of the president of the Republic of Costa Rica and to serve as a member of the panel of conciliators at the International Center of the Settlement of Investments Disputes. He also served as U.S. ambassador to the Republic of El Salvador from 2003-07. “Ambassador Syrclay was a larger-than-life figure whose distinguished career in public service spanned many years,” says College of Law Dean Craig M. Boise. “He made many significant contributions to the University, the College of Law, New York state and the nation. The College of Law community extends our deepest condolences to the Barclay family and everyone who knew and loved Doug.”

Syrclay earned a J.D. from Syracuse University’s College of Law in 1961 and a B.A. from Yale University in 1955. He served in the United States Army from 1955 until 1957. He was recognized with honorary degrees from Syracuse University, Clarkson University, the State University of New York at Oswego, Le Moyne College and St. Lawrence University.

Barclay and his wife, Sara “Dee Dee” Seiter Barclay, provided the lead gift for the establishment of the H. Douglas Barclay Law Library in the College of Law. They generously supported other initiatives in the College of Law, the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University Athletics, Syracuse University Libraries and international enrollment. “A towering figure in local, state and national government, Doug never forgot his Central New York roots,” says Chancellor Kent Syverud. “Doug remained a strong advocate of Syracuse University, and we all benefitted from the knowledge and experience he brought to the Board and the generosity he showed to our students.”

Barclay was elected to 11 consecutive terms in the New York State Senate from 1965-84. During his tenure, he chaired the Senate Codes Committee, the Senate Judiciary Committee, the Select Task Force on Court Reorganization and the Senate Republican (Majority) Conference. In 1990, President George H. W. Bush appointed Syrclay a public board member of the Overseas Private Investment Corp. He served there until 1993, when his successor was named. In 2002, President George W. Bush appointed Syrclay to represent the United States at the inauguration of the president of the Republic of Costa Rica and to serve as a member of the panel of conciliators at the International Center of the Settlement of Investments Disputes. He also served as U.S. ambassador to the Republic of El Salvador from 2003-07. “Ambassador Syrclay was a larger-than-life figure whose distinguished career in public service spanned many years,” says College of Law Dean Craig M. Boise. “He made many significant contributions to the University, the College of Law, New York state and the nation. The College of Law community extends our deepest condolences to the Barclay family.”

Barclay was counsel to, and former partner of, Barclay Damon LLP, Central New York’s oldest law firm, and serves on the boards of the Syracuse International Airport Foundation, the Syracuse Symphony Orchestra, the State University of New York, and several other local and national organizations.

Barclay was chair of the Board of Directors of Douglaston Manor Inc., and owner and operator of Douglaston Salmon Run fishing reserve and Quality Machined Products (QMP), a family-owned and operated machined products company. He was past chair of the Board of Directors of Panthos Corp., QMP Enterprises, Eagle Media and CenterState CEO (formerly the Metropolitan Development Association).

Barclay also chaired the Compensation Committee of KeyCorp, which operates through Key Community Bank and Key Corporate Bank. His previous board service included KeyBank of Central York, Key Trust Company of Florida, Key Financial Services, Key Pacific Bancorp, Empire Airlines, Syracuse China Corp., Giant Portland and Masonry Cement Co., Coradiant Corp., Mohawk Airlines, and Excellor Insurance Co.

Former Overseer of the Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government, Barclay was a Fellow of the American Bar Foundation and chair of the Alexis de Tocqueville Society of the United Way of Central New York. He was also the former president (1991-2003), chairman emeritus (2003-present) and member of the Board of Directors of the Syracuse Metropolitan Development Association. Barclay also served on the New York State Economic Development Power Allocation Board, the Board of Directors of Modern Courts, and the Board of the New York Racing Association.

Barclay was a recipient of the Private Sector Initiative Commendation from the President of the United States; the John Jay Education Award from The Commission on Independent Colleges and Universities in New York; and multiple El Salvadorian honors, including the “Noble Amigo de El Salvador” (“Noble Friend of El Salvador”) award from that country’s legislative assembly in 2006, and the Republic of El Salvador’s Award of the Orden Nacional Jose Matias Delgado en el Grado de Gran Cruz de Plata in 2007. Doug is survived by his wife Dee Dee and their children Kathryn, David, Dorothy Chynoweth G’88 (School of Education), Susan G’91 (School of Education) and William L’95 (College of Law) and 10 grandchildren, including granddaughter Sara Chynoweth ’15 (Martin J. Whitman School of Management) and grandson William Chynoweth G’88 (College of Arts and Sciences and the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs), G’19 (School of Education).
We can never say it enough—your support, input, and leadership are making a huge impact. Whether it’s our world-class faculty, our high-performing Advocacy Program, or our forward-leaning curriculum, we have much to celebrate even as we improve, adapt, and innovate.

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Together, we are making a difference. Thank you!

Contact Sophie Dagenais, Assistant Dean for Advancement and External Affairs, at 315.443.1964 or sdagenai@syr.edu to make a donation.