Sesquicentennial

University of Michigan Law School

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Michael Wagner was in Joan Larsen’s seminar on presidential power when he saw some powerful-looking people in the doorway. One of those people, it turned out, was none other than the 17th Chief Justice of the United States. As part of his visit to the Law School, John G. Roberts, Jr., visited several classrooms and invited students to ask him questions.

Wagner, feeling awed by the occasion but not too overwhelmed to speak, asked Roberts whether people with non-judicial backgrounds are likely to have a place on the Supreme Court in the future. And the 2L walked away with an experience he won’t forget any time soon. “For him to take time out of his schedule to talk with our small class was a real honor,” Wagner said.

During his three-day visit for the Law School’s Sesquicentennial Celebration, Roberts dined with faculty members, helped to break ground for a new academic building, tailgated with alumni, and sat with Dean Evan Caminker in the Big House for the Michigan-Notre Dame football game.

The highlight for many was the Conversation with the Chief Justice, a question-and-answer session at Hill Auditorium, where a packed house heard his thoughts on his newest colleague, football, and releasing audio of cases before the end of the Supreme Court’s term. Caminker joined Roberts on stage and moderated the discussion.

Given the recent appointment and swearing-in of Associate Justice Sonia Sotomayor, it’s no surprise that several people asked about her. Roberts responded, “I think she’s going to be a delightful, wonderful colleague.”

One questioner asked whether the Court will release the audio of arguments more quickly, as it did with a case involving the Voting Rights Act earlier this year. Many people are concerned, Roberts said, that releasing the recordings immediately might “change how the process functions. … It’s not our job to educate; it’s our job to decide cases under the Constitution.”
Roberts displayed a knack for comedic timing throughout his visit. Responding to a question about whether Supreme Court justices could relate to everyday folks, he tried to dispel a myth. “Not all justices went to elite institutions. Some of them went to Yale.” When the crowd’s laughter quieted, the two-time Harvard alumnus added, “I’m going to pay for that.”

Anticipating questions about which team he would cheer for in U-M’s football game against Notre Dame, Roberts—who once attended Notre Dame Elementary School in Indiana—opted not to give a direct answer. “I am an advocate of judicial restraint. I see no need to answer that question.”

When asked if he favored banishment as a legal sanction, he paused, then answered, simply, “No.”

And when Caminker inquired about what qualities a president should look for in a new Supreme Court justice, Roberts quipped, “He could save us all a lot of trouble by just giving me an extra vote.”
Breaking New Ground

The day before a “maize out” filled the seats of the Big House with bright yellow T-shirts, a smaller but no less vibrant version occurred on the site of the Law School’s new academic building.

At the groundbreaking for the School’s first new academic addition in more than 75 years, hundreds of faculty, students, alumni, and friends gathered to hear Chief Justice John G. Roberts, Jr., and other dignitaries speak. All of them were given novelty hard hats, turning the parking lot into a sea of yellow.

“You’re standing where the Law School’s past meets the Law School’s future,” Dean Evan Caminker announced.

The five-level academic building, at the southeast corner of State and Monroe streets, has been designed in a modified Collegiate Gothic style. With a stone exterior and a slate roof, it will reflect the design of the existing Law Quad buildings. The new Law School Commons will be added to previously unused space between buildings on the Quad.

“Our breaking of ground today symbolizes our movement from vision to reality,” said Bruce Bickner, ’68, chairman of the Law School’s Campaign Steering Committee. He thanked former Dean Jeffrey Lehman, ’81, who “got the ball rolling on the building expansion,” and Caminker, who “has made this project happen.”

Roberts spoke of the three Michigan Law alumni who served as Supreme Court justices: William R. Day, 1870, Frank Murphy, 1914, and George Sutherland, who attended in 1882 and 1883.

He also referred to a letter that Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. sent to the Law School when the Law Quad buildings were dedicated in 1935. If Holmes were around today to send another letter, Roberts noted, he would be pleased by the sight of irregularly shaped pieces of stone that will form the building’s exterior.

“He might also point out that the mortar between those stones is important as well. The bond between students, professors, and alumni, between lawyers and their community, is an essential ingredient in transforming quarried rock into a great and lasting institution,” Roberts said.

Caminker predicted: “I see the Commons as the new nerve center of the Law School—an amazing space that will enhance the student experience and make our already collegial learning community even more so.” And in the big first-floor classroom of the new academic building, he envisioned this scene: “There’s a first-year student who just got called on in her Torts class, and is trying to figure out what the hell Justice Cardozo meant by ‘proximate cause’ in the Palsgraf case.

“Some things should never change.”—KV
Across Five Deanships

Their priorities may have been different—dictated by the times in which they led—but for the five surviving Michigan Law deans who assembled for an extraordinary panel discussion during September’s Sesquicentennial Celebration, the pressures of leadership were always substantial.

Fortunately, the joys of the job—at least according to Lee Bollinger, now president of Columbia University and deputy chairman of the New York Fed—were, too.

“The best years of my life … have been in exactly this location, this place, and this town,” Bollinger said. “For me, this is a magical place.”

The panel, moderated by Professor Christina Whitman, ’74, included Bollinger, Ted St. Antoine, ’54, Terry Sandalow, Jeff Lehman, ’81, and current dean Evan Caminker. The participants, aided by alumni and friends seated in Honigman Auditorium, examined their deanships’ similarities and differences.

Some deans, like Sandalow, found themselves concentrating primarily on building the strongest faculty and curriculum possible. Others, like St. Antoine, Lehman, and Caminker, balanced the need to maintain those traditional strengths with overseeing fundraising for endowment growth or huge building projects, like the underground library addition and the academic building and student commons the Law School is constructing now.

“None of us is at all prepared for what our daily lives are going to be like” before taking on the job, said Lehman, who, after his deanship, was president of Cornell University and helped found China’s first American-style law school. “So much of what I did as dean was finding balance” between alumni, faculty, and students.

Finding time to address communications with the same three groups is another challenge, the deans agreed. Caminker confessed to receiving some 300 e-mails a day. Bollinger drew a laugh when he described bringing carpet samples to a faculty meeting as part of renovation planning. “You have to start somewhere,” he said.

Sandalow drew chuckles when he described his son’s attendance, during his deanship, at the Law School. The son’s advice? “Don’t go to the law school where your father is dean.” And St. Antoine got a laugh when he observed dryly that “the mathematics were that roughly half the class weren’t going to be in the top half of the class.”

The job may come with ample opportunity for frustration, but it also comes with unparalleled rewards. Caminker described getting a note from a recent graduate who wrote of a recently completed first trial as a public defender.

“I didn’t come in with the highest numbers,” the graduate wrote, “but I’m grateful that you looked past that to see the potential in me.”—JM
‘Bruno Unmuzzled’

Perhaps Judge Bruno Simma shared the sentiments of the alumni in attendance when he remarked, “Every time I return to Ann Arbor, it really is coming home.” The featured speaker at the Worldwide Reunion and Dinner at the U-M Museum of Art, Judge Simma forged a relationship with the Law School in 1986, but his acquaintance with the United States goes back half a century. “I came to this country as an exchange student in 1958–59,” Simma said, “and if you think Ann Arbor is the Midwest, go to East Moline, Illinois.”

Judge Simma, a William W. Cook Global Law Professor who has served on the International Court of Justice since 2003, shared his enthusiasm about the ever-varied cases he comes across at the ICJ. He also stressed his affection for the Law School, where he can remove “the muzzle you have to wear as a judge” and openly debate legal ideas in the classroom.

Dean Evan Caminker then introduced Eric Stein, ’42, the Hessel E. Yntema Professor Emeritus of Law, to offer a toast. “It was a ringing introduction, and the ringing is still in my ears,” the 96 year old quipped. “I’ve been connected with the Law School for almost half of the entire history of it,” Stein remarked. “My favorite change” in the School’s history, he said, was “the response of this institution to the globalization” of law. He ended with, “May [the Law School] live long and grow and flourish, or, as the old Romans said, ‘Vivat, crescat, et floreat.’”

Caminker honored Professor Stein and Judge Simma, and their invaluable contributions to the Law School, by celebrating professorships bearing their names. Daniel Halberstam will be the inaugural Eric Stein Collegiate Professor of Law, and Steven Ratner the inaugural Bruno Simma Collegiate Professor of Law.—CS
Gala Dinner

Michigan Law has demonstrated “an extraordinary capacity to grow with the times,” the Honorable Harry T. Edwards, ’65 (below left), of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit, said at the Friday night gala reception at the Michigan League. “We have much to celebrate … for our legacy is great.” The night’s other speakers were Mayo Moran, LL.M. ’92 (below right), the dean and James M. Tory Professor of Law of the Faculty of Law, University of Toronto; and Ronald L. Olson, ’66 (below center), a partner in the Los Angeles office of Munger, Tolles and Olson. Entertainment at the end of the evening was provided by the Men’s Glee Club, which, like the Law School, celebrates its 150th anniversary this year.
A reception hosted by the Nannes 3L Challenge Committee introduced leaders of the Law School’s more than 50 student organizations to the Challenge and its benefactor, John Nannes, ‘73 (center), shown here with Challenge cochairs Teresa Lin, 3L and Spencer Walters, 3L, along with Dean Evan Caminker.

Zdenek Kühn, LL.M. ’02, a justice of the Supreme Administrative Court of the Czech Republic, addresses a question during the panel “Civil Justice Reconsidered: Perspectives from Around the World” during Michigan Law’s Sesquicentennial weekend. Others on the panel included Michigan Law Professor Steven Croley; Wang Liming, vice president of China People’s University and former dean of the China People’s University School of Law; and Yoichiro Yamakawa, MCL ’69, senior partner of Koga and Partners in Tokyo. The moderator was Professor Phoebe Ellsworth.

For more coverage of the academic panels that took place during the Sesquicentennial weekend, visit the online version of the Law Quadrangle.


Jurors in mock trials at the Law School will now be deliberating in the Faegre & Benson Jury Room, following a room dedication ceremony during the Sesquicentennial weekend. Dean Caminker thanked 12 Michigan Law alumni firm members at Faegre who named the room via their support and a gift from the Faegre & Benson Foundation. Pictured in the newly named room were (from left) Russell Stewart, ’84, Jim Spaanstra, ’77, Dean Caminker, Brian O’Neill, ’74, and Laura Ferrell ’09, an associate with Skadden, standing in for her father, Charlie Ferrell, ’77, also a Faegre partner.
The Honorable J. Richard Ernst, ’63, a retired judge from northern Michigan, and Julia Ernst, ’94, talk with Tracy Lin, a first-year LL.M. student from China, during the alumni-student breakfast. Julia Ernst showed Lin pictures of her daughter, who also is from China, and asked Lin about making the adjustment to studying in the United States.

Historian and sports commentator John U. Bacon and film producer Christopher Cook (pictured), along with Michigan Law Professor Richard Friedman, shared their insights on the life of 1911 Law School graduate Branch Rickey, who helped integrate Major League Baseball in 1947 by signing Jackie Robinson to a contract with the Brooklyn Dodgers. A Matter of Fairness (background), an examination of Rickey’s impact on baseball, was commissioned by the Law School and has aired on sports networks around the country.

To a rapt audience that included 1933 alumnus John Keusch, who remembers the Law School before the Law Quadrangle was completed, and Ann Cook (pictured here with Leary), 1945 LSA graduate and grandniece of the man who made the Law Quad possible, Law Library Director Margaret Leary delivered an engaging lunchtime talk about benefactor William Cook. Read more in the online version of the Law Quadrangle.

Students, alumni, faculty, and friends told their stories to StoryCorps, an independent, nonprofit oral history project. Recorded conversations will be archived at the Law School and the Library of Congress. Brad Livingston, ’79, and his daughter, Amy, a 1L, talked about the changes in the Law School between his school days and hers. Her final question to him was this: “Are you proud of me?” He answered with an emphatic “yes.”

Read more StoryCorps remembrances in the online version of the Law Quadrangle.