

# Among our best

## UB Law Alumni Association celebrates luminaries of the school



Above, left to right: Daniel T. Lukasik '88, Francis M. Letro '79, Dean Makau W. Mutua, Denise E. O'Donnell '82, Hon. David J. Mahoney '52 and Thomas E. Black Jr. '79

A long tradition of UB Law alumni gathering to enjoy each other's company, and to salute some of the best among them, added a new chapter with the 46th Annual Dinner of the UB Law Alumni Association. Held at the Hyatt Regency Buffalo, the event culminated with the presentation of Distinguished Alumni Awards to five graduates and one non-alumnus – then-interim Dean Makau Mutua.

After a welcome by Margaret P. Gryko '77, president of the UB Law Alumni Association, Mutua spoke of the alumni as real-world examples of the Law School educational experience. "If anyone has any doubts about the quality and excellence of our faculty and our students," he said, "all they have to do is look at our alumni. You are the best testament, the most visible evidence, of the quality of the education that UB provides. Your success, your own accomplishments, speak to the in-



UB President John B. Simpson presented the award to Professor Makau W. Mutua, who was then interim dean.

tegrity and to the vitality of our Law School."

Mutua also spoke to the current controversy surrounding a proposal for state funding of other proposed law schools in New York State, and asked

the alumni to join in advocating that state dollars be better spent in supporting UB Law, the state's only public law school.

Robert L. Boreanaz '89, co-chair of the Annual Dinner, detailed progress on the Law School's Harry Rachlin '26 Oral History Project, which collects, catalogs and indexes videotaped interviews with UB Law alumni, faculty and others to capture the rich tapestry of Buffalo legal history. He also played some clips from the project – some stirring, some with a smile – and noted that the materials are fully searchable by names and keywords. "This is truly a remarkable resource, and it is building and growing," Boreanaz said.

His Annual Dinner co-chair, Richard F. DiGiacomo '76, recognized the many sponsors and underwriters of the event, a major fund-raiser for the Law Alumni Association. Major sponsors included Alan Fenster Associates, M&T Bank, Structured Financial Associates, Computer Task Group and LCS.

Honored for "his conscientious and diligent performance in the judiciary" was **Hon. David J. Mahoney '52**, retired justice of the New York State Supreme Court, 8<sup>th</sup> Judicial District.

"Judge Mahoney is always a gentleman, quick with a smile, a terrific sense of humor and a hearty laugh," said Hon. E. Jeannette Ogden '83, who introduced the honoree via a tape-recorded message. "He is an avid reader and a student of history, a lover of theater, a terrific golfer, and a squash champion who works out daily at the Buffalo Athletic Club, where he is known to take a one-hour spinning class and immediately follow it with a squash match."

Ogden also cited the judge's advocacy for the less fortunate, as chair of the Civil Right Committee of the New York State Bar Association and past president of the Erie County Bar Association. "He loves the law and lawyers," she said.

Longtime Buffalo litigator **Francis M. Letro '79**, honored "for his leader-

ship by example as a private practitioner," was introduced by DiGiacomo, who said Letro met all the criteria for the award, including having the respect of his fellow lawyers; presenting a positive image of the profession; knowledge and courtesy; and honesty and ethics.

Citing Letro's support for such community mainstays as Erie County Medical Center, Roswell Park Cancer Institute, Buffalo State College, the Burchfield-Penney Arts Center, the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, the Darwin Martin House Restoration Project, the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra and the Boy Scouts, DiGiacomo said, "Through his efforts in these community groups and organizations, Fran displays a much-needed positive image for our profession."

DiGiacomo also noted Letro's major gift to build the working courtroom in O'Brian Hall: "He says he was an ordinary kid who was given an extraordinary opportunity by our Law School, and he committed \$1 million to the courtroom project so he could contribute back to the Law School he had gratitude for."

**Daniel T. Lukasik '88**, honored "for his many contributions to the betterment of our community," was introduced by Gryko, who noted the honoree's efforts on behalf of lawyers facing the illness of depression.

"Lawyers are susceptible to depression, yet they do not always confront their illness," Gryko said. "During his own recovery, Dan Lukasik was unable to find an online resource and support network geared toward lawyers facing depression. So in 2007 he launched and continues to maintain lawyerswithdepression.com, which includes articles, podcasts and resources. Subsequently Dan founded a support group for lawyers with depression in Erie County; similar groups have been formed in Albany, Rochester, New York City and elsewhere in the state.

"By creating a supportive environment for lawyers to openly communicate about depression, Dan has turned a difficult experience in his own life into something positive for others."

Boreanaz introduced **Denise E. O'Donnell '82**, honored for her commitment to public service. A former U.S. attorney, she now serves as commissioner of the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services.

"Denise lives, eats and sleeps public service," Boreanaz said. "It is truly a part of her fiber. She is an outstanding and superbly hard-working attorney who puts in a legendary 70-hour work-week."

As well, he said, "I was always struck by Denise's demeanor. She was such a kind person, and she was such a genuine person." In addition, he said, O'Donnell has devoted countless hours to professional bono work, was a founding member of the New York State Women's Bar Association, and has served as president of the UB Law Alumni Association.

DiGiacomo introduced **Thomas E. Black Jr. '79**, who received an award "for his exemplary performance and



Denise E. O'Donnell '82 received the award for Public Service.

business." Black is managing partner of Black, Mann & Graham in Flower Mound, Texas, practicing in the area of residential real estate law.

"Many of you remember Tom and his brother Shawn as excellent real estate attorneys in Western New York," DiGiacomo said. "Tom has always had a terrific ability to help a brother or sister lawyer in a difficult closing, but never in an offensive way, always with courtesy and often with humor."

In community service, DiGiacomo said, Black serves as board chairman of Christian Community Action and served on the board of the North Texas Food Bank. At UB Law School, he is chairman of the Dean's Advisory Council and served as a member of the search committee for the new dean.

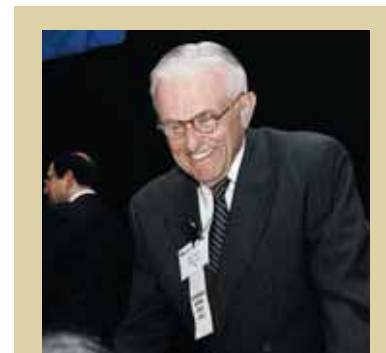
A graduate of the University of Notre Dame, he also recently completed an MBA at Notre Dame.

UB President John B. Simpson presented the award to Professor **Makau W. Mutua**, who was then serving as interim dean of UB Law School. Mutua was honored for outstanding service to the university and the community by a non-alumnus.

"Through UB 2020, the University is pursuing a course of sustained academic excellence that we believe will lead to UB's being recognized as one of the great public research universities of the 21st century," Simpson said. "Professor Mutua has contributed and will continue to contribute in outstanding ways to that mission. He has provided instrumental and timely leadership as the Law School continues its strategic pursuit of excellence."

Noting that Mutua was the founding director of the UB Human Rights Center, he said, "As one of the world's foremost authorities in the area of human rights law, his impact has been truly global in scope, shaping human rights in political practice in the United States, in Africa and in a multinational context. In short, he has distinguished himself and our University on an international scale through his scholarship and through his profoundly meaningful application of that scholarship."

Also serving on the Annual Dinner Committee were Kenneth W. Africano '85, Hilary C. Banker '96, Vincent E. Doyle III '89, Catherine E. Nagel '98 and Donald W. O'Brien Jr. '77.



Hon. David J. Mahoney '52, who received a Distinguished Alumnus Award at the Law Alumni Association's Annual Dinner, passed away July 5 in a hospice facility near Buffalo. The retired New York State Supreme Court justice was 79.