

The leaders of the three largest law firms: David McNamara, left, managing partner of Phillips Lytle LLP; John Amershadian, president of Hodgson Russ LLP; and Peter Marlette, managing partner of Damon Morey LLP.



All together

Attorneys credit SUNY Buffalo Law School with fostering collegiality within the profession

BY MATT CHANDLER
mchandler@bizjournals.com | 716-541-1654

If there is any question of how important SUNY Buffalo Law School is to the local legal profession, a look inside the numbers is quite revealing.

The top 10 law firms, ranked in Business First by number of local attorneys, employ a total of 677 attorneys. Of those, more than 55 percent (379) are graduates of SUNY Buffalo Law School.

The top three firms (Hodgson Russ LLP, Phillips Lytle LLP and Damon Morey LLP) account for 194 of those currently practicing in Western New York.

Hodgson Russ leads the way with 91 graduates. President John Amershadian said the importance of the law school to the local legal community is so great, it can't be quantified.

"It's not just that the school is an economic engine, which it certainly is," he said. "But most importantly, throughout the community, it is an intellectual engine. It gives us the ability to tap into

talent that otherwise might never end up in Buffalo."

Twenty years ago, Amershadian said, the firm would have gotten leads on its best attorneys from professors who would pick up the phone and push students into the spotlight. The process has evolved, he said, but the benefits of having a steady flow of quality applicants in Western New York are clear.

According to Amershadian, Hodgson Russ sets the bar high for incoming attorneys. He praised UB's ability to consistently deliver top-flight attorneys.

“When we are hiring someone, we expect them to not only be able to work within this community but also with people and in communities nationwide,” he said. “Our UB graduates come to us ready to work and equipped to succeed.”

He appreciates the opportunity for attorneys at his firm to take on roles as adjunct faculty, he added. The nearby law school provides an outlet for those who want to teach on a part-time basis.

■ **By 1929, 57 percent of the attorneys practicing in Buffalo had received a degree from the law school. In October of that year, the university kicked off its endowment fund campaign. But on the fifth day, Black Friday struck. Though the stock market crash and the Depression had their effects, the campaign was considered a success, raising more than \$5 million.**

—“**University at Buffalo Law School 100 Years 1887-1987**”

“Because they have that outlet here, I think it can help us keep talent,” he said. “Attorneys who want to teach don’t have to feel like they have no options or that they have to go elsewhere to pursue that desire.”

In addition to giving back to students,

Amershadian sees another benefit of adjunct professors.

“We have had people from UB come to interview and when we ask them how they learned about the firm, they will regularly cite having a professor who is one of our attorneys who made a lasting impression on them,” he said.

Phillips Lytle Managing Partner David McNamara agreed. With 53 graduates of SUNY Buffalo Law School among his attorneys, McNamara said many have returned as adjunct professors.

“All of our attorneys, to a person, acknowledge how much they take away from those (adjunct) experiences,” he said. “Interacting with the students in the classroom setting, and the energy they take away from that, is an enormous benefit for our lawyers. And that’s why we support our adjuncts so strongly.”

According to McNamara, the law school has a big footprint in Western New York.

“We see the benefits UB Law has for other businesses, for social service organizations, charities,” he said.

To that point, Phillips Lytle supports the law school in various ways – financially, through adjunct professors and through mentoring. Then, of course, there is the ultimate support – hiring law graduates and giving them their first job. McNamara said while it’s a benefit for the graduates, the firm gains an edge, as well.

“You are hiring someone who is already familiar with the Buffalo area,” he said. “Someone who appreciates some of the advantages of being part of this community. That can be huge in terms of the long-term prospects for success.”

Talk to enough lawyers in the region and you hear a recurring theme – UB is a unifying force. “Buffalo is very blessed with the high number of terrific attorneys we have, and UB Law is a big part of that success,” said Peter Marlette, managing partner at Damon Morey LLP.

That spills over not only into the law firms but to the various bar associations and legal organizations, he added.

“We have a bar here that really gets along and is overall very respectful of each other and congenial,” he said. “When you have so many attorneys practicing in this area who have all graduated from the same institution, I think there is a mutual respect that goes a long way toward the success of not only an individual firm but also of the entire community.”

Regardless of where they go to begin their career after graduation, Marlette said spending a few years in Western New York and seeing that the practice of law doesn’t have to be a cutthroat business serves law students well.

“I believe it shows them that things can be done civilly,” he said. “It doesn’t have to be about getting an edge over everybody and fighting every step of the way. We can practice law with dignity and respect, and I think the students benefit from seeing that here in Buffalo.”

When SUNY Buffalo Law School reached out three years ago, Damon Morey started a matching program in which the firm matches donations its attorneys make to the school.

“We decided to try the matching idea to get our attorneys to give even more and it has been very successful,” Marlette said.



“Having a quality law school that attracts top faculty and students is a tremendous benefit not only to the local law firms but to the entire community,” says David McNamara. At left, Peter Marlette and John Amershadian, center.