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## March 2008 Alumni Newsletter

New York Law School

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# ALUMNI CONNECTIONS

Your Lifetime Network of Support | April 2008

## Meet the Network



### Building Buzz

Roaring backhoes and drumming jackhammers are just music to Dean Richard Matasar's ears. All those sounds indicate the continuing progress being made on the Law School's new building. Steel girders have been erected on the Worth Street side of the building site, and work is coming to completion on the slurry wall foundation for the larger, West Broadway portion of the site, says Associate Dean Harry Althaus. Concrete has been poured for the ground floor, and now excavation continues for the belowground B1 level, to be followed by B2, B3, and B4. After that, construction will begin aboveground, and then finishing work like drywall and paint begins both above and belowground at once.

"Every day the magnificent construction team brings the Law School closer to achieving its dream of not just a bigger but a significantly better facility," Dean Matasar says.

### Did you know?

New York Law School is the alma mater of...

- One Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award-winning poet, Wallace Stevens, Class of 1903.
- One Pulitzer Prize-winning dramatist, Elmer Rice, Class of 1912.
- One Tony Award-winning producer, Michael Rego, Class of 1996.



Michael Rego '96



Producer Michael Rego '96 (center) with partners Matthew Rego (left) and Hank Unger (right)

### Michael Rego '96

Yesterday, like every other day, Michael Rego '96 put his law degree to good use to finesse a merger between two companies.

Rego, however, is not a lawyer, but the producer of the Tony Award-winning play (and soon to be movie) *Urinetown*, as well as the hugely popular *Wicked*. The merger—a successful one—was between his theater production company, The Araca Group, and a smaller company.

Although law might seem an unlikely tool for a theater producer, Rego says it is essential to his company. "The merger was a math and contract issue, and I had to evaluate the deal," he says. "I used many of the skills I learned in a Securities Law course to do that." As a fledgling producer before law school, he was hampered by not knowing how to read a contract.

"Working in the entertainment industry is all about making deals. I make deals all day long." The Law School taught Rego how to make deals more effectively by "thinking like a lawyer." "In sum," he adds, "I wanted to get smarter."

But Rego still got to tap into his creativity at the Law School, he says, in his favorite course, Tax Law.

"Good lawyering is necessarily a creative endeavor. The Tax Code is an unyielding, Byzantine, crazy document. But a creative thinker can structure a deal creatively to take the optimum tax advantage."

Referring to his merger meeting, he says, "In fact, we were talking about taxes all day yesterday."

## New York Law School Heritage

### Meet John M. Harlan, Class of 1924



a luxury he had probably grown accustomed to, as the son of an affluent Chicago attorney.

But John M. Harlan '24 had something in common with many hard-working New York Law School students then and for generations to come. He already had a day job. Harlan balanced work at a white-shoe Wall Street law firm during the day with law classes that would lead to his degree in 1924.

Harlan became a partner at the firm in 1931 and returned to private practice after service in World War II. In January 1954, Harlan was nominated to the United States Circuit Court for the Second Circuit.

By the time he was chosen in 1955 by President Dwight Eisenhower for the Supreme Court, he had become “a lawyer with an impressive pedigree, [Chief Justice Earl] Warren’s opposite in many ways,” Peter Irons wrote in *A People’s History of the Supreme Court*. Warren’s father came from Norway and worked on the railroads; while Harlan’s father came from colonial stock and headed a prominent Chicago law firm.

In fact, the patrician Harlan is best known as the dissenter of the liberal Warren Court. He strongly believed in states’ rights and the rights of the individual. Harlan advocated a limited role for the judiciary, remarking that the Supreme Court should not be considered “a general haven for reform movements.” William Rehnquist, in *The Supreme Court*, noted that as the last justice born during the nineteenth century, in 1899, Harlan “did not feel its tug in reading the Constitution.” He defended federalism against centralization of power and he rejected the idea that the Fourteenth Amendment incorporated or embraced the Bill of Rights.

The 25-year-old from Chicago with London-tailored suits and a gold pocket watch may have seemed aristocratic to the average New Yorker. The pocket watch was inherited from his grandfather and namesake, John M. Harlan, a Supreme Court Justice who had served from 1877 to 1911, and the suits were

Despite his conservatism, Harlan often sided with the Court’s liberals and sometimes wrote the majority opinion for them. He and the other justices were unanimous in directing the district courts to bring about, “with all deliberate speed,” the end of racial segregation in the public schools, which the Court had declared unconstitutional the previous year.

He wrote the majority opinion in the landmark case, *Cohen v. California*, which held that wearing a jacket with the words “F—k the Draft” was protected speech. In *Radich v. New York*, Harlan led the Court in overturning the conviction of a Manhattan art gallery owner, who had been convicted of displaying American flags (each portrayed as a penis), in a “lewd, vulgar, and disrespectful way.”

Justice Harlan retired in 1971 after sixteen years, “a principled conservative with a libertarian streak, cast in the mold of his grandfather,” wrote Rehnquist. Norman Dorsen, President of the American Civil Liberties Union, remembered Justice Harlan as a “great judge and a great man.”

## Alumni Corner

How much do you know about the life of today’s New York Law School students? Take our true-false quiz:

1. A New York Law School class sometimes meets on a virtual island—“Democracy Island”—in a video game called “Second Life.”
2. Some New York Law School students and professors have decided to meet for classes in alternative locations during the construction of the new building. Alternative locations around New York City include the top of the Empire State Building, the crown of the Statue of Liberty, and numerous Starbucks’ coffee shops in TriBeCa.
3. New York Law School students ranked fifth in New York State for bar passage in the summer of 2007 for first-time takers.
4. The Student Body Association hosts a “Fitness Fair” in the fall for new students to learn about various gyms and activities in New York.
5. TriBeCa offers students more steak houses than Japanese restaurants and more tapas bars than Indian restaurants.

To take this survey and see the answers, please visit the Alumni & Friends page on the New York Law School Web site, [www.nyls.edu](http://www.nyls.edu).

## Diversity's Champion

**E. Christopher Johnson '81**



Catching up with Chris Johnson '81 is like chasing after a marathon runner. In the space of four days, he is at the Law School giving a talk to the Dean's Council, then flying to the ABA mid-year meeting in Los Angeles, and then back to his office in Detroit on the red eye for an all-day meeting the next day.

It's small wonder that Johnson is busy. He oversees Legal Operations for General Motors in the United States, Canada, and Mexico. As Vice President and General Counsel at General Motors North America, he leads a 250-member legal staff and manages strategic relations with more than 500 external law firms.

In Johnson's personal life, church, his wife Rhonda, and children Chip and Erin are the utmost priority. At GM, finding the balance between domestic and global priorities is a little more challenging. As GM becomes a more global company, the legal challenges outside the U.S. grow, which requires more diversion of the U.S. staff. Yet the American legal environment is "the most complex and expensive in the world," so significant challenges remain here. "Don't get me wrong," he says. "I think this is a positive thing because it provides the attorneys on my staff with new types of opportunities."

An essential ingredient to success in the "increasingly diverse and interconnected world economy" is a workforce that works productively and creatively with individuals from a multitude of races and ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds, Johnson says.

His passion for diversity has paid off. In response to Johnson's 2003 challenge, GM's payments to women-owned firms and female lawyers increased 21 percent, and payments to minority law firms and minority lawyers increased 44 percent. Recently GM along with DuPont, Sara Lee, Wal-Mart, and Shell made a commitment in 2006 to place \$16 million with minority-owned law firms.

The first step towards achieving diversity in the legal profession begins in middle and high school when students begin to consider law as a career. To that end, GM is also among companies determined to increase "pipeline" activities with inner city schools in Detroit and Pontiac, offering outreach programs to students.

*Commitment to diversity continues in law school. Johnson, along with Dean Richard Matasar, has sought modifications to a recently proposed bar pass standard that might have adversely affected law school diversity. In fact, at the ABA meeting, he and others made successful arguments before the House of Delegates to approve a modified standard that he, Dean Matasar, and others had crafted.*

Chris Johnson has always looked at issues—big or small—with an eye towards improvement. As an honors student and SBA president, Johnson decided to replace "very boring wine and cheese parties with beer, potato chip, and pretzel parties."

"Not only were these parties much more fun, but also, we made a great deal of money, which allowed us to fund most of the needs of the student organizations."

Johnson's commitment to good works extends well beyond party planning, however. He works pro bono as the general counsel of his church, and that work, as well as his commitment to diversity, reflects his fervent belief in using his position and influence for the betterment of society.

"In the end, the principles of justice and equality are the cornerstones of the legal profession."

ALUMNI

# CONNECTIONS

Your Lifetime Network of Support | April 2008



## For Alumni

### SAVE THESE DATES

- **Wednesday, April 9**  
**Reception: 6:30 p.m., Dinner: 7:15 p.m.**  
Dean's Council Dinner (by invitation only)
- **Friday, April 11**  
**Reception: 7:00 p.m., Dinner: 8:00 p.m.**  
Annual BLSA Alumni Dinner  
Wellington Conference Center
- **Monday, April 14**  
**12:30 p.m.**  
Spotlight on In-House Counsel  
Wellington Conference Center
- **Friday, November 14 and Saturday, November 15**  
Reunion Weekend 2008 for all classes ending in  
"3" and "8"

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## Breaking New Ground. Again: Carrying On a Legacy

Suzy Mendik



Slim and blonde, Suzy Mendik has changed little from the pictures that decorate her home—pictures of her smiling and laughing with her late husband Bernie and their children. The dozens of framed pictures, as well as the hundreds of books that line shelves from floor to ceiling at

her New York City town house, tell the story of a close and educated family. In this setting, it becomes clear why the Mendik family continued the tradition started by real estate entrepreneur Bernie Mendik '58, former Chairman of the Board of New York Law School, to endow the Law School's new Mendik library. Like a jewel in a crown, the new Mendik Library promises to be the centerpiece of the Law School's expansion—not just part of, but central to the new glass-enclosed, 235,000-square-foot, nine-level building.

The Mendik name will continue its place of prominence at the Law School. Yet it isn't glory but commitment to education that is at the heart of this family tradition, Ms. Mendik said.

That commitment to New York Law School began with the first Mendik Library, on the corner of Church and Leonard Streets. Dedicated in 1990, the five-story facility substantially enriched the Law School's ability to provide top-notch research and study facilities to its students and faculty. The new library will be without question an integral part of the Law School's expansion and an improvement on the first Mendik Library. The new library furthers the hope Bernie Mendik had when he endowed the original library. That hope, said Ms. Mendik, was that a world-class library would signal to the law community the excellence of the School itself.

"He pushed and prodded us to dream grandly about our future and to imagine how best we could leverage the untapped value of our wonderful TriBeCa home," Dean Richard Matasar says.

Ms. Mendik notes, "Bernie felt that an excellent library would give the Law School the jump start it needed to get to the next level." Indeed, the original, five-story facility, which houses more than 500,000 volumes of books, microforms, audio/visual materials, and computer programs, has been a magnet for students and faculty and a vital and beloved campus fixture.

As much as the Mendik name seems to belong to the library, the naming of the original library was not something her husband requested but instead something the Board asked him to approve, she says. He reluctantly agreed, on the condition that it be named after the whole family and not just him.

"Nothing was done by Bernie without including his family. Everyone was included and involved, and he never wanted personal attention. Bernie was a very private person who never would allow himself to be honored by any organization. He dedicated himself to various causes without the need for glorification. We felt that our future is in the hands of our children. And what better thing can you do?" Ms. Mendik says.

In addition to the first Mendik Library as well as the new one, the Mendik name also graces another bastion of education, The Real Estate Board of New York's newly opened education center.

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*"[Bernie Mendik] pushed and prodded us to dream grandly about our future and to imagine how best we could leverage the untapped value of our wonderful TriBeCa home,"*  
*Dean Richard Matasar says.*

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“Education was so important to Bernie when he was growing up,” says Ms. Mendik. “He fought to get out of the Southeast Bronx, and throughout his life he was very big on scholarships. He went to an excellent public high school, Bronx Science, and to City College on the GI Bill, and then New York Law School as a night student while he worked during the day. He and I always felt that education is the key to our future because of our children and that education as well as medicine were crucial areas we wanted to support.”

Bernie Mendik was also a proponent of a campaign to halt a city zoning initiative that would have capped the height of skyscrapers. The change, he argued, would stifle future development. The Law School’s new building, with the library at its heart, is in some ways the culmination of a dream for her late husband as a symbol of both the School’s progress and the city’s ability to constantly reinvent itself—both things for which Mendik worked hard.

“He would be thrilled to see the Law School evolve,” Suzy says. “New York Law School was always an important part of his education. Although he didn’t use his law school education to practice law, he felt it gave him the knowledge and training to succeed. Whenever the children of friends asked his advice, he would tell them, ‘Go to law school. It teaches you how to think.’”

Ms. Mendik, in addition to her commitment to the new library, has other significant ties to the Law School. As a member of the Law School’s Board of Trustees, Suzy brings her experience as a C.P.A. to bear on issues affecting the School. Despite her own very busy life, she has continued her presence on the Board “to represent Bernie and continue his dreams for a better, greater New York Law School.”

Board Chair Arthur N. Abbey ’59 agrees that Bernie’s vision of the Law School is the inspiration for the new building, and Suzy Mendik’s presence on the Board “continues his tremendous legacy to our School.”

“She is smart, able, and perceptive. I hope she stays involved and committed for a very long time.”

Dean Richard Matasar says the Mendik family contribution to the Law School cannot be measured in numbers alone. “Her strength, her passion, and her love for the Law School

have made her the spiritual center of our Board and have helped us to bring vision to life.”

Ms. Mendik has generously hosted New York Law School events on numerous occasions, including a fund-raiser after 9/11 and a reception at her home last March to announce the launch of the Law School’s new Center for Real Estate Studies.

“Bernie would have been so happy to see the new program instituted by the Law School,” she said with a wistful smile. “I wanted to help them get started,” she added, gesturing to the beautiful room behind her, “and we built a great home for entertaining.”

Although Ms. Mendik has been honored and happy to carry on her husband’s legacy, she notes that one family cannot do it alone. She encourages other alumni to begin a family tradition of support to New York Law School, one that the Mendik family is carrying out with such joy and commitment.

“Our children’s futures depend upon the generosity of each and every one of us. The torch is passed not just from generation to generation, but from family to family. That’s how institutions grow by leaps and bounds. That’s why New York Law School has been able to grow from a neighborhood school to an international one.”

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