

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 13, 2007

Contact: John M. Veilleux
Assistant Dean for Marketing and Communications
PH: 817.212.4064

Law School Announces the Naming of the Bernie Schuchmann Conference Center

FORTH WORTH, Texas - Texas Wesleyan University School of Law proudly announces the Bernie Schuchmann Conference Center. The naming honors Bernie Schuchmann '07, who has made a gift to the law school.

“We are extremely grateful for Bernie’s generous gift,” Interim Dean Cynthia L. Fontaine said. “As a student, Bernie was actively involved and deeply committed to the success of the law school, helping and giving to the community through his *pro bono* service, as an academic support and legal writing teaching assistant, and as a member of the negotiation team. Bernie made a positive impact while he was a student here, and now as a new alumnus, he is continuing to demonstrate his commitment to the law school in an extraordinary way.”

Bernie, a graduate of the Harvard Business School and the Kennedy School of Government, and a real estate executive when he entered law school in 2003, said the time he spent at Texas Wesleyan University School of Law changed his life.

“What Texas Wesleyan taught me was that it isn’t all about money,” Bernie said. “When I decided I wanted to make a gift, I couldn’t think of a better recipient than the entity that changed my way of thought. I was 49 when I entered law school. It’s hard to teach an old dog new tricks, but Texas Wesleyan managed to do that with me.”

Proudly Committed to a School with ‘Soul’

Bernie said he felt compelled to make this gift because he was proud of his association with a school he described as having ‘soul.’

“This school changes people’s perspective on life through teaching both academics and attitude, and I think that is what gives this place soul,” Bernie said. “It has all the rigor of law school, but it also has a personality, and I don’t want that strong personality to dissipate. I hope that any contribution I make will help go toward keeping this school’s soul intact.”

Citing a personal example of the school’s soul, Bernie recalled a conversation with Professor Kay Elkins-Elliott, who approached him and discussed her hopes for the then-upcoming Southwest Regional Mediation Competition at South Texas Law School last spring.

“I had not taken her mediation course,” Bernie said. “But based on our conversation, I put together a group of students who would compete with less than a month to go before the competition.”

Texas Wesleyan fielded two entries with the group of students Bernie patched together, with Stacy Jewett '07 and 3L Clay Graham making up one team, and Carlie Fraser '07 and Bernie the other. The teams were immersed almost daily with rehearsals led by Elkins-Elliott and others she brought in to help the group

prepare for the competition. Fraser and Jewett were the only team members who had taken Elkins-Elliott's mediation class.

"Kay brought in numerous individuals to help get us up to speed," Bernie said. "She brought in alumni and she set up video cameras to review our practices – all to take us from two teams with little to no experience to teams that could compete against South Texas Law School, the long standing regional champion of negotiation in this region."

And the result was spectacular, with the two teams sweeping the competition, setting up a Wesleyan v. Wesleyan showdown in the final round. Jewett and Graham went on to finish first, and Fraser and Bernie finished second.

The Catalyst for a New Perspective

Bernie credits his seven semesters as a legal writing and academic support teaching assistant as the genesis for his change of perspective. While attending school as a part-time evening student during his four years at the law school, he spent two semesters as a legal writing TA and five semesters as an academic support TA.

Everett Chambers, director of the academic support program, said Bernie's impact on the program was enormous, and his commitment to seeing the students succeed was unwavering.

"He always displays a can-do attitude, and he infected his students with that same attitude," Chambers said. "Bernie believes in the individual success of each student entrusted to him and works selflessly, tirelessly, and creatively to help each student tap into his potential. He is the gold standard, setting a record for attendance and achievement with his sections."

Professor Mark Burge, for whom Bernie served as a teaching assistant for two semesters, said that what repeatedly impressed him was Bernie's commitment to the students who came after him. Burge said through both his work as a legal writing teaching assistant and academic support TA, Bernie consistently went above and beyond what was required of the position.

"Bernie hasn't just put in the usual work of being a teaching assistant. He also strives to be a role model for students in a variety of areas, ranging from study skills to ethics and integrity. As much as any student I have seen here, Bernie pushes and encourages the students around him in much the way a professor would. I think it truly matters to him that other students have an enriching law school experience and get as much out of Texas Wesleyan as he did."

Inside the Bernie Schuchmann Conference Center, the law school plans to display a few photos of Bernie's time at the law school. Of those pictures, the one most important to him is that of his last academic support section.

"My hope is that the naming of this room will place an even greater emphasis on the academic support program. The program is one that I believe in strongly," Bernie said.

After Bernie's first year of law school, Chambers approached him and asked if he would consider becoming an academic support assistant. Having been inspired by his own TA, Chris Long '04, Bernie agreed to Chamber's request and was then given the opportunity to review the curriculum for the students.

"After looking it over, I said to myself, 'Boy, if I had only known this information during my first year, I could have saved myself 300 man hours, and I could have perhaps received a half grade higher across the board,'" Bernie said.

The real strength of the academic support program, Bernie said, lies in the fact that it serves as a sort of compass, helping students navigate the rough and rapid waters of law school.

"The academic support program takes students thrown off the dock to swim, and it gives them a compass that indicates which way is north. That can be an invaluable tool in helping students succeed," Bernie said.

2L Sharon Lowry, a student in Bernie's academic support section, said Bernie was especially eager that the students in his section to do well, saying that it was evident he wanted his section to be the best-performing TA section.

"He gave very solid advice, backed by charts and graphs, about where we should be concentrating our study time for maximum effect," she said. "He also had specific examples of how to prepare an outline that helped us focus on the real meat of our courses."

Lowry said the success Bernie's academic support sections experienced both in terms of academic performance and attendance was not by chance. She attributed it to that fact that his advice was practical and specific, so students knew they would learn something valuable by attending his sessions.

"He is unselfish with his advice on the best strategy for passing a course, or planning a semester, and how to succeed with particular instructors. In talking with students who had other TAs, I realized that we had something special in Bernie that other students envied," Lowry said.

Giving Back Through *Pro Bono*

In addition to his countless hours serving as a teaching assistant for seven semesters, Bernie performed 727 hours of *pro bono* service for the Fort Worth federal public defender's office while in law school, 697 more than the 30-hour requirement. For his efforts, Bernie received the Equal Justice Award this past spring.

After completing his required 30-hours of service, Bernie was encouraged by Assistant Dean Patti Gearhart Turner, director of the equal justice program, to give more hours of service, something she challenges all students to do. After thinking about Turner's advice, Bernie decided it was something he needed to do.

"As much as students at Texas Wesleyan needed help with the academic support program, no one needs help more than the defendants who present themselves to the federal public defender," Bernie said. "I learned from that office that I should never complain about anything that is happening to me in my life again. Those defendants are the ones with real troubles and need as much help as you can possibly give a person."

Peter Fleury, Bernie's supervising attorney at the federal public defender's office, said Bernie's life experience really provided him with an advantage during his internship.

"He was able to roll up his sleeves and work hard," Fleury said. "Bernie is very intelligent and his business experience really helped in our cases dealing with white-collar crime. He was really the best intern we've had, and we are all very appreciative of his contributions."

Bernie said he believed the federal public defender's office was understaffed. The lawyers and defendants, he said, both needed his help. And giving back through the law is what Bernie said now drives him to make a difference.

"Many people, when they get older, turn to religion, community service, or charitable organizations as a way of making a difference," Bernie said. "I have turned to the law. I get more satisfaction out of being involved in the law and helping other people in relation to the law than I ever did in other endeavors. I personally think it is a higher calling and Texas Wesleyan woke that up in me."