

Possible UB Law move: What alums have to say

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By **MATT CHANDLER**

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We polled several University at Buffalo Law School alumni to get their thoughts on proposals from Rep. Brian Higgins and others to move the law school, now in the northern suburb of Amherst, to the vacant Statler Towers building downtown. Their responses to three questions are outlined below.

• ***Do you see this as a good and viable option for the UB Law School?***

"I think there is an unofficial consensus among alumni that there is a strong benefit to having the law school in close proximity to the courts. We see this as a major factor that should be considered when determining the location of the law school.

"We (the law school's Alumni Association) are reaching out to the university as an organization to have the university explain to us what, if anything, it has done to explore the possibility of the Statler as a plan for relocating the law school. We have also asked them to account to the Alumni Association whether it considered any downtown location for the school. This is a university decision, not a law-school decision, and we have asked them about their reconsideration, given the current situation with the Statler.

"In short, we have asked the university to report to us, and be held accountable as to what it's done to look at not only the Statler, but any downtown location."

- Robert Boreanaz '89,
Lipsitz Green Scime Cambria LLP,
president of the UB Law Alumni Association

"Generally speaking, knowing what I know now, I certainly would have enjoyed the opportunity in law school to find myself closer to practicing attorneys and with closer access to the courts and the chance for some real-life practical experience. I think it is a wonderful idea, especially if the building is going to sit empty."

- John Ford '04,
Damon Morey LLP

"I think the law school is one of Buffalo's great treasures and resources. I also think that downtown Buffalo is going to be the future of this area, so to have more people downtown, especially people who

would benefit from the access to the courts and the (Erie County) clerk's office, would be exciting. I think it's fabulous."

- Catherine Wettlaufer '85,
Hiscock & Barclay LLP

"This works on two levels. One is the perspective of the university, and they will have to make their own decisions. But from the perspective of the legal community downtown, it would be a wonderful thing if the law school could see fit to relocate down here.

"It works on so many levels. Students will get to see firsthand the real-life practice of law. Law firms will have easier access to have student clerks and that will add to all kinds of employment benefits to graduating students."

- Robert Convissar '77,
*solo practitioner, president of
the Bar Association of Erie County*

"I believe that any opportunity we have to strengthen our infrastructure downtown and to help build the economy only helps to strengthen Western New York. I also think that if we are able to get a viable tenant in there, it again only strengthens the downtown economy.

"I think that the convenience of it is also great because the opportunity to be around the larger firms ... will give them the chance to see the day-in-and-day-out operations not only of what we do, but also the courts and the judges as well."

- Joseph Hanna '05,
Goldberg Segalla LLP

"I personally do not see the current proximity of the law school as a deterrent, whether it is in Amherst or on (UB's) South Campus. I would personally defer to the law school to make the right determination in the best interest of the faculty, students and staff; however, there are numerous joint degree programs that are at the law school, along with other professional programs, that would make it difficult if the law school was apart from the rest of the graduate programs.

"On top of that, if the law school is (moved to) the South Campus, it is quite easy to take a subway and get down to the courthouse in a very short window of time."

- Marc Brown '99,
*Phillips Lytle LLP, member of the
UB Law alumni board of directors*

"Without understanding or knowing the financial aspects and complications there would be for the university, I think it would be a good thing for law students themselves, and they would benefit greatly from being downtown. They would get so much more exposure to the system and gain much more experience being here."

- Daniel Sperrazza '83,
Cohen & Lombardo PC

• *Could the relocation of the law school create a stronger bond with the legal community and increase the retention of graduates in the area?*

"I think it would exactly serve that purpose. Law students who may not be able to get paid clerking jobs may be able to take on volunteer clerk positions or internships, because there will be no travel requirements. I see that giving them access to law firms and lawyers and having the chance to make contacts, and it could only improve the potential employment situation of the students."

- R. Convissar

"I think if they were downtown, there would be such easier access between the students and the law firms and between the law firms and the school, and their career-development office. I think it would be an easier process for both sides. I think it would help especially with the smaller law offices who don't take advantage of the law school because it is out in Amherst. In that respect, I would see more opportunities for the students."

- D. Sperrazza

• *Would your experience at UB Law have been enhanced if the program had been downtown? How so?*

"I spent a great deal of time in the courtrooms while going to law school, primarily because I had access because of my working in my father's firm as a law student. It was a great benefit to me, and not every student has that access. So if the school was downtown and the students could spend their free time networking and observing courtroom proceedings, it would be a wonderful asset."

- R. Boreanaz

"Not necessarily, because I think as a law student, you make your own opportunities. I always felt that if you were proactive and reached out to attorneys or judges, I think that option was always there, and they were very receptive to that."

- J. Ford

"It only happened (students getting downtown regularly) if you had a job. I worked in my third year for a firm as a law clerk, and back then there weren't the clinic programs there are now, so it was the only time I ever came downtown. Had the law school been downtown then, I certainly would have benefited."

- D. Sperrazza

A call seeking comment from John Della Contrada, senior director of media relations at UB, was not returned as of press time.