

# Public Interest

## OPICS

In the fall of 1993, a group of Georgetown Law students had a vision: to create a vibrant academic environment in which public interest lawyering would be accepted, supported and nurtured.

To make the vision a reality, they submitted a 32-page report to school officials setting forth a blueprint for the idea. Those administrators — who were already considering improvements in that area — responded quickly, and the Office of Public Interest and Community Service was born: a public interest

career center that also encourages all students, regardless of their future path, to make room in their busy lives for pro bono work. Now in its second decade, OPICS has accomplished just what those student visionaries set out to do — bring Georgetown Law to center stage in the public interest arena.

“I think we’re one out of a handful, certainly less than 10, law schools across the country that have a stand-alone public interest career center, and even fewer that have both the career component and a pro bono component,” says Assistant Dean Barbara Moulton, who has headed the Office of Public Interest and Community Service since its inception during the 1996-1997 school year. “One piece of what we do is to try to encourage all law students, regardless of what their career interests are, to make pro bono a part of their experience here.”

And it keeps getting better. Over the past decade, the office — with its staff of five — has provided counseling, workshops and recruitment opportunities for students interested in public interest and government careers; worked with the Equal Justice Foundation to secure funding for students doing unpaid summer work; and helped students get loan repayment assistance through the Office of Financial Aid. Popular career programs, like the “Public Interest and Pizza” dinner series, provide students with some much-needed career guidance along with a meal.

Professor Wally Mlyniec, who along with Professor Judy Areen was one of the administrators responsible for getting OPICS off the ground, says that the present-day office has far exceeded the students’ original goals. The best part, he believes, has been making an extraordinary idea part of the everyday landscape.

“The OPICS office is now part of the mission of the school and in some ways is not, for us here, exceptional,” Mlyniec notes. “It’s what we do at Georgetown.”

For OPICS’ second decade, Moulton wants to make it even easier for students interested in public interest and government work to go through the job search process — and to ensure that all students who come to Georgetown Law are able to pursue a public interest career path if they choose.

“We very much consider ourselves a student- and alumni-centered office,” Moulton says. “But for them, we wouldn’t exist.”



Above, from left: Nicole Vikan, government and international career counselor; Assistant Dean Barbara Moulton; Kim Matthews, executive assistant; Charles Curry, manager of technology services; Holly Eaton, director of pro bono programs; and Lauren Dubin, director of public interest careers.

Right: Joy Welan (L’08) was honored at the 2007 OPICS awards reception last April for her public interest work.



HOLLY EATON



ALEXANDER B.  
MCMURTRIE JR. (L'61)

BY ANN W. PARKS

Like many who graduated before and after him, Alexander B. McMurtrie Jr. (L'61) could not have attended law school without working a full-time job. In the late 1950s, the newly married student would commute from his apartment in Arlington to the Department of Labor, where the administration of the Davis-Bacon Act would occupy his days. Evening classes at Georgetown Law followed, topped off by a nice dinner his wife prepared and study until midnight. The next day, he would get up and do it all again. Although he eventually transferred into day classes, he continued to work throughout law school as a clerk at the firm of Covington & Burling. "It was a grind," he says. "You just had to put your nose to the grindstone and get it done."

Working through law school never hurt anyone, McMurtrie says. Still, nearly 50 years after those late-night study sessions, he wanted to give something back to other Georgetown Law students who now face financial constraints. To that end, McMurtrie and his wife, Margaret "Kitchie" Hillenbrand McMurtrie, recently donated a six-figure gift to the school to establish a new endowed scholarship fund.

A graduate of the University of Notre Dame as well as Georgetown Law, McMurtrie wanted to see the scholarship go to deserving students from both his alma maters. "I've always been interested in scholarship help for needy students who have the ability but not the financial means to achieve their dreams," McMurtrie says. "I suggested to the dean that the scholarships be used for financially strapped Notre Dame graduates who had the ability but maybe not the financial wherewithal to pursue a law degree."

McMurtrie was born in Richmond, Virginia, to middle-class parents who understood the value of education. His father, Alexander B. McMurtrie Sr., was a businessman who died when young McMurtrie was 15. His mother, Mary O'Haren McMurtrie, was a teacher who did graduate work at Columbia University in the 1920s, when few women were pursuing advanced degrees. After attending college at Notre Dame, McMurtrie enrolled in night classes at Georgetown Law — which just seemed like the right thing to do, he said.

And though he did have to work in order to attend school, he received personal and financial help from his family: his mother; his wife and her parents, George C. and Margaret "Peg" Moran Hillenbrand. He also received emotional support from his two brothers, Bill McMurtrie (L'64) and the late Monsignor James W. McMurtrie. "They helped me go through law school, and they helped me through life."

McMurtrie graduated from Georgetown Law in two and a half years and went to work in the appellate court section of the National Labor Relations Board. Private practice followed, but by the 1970s, his career path took an unexpected turn. His neighbors, concerned about the annexation of part of Chesterfield County by the City of Richmond, suggested that he run for public office. He won a seat in the Virginia House of Delegates by 350 votes in 1972 and stayed there for 10 years. "I was a moderate voice. I never believed in extremes," he says. "Extremes get you into trouble."

He continued to practice law during his time in the legislature and afterwards, doing partnership, corporation, trusts and estates and trial work. In the 1990s, he took a case regarding the pay and pension of state legislators all the way to the Virginia Supreme Court. Always wanting to do the right thing, he represented not the politicians but a group of citizens concerned by the possibility of abuses. At about the same time, he served as the vice chairman of Virginia's Board of Corrections. He's done, he says, "a little bit of everything."

Today, McMurtrie practices at his Richmond firm, McMurtrie, Grubbs and Associates, doing trusts and estates work and "managing money for folks." Though he has managed his own business interests quite well — he was recently named by *Virginia Business* magazine as one of the state's 100 most influential people — he believes that "everyone needs to be encouraged to have a seat at the table." He also knows not to take material things too seriously. "In life, you own nothing, all you do is rent," he says. "It's what you do with what God gave you."

What he's tried to do is improve the lives of others. "Education lifts society to a higher level," McMurtrie says. "It's expected that educated people will help. It's about giving back a little bit, too."