

Building Momentum on the Alumni Board

By J.J. Schnabel

“I really want to give back something to the School of Law because it has given me so much,” says Heather Clark ’98, newly elected President of the Alumni Board. Clark has served on the Board for the past five years and is in one sense unusually well qualified for the presidency: She’s not too busy handling cases. “My law practice is on hiatus just now, while I look after my three young children,” she says. “Being a mom is a job in itself, but I have more time and energy to spare for Board work than I would if I were in a full-time legal practice.”

In recent years, the Board has been increasingly active in trying to connect with current students “in the hopes that they will stay connected to the law school as alumni,” Clark says. “To that end, we have promoted opportunities for alumni to meet with students to network and share their experiences through a mentoring program, our ‘Lunch with a Lawyer’ program, and informal ‘meet and greets’ between alumni and students.

“There’s a real momentum that we’re going to build on in the coming years,” she adds.

After graduating from Bucknell with an English degree, Clark worked briefly as a writer and editor before deciding that the law was her metier. During law school, she served as Notes & Comments editor of the *Maryland Law Review*, and completed her degree with honors in 1998.

Initially she joined the Baltimore litigation firm Goodell, DeVries, Leech and Dann, where she handled a variety of litigation including product liability and insurance defense cases—and also met her future husband, a lawyer with the firm. In 2000, Clark moved to Steptoe & Johnson in Washington, D.C., and took part in two long-running environmental cases pitting large industrial firms against Steptoe’s client, a major insurer. “These were complex, high-stakes cases involving novel legal theories, and I was able to work extensively with the clients and witnesses, which is always rewarding to a litigator,” says Clark. “I wasn’t even in law school when these cases started, but I was there for the end, when—in both instances—the parties settled.”

In 2006, when her first child was a toddler, she switched to part-time work, clerking for Marvin J. Garbis, a U.S. District

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Heather Doherty Clark '98

Court judge in Baltimore. “I already had courtroom experience, but there’s still a lot that you can learn from working for a high-profile judge and being in the courtroom on such a regular basis. It was a great experience, and Judge Garbis is a great mentor,” she says. Clark turned to parenting full time in 2007 with the birth of her second child—whose arrival was followed last summer by her third.

In her new role as President of the Alumni Board, Clark has a full agenda. She plans to continue efforts to keep recent graduates connected to the School of Law, through the Recent Graduate Committee, and to encourage alumni to volunteer with students at UM Carey Law’s fall and spring service days and through the JustAdvice® program—a low-cost legal services program offered by the School.

To help elevate the School of Law’s profile, Clark says, the Alumni Board is working to identify and nominate worthy alumni for professional awards given by *The Daily Record*, the Maryland Bar Association, and other organizations.

In addition, each year the Alumni Board presents three awards of its own to worthy alumni for excellence in the legal profession. This year, says Clark, those awards were presented at the Dean’s Convocation in September.

“This will be a fantastic opportunity to connect alumni with each other and with the School and to provide a high-profile platform for the presentation of the Alumni Awards,” she says.