The Distinguished Graduate Award honors an alum who has achieved prominence through professional excellence and service to the Maryland community.

For more than a quarter-century, Mathias J. DeVito '56 has been a national leader in the real estate industry. As chair, president and chief executive officer of the Rouse Company, a publicly held real estate development and management company, DeVito has had a dramatic impact on tens of thousands of Americans.

Following a lengthy stay at the Baltimore firm of Piper & Marbury, where he was a partner, and a two-year appointment as assistant attorney general for the State of Maryland, DeVito was elected senior vice president and general counsel at Rouse in 1970. This was only a few years after the company had begun developing the city of Columbia, Maryland, a project that has become a model for the planned community. DeVito soon became executive vice president and COO of Rouse and, in 1973, its president. Six years later, he was elected its chief executive officer and, in 1984, chairman of the board. He retired as CEO in 1995, and continues to serve as chairman of the board.

He serves as board chairman of Empower Baltimore Management Corporation that last year won a major Empowerment Zone grant. This award will enable some of the city’s most embattled neighborhoods to become better places to live and work through resident participation.

DeVito is also on the boards of the Business Committee for the Arts, the Maryland Institute College of Art, the Enterprise Foundation, the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, the Walters Art Gallery and the Greater Baltimore Committee.

He is chair of the trustees of State College of Maryland and sits on the boards of Johns Hopkins University and Roanoke College. In March 1989, DeVito was selected as “CEO of the Decade” in the real estate industry by Financial World magazine. In March 1995, the magazine honored him as the real estate industry’s most outstanding chief executive officer for 1994. For five years, The Wall Street Transcript selected him as the nation’s top CEO in real estate. In 1987, the U.S. Small Business Administration named DeVito as Maryland’s Minority Advocate of the Year.

The Benjamin L. Cardin Pro Bono Service Award is presented annually to a graduate who has demonstrated significant and substantial contributions to furthering pro bono ideals in the state of Maryland.

Through the work of Baltimorean Richard O. Berndt ’67, Gallagher Evelius & Jones has become the outstanding pro bono firm in this state and among the finest in the region. Employed there since 1968 and managing partner for two decades, he and the firm work with the St. Ambrose Housing Law Center in representing low-income elderly clients.

The lawyers at Gallagher, Evelius & Jones assist the elderly poor who are the victims of home-repair scams. The firm’s involvement in the Public Justice Center includes work in the tenant advocacy project which recruits and trains non-attorneys in attorney-supervised court proceedings of tenant-landlord disputes. Gallagher attorneys worked with the Citizens Planning and Housing Association on Baltimore’s ban on cigarette and alcohol billboards in residential neighborhoods. In 1987, Berndt served as vice chair of the state task force that found that Maryland’s poor were receiving little legal assistance and led the state to double its legal services to low-income residents.

He is a member of the Board of Regents of the University of Maryland System, the Cardinal Sheehan Center, Inc., the Baltimore Development Corporation, the Financial Administration Board of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Baltimore, Mercy Medical Center and the Institute for Christian and Jewish Studies. Berndt also serves on the boards of the Baltimore Equitable Insurance Company, the Shelter Development Corporation and Allegis Health Services. He served on the campaigns for Senators Paul Sarbanes and Barbara Mikulski, Congressmen Ben Cardin and former Governor William Donald Schaefer. In 1976, he chaired Citizens for Harborplace, the referendum that renewed downtown Baltimore. Among Berndt’s many accolades are two Papal Medals, “Knight Commander of the Knights of St. Gregory,” and “Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice” from Pope John Paul II, presented in 1994 and 1990. He also received the 1978 Greater Baltimore Community Award for Outstanding Community Service and the 1989 Frances Morton Froelicher Civic Statesmanship Award from the Citizens Planning and House Association.