Queen’s Law celebrates 60th anniversary at special homecoming

Sixty years after the first class of law students began their studies at Queen’s, over 250 alumni returned to campus to celebrate Queen’s Law at 60 Homecoming festivities. Throughout the weekend of September 8–9, they caught up with old friends and the latest developments at their alma mater, reminisced about their school days and made new lasting memories.

They came from across Canada – from Vancouver, B.C., to Charlottetown, PEI – and from as far away as London, England and Hong Kong. Joining those alumni marking class milestone anniversaries (Law’67, ’72, ’77, ’82, ’87, ’92, ’97, ’02, ’07 and ’12) were grads from other years, with Law’69, ’74, ’83 and ’84 having particularly strong contingents.

Also in attendance was an alumna from the first graduating class, Geraldine Tepper, Law’60, one of two women in her class of 18 students, still practises law in Kingston today. In Ban Righ Hall at the gala dinner that capped off the weekend, she received a standing ovation when introduced by Dean Bill Flanagan.

Now in his 13th year as Dean of Law, Flanagan began his address to the crowd with these words: “It has been a great privilege and honour to serve a faculty as distinguished, and with such loyal alumni, as Queen’s Law.”

Recounting the school’s humble beginnings in 1957, he spoke of the school’s founding faculty – Acting Dean Alec Corry and Professors Stuart Ryan and Dan Soberman – welcoming students in a small brick house on University Avenue.

Then he continued to impress the audience with a few key facts about Queen’s Law today:

• With six new hires this year, the faculty complement will grow to over 35 full-time members, the largest number in the school’s history.

• Of the diverse group of 200 outstanding students in the incoming class, 50 per cent are women, 31 per cent are people of colour, 5 per cent are Indigenous persons (a record for Queen’s Law) and 16 per cent were born outside of Canada.

• The graduate program has grown to include almost 40 LLM and PhD students from around the world.

• Clinical programs have dramatically expanded with five clinics all co-located in downtown Kingston.

• Queen’s leads North American law schools in the range of international study options, with almost half our students taking advantage of the opportunity to study abroad.

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“Although we aim high for our students, providing a range of opportunities well beyond the imagination of most of us in this room when we attended law school (and for some of us, that was many years ago), the core strength of Queen’s Law remains unchanged: the unique sense of community engagement that has long distinguished our school,” he said. “With our students mostly living close to campus, they remain highly engaged in the life of the school, from morning till night. This engagement is at the core of who we are as a law school.”

Betty DeBianco, Law’84, Chief Legal and Administrative Officer with Celestica Inc. and a member of the Dean’s Council, echoed that sentiment in her remarks to the assembly. “I have been struck by the incredible amount of change in legal education over the years, but also by how much has not changed at Queen’s Law over time,” she said. “The biggest constant is the spirit of community and camaraderie that exists at Queen’s Law. That sense of spirit just doesn’t exist at the other law schools. It is something I know we all value.”

Queen’s Principal Daniel Woolf (Artsci’80), toasted the Law Faculty for an “outstanding” first 60 years, adding “I know that the best is yet to come!” Addressing the alumni, he said, “Your own successes are testament to the value of a Queen’s Law education. The example that you set, and the mentorship that so many of you generously offer, are extremely enriching for our bright young students.”

Twenty-four hours earlier, Homecoming kicked off with a welcome back reception at the world-class Isabel Bader Centre for the Performing Arts on the shore of Lake Ontario.

On the morning of September 9, many toured the downtown Queen’s Law Clinics, meeting the current student caseworkers serving Kingston-area clients as they once did.

Macdonald Hall was bustling with activity over the noon hour with alumni checking out the building’s newest renovations in tour groups with student guides.

Another highlight followed: a symposium honouring the recently retired Supreme Court Justice Thomas Cromwell, Law’76, LLD’10 (Mus’73), the school’s first graduate appointed to Canada’s highest court.

Betty DeBianco captured the feeling of her fellow alumni as Homecoming Weekend came to a close. “I am proud of the education I received here and grateful for the wonderful career that it afforded me. But it is the lifelong friendships I made here that are what I cherish most about Queen’s Law.”

BY LISA GRAHAM
Dean’s Council
BUILDING TOUR

PHOTOS BY GARRETT ELLIOTT
Queen’s Law at 60 Symposium
Justice Thomas Cromwell: Notes on a Life in Law
GALA DINNER

Betty DelBianco, Law’84, Dean’s Council member

PHOTOS BY RAI ALLEN