

The New Heart of the Law School, and the World Beyond

When we first announced the generous gift from Robert B. and Ann Aikens to fund a new common area at the Law School, I said that the space “is sure to become a new nucleus for the intellectual and social life of the Law School and will help nurture the bonds students form here, both among themselves and with the faculty.”

I’m so pleased to report that my prediction came true even faster than I imagined. As we opened the doors to the Robert B. Aikens Commons on September 7, students flooded in. They took in the steel and glass roof, the intricate wood-working, and the Motawi tile in the Kirkland & Ellis Café. After the grand-opening event, they stayed. Now, at nearly any time on nearly any weekday, many of the study nooks, tables, meeting areas, and computer stations are filled with students and faculty.

That is precisely what Bob Aikens, ‘54, envisioned: “When I was in law school, there were few places for the off-campus students to have lunch or work other than the Law Library. When I was appointed to the Building Committee, we found that most leading law schools had a gathering place. I am pleased to help our school join other leading law schools with such a wonderful facility,” he said.

The Commons builds on Michigan Law’s tradition of collegiality, both among students and faculty—just one of many qualities that make it one of the best law schools in the country. Read more about the glorious space, as well as the soon-to-open South Hall, throughout this issue of the *Law Quadrangle*.

The magazine also explores the current state of legal education which, as you know, has been

the subject of increased scrutiny by the media, prospective students, and recent graduates of some law schools.

As you will see in the collection of articles that begins on p. 10, Michigan Law continues to provide world-class education to our students with a combination of doctrinal and practical courses, an emphasis on excellent faculty, and opportunities that can take graduates a few miles down the road or to the other side of the world.

Cynics are fond of asking the newly fashionable question, “Is the high price of law school worth it?” Naturally, the answer depends on the quality of the education at the school, as well as students’ goals: That is, do they simply want to become wealthy, or do they want to learn how to think like a lawyer in order to play an important role in society, to create a legacy in the realm of jurisprudence, to fight passionately for the interests of their clients?

My answer is that a Michigan Law education is absolutely worth it, and that our students and alumni earnestly believe they can make the world a better place with the knowledge, reasoning skills, and experience they gain here. Examples of our students’ passion for the law are evident in the story about Future Advocates in Training (p. 26), an organization founded by Brittllynn Hall, ‘10, when she was a student. Several of our alumni are featured in the Class Notes section for their business acumen, volunteer work, and changes they are making on a global level.

The facilities in which we teach these students and inspire their greatness have been extraordinary since we opened Hutchins Hall in 1934. Yet something was always missing: a central space where people could gather. Now, thinking of the Commons as a nucleus of law school life, one may wonder about the perimeter of the circle, a student’s life beyond law school.

This is how I see it: If you stand in the Aikens Commons and look skyward at the cathedral towers of the Law Quad through the extraordinary domed glass roof, it appears that no barrier exists between the University of Michigan Law School and the world that surrounds it. That’s exactly what we want our students to see.

Sincerely,



Evan Caminker
Dean and Branch Rickey Collegiate Professor of Law

