

CLASS OF 2001

REFLECTIONS ON THE
WILLIAM S. BOYD SCHOOL
OF LAW CHARTER CLASS

BY MICHAEL SAUNDERS, ESQ.

In keeping with the theme of this month's issue of *Nevada Lawyer* magazine, charter class members of the William S. Boyd School of Law shared their thoughts on being founding members of the law school with our members.

Leon Symanski, attorney at Craig P. Kenny and Associates

The opening of the William S. Boyd School of Law presented a great and unique opportunity for many Nevadans who desired to go to law school, but for one reason or another did not or could not attend law school out of state. Leon Symanski was one such Nevadan.

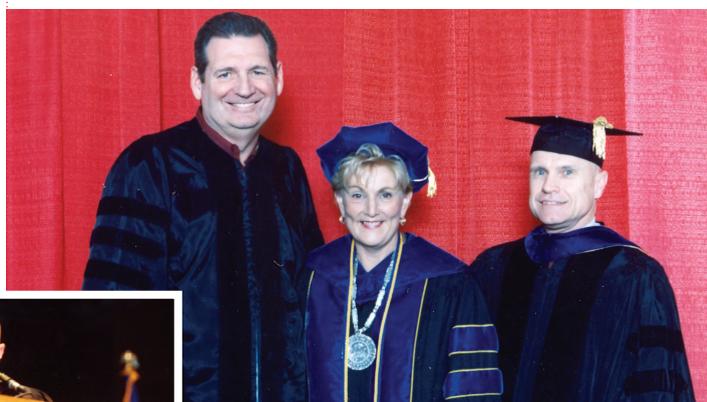
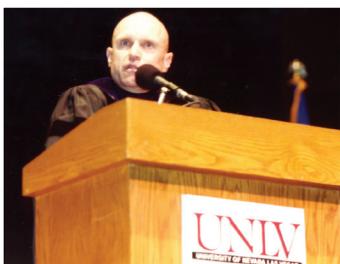
On being accepted into the first class, Symanski says, "It was very exciting. It was uncharted waters, and we were all in the same boat."

Charter class students were concerned by the fact that initially the law school was not accredited by the American Bar Association (ABA). Without ABA accreditation, graduates of the law school would not have been eligible to sit for bar examinations in every state.

Regarding the issue of accreditation, Symanski said he had faith. He explains that conversations with former Dean Richard Morgan eased his concerns regarding whether or not the law school would ultimately receive accreditation. He was confident in the vision that Dean Morgan had for the law school and the foundation that he was laying for the school.

When it opened in 1998, the law school was housed in the 1950s-era Paradise Elementary School at Tropicana and Swenson across from the Thomas and Mack Center. Because of the age of the facility, the charter class students had to contend with, among other things, roof leaks and heating and air conditioning issues. And, since the facility was originally designed for elementary students, not fully-grown law students, the law school, at least early on, featured un-renovated "boys" and "girls" restrooms.

When asked about attending law school at the site of a former elementary school Symanski says, "You've got to chuckle.... The facilities were meant for little people and I'm 6'8". He adds, "We did not have the amenities that the law school has now. There were a lot of different challenges, but I think those challenges made the experience much more special for us who were in that charter class."



▲ Former Governor Bob Miller, former UNLV President Carol Harter and former dean Richard Morgan.

◀ Dean Morgan speaks at the 2001 graduation ceremony.

Billie-Marie Morrison, attorney at Craig P. Kenny and Associates

Symanski's work colleague and fellow charter class student Billie-Marie Morrison says attending Boyd "...was exciting – and it was very scary." Like many of the other charter class students, she was apprehensive about attending Boyd, because it was not accredited. However, she said after meeting Dean Morgan and Associate Dean Christine Smith and doing some research on the incoming faculty, her concerns regarding accreditation were allayed.

Morrison says attending law school at the site of a former elementary school "...took away a lot of the intimidation of law school." With a laugh, she explains. "Because, you know, we had a playground." She says the campus "...had a lot of spirit to it. It just felt like a fun place." She says the issues presented by the facility "...helped us all become a really close group."

Reflecting on her decision to attend Boyd, Morrison explains. "I feel like the luckiest lawyer in the world." She adds, "I am very happy and feel very fortunate."

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Meredith Strand, Associate General Counsel Southwest Gas Corporation

Much like Morrison, charter class student Meredith Strand states that attending an unaccredited law school was “a little bit scary.” Strand did not learn of the law school until about two months before it officially opened, a fact that contributed to her apprehension.

With respect to attending the law school, she says, “It was a pretty big gamble, which, in my opinion, certainly paid off.”

Commenting on attending law school at the former Paradise Elementary school, Strand says, “Quite frankly, I have very fond memories of going to school there. It felt like our little, private school.” She says, “We certainly had the best parking that you could ever want at a university.”

Like other charter class students, Strand mentions the challenges related to the facility. However, she says, “For the most part, I think people were appreciative of what we had at the time.” She says, “I feel proud that we sort of forged our way through with what we had....”

Becky Pintar, attorney at Gibbs, Giden, Locher, Turner & Senet

On the opening of the law school, Becky Pintar says, “It was just so well organized.” Pintar had high praise for the man who shouldered much of the responsibility for that organizing effort, former Dean Richard Morgan. In selecting Morgan to be dean, Pintar explained, “They just picked the right guy...and, he brought the right staff and instructors to open up the law school and did a fantastic job.”

Pintar says she is very proud to be part of the charter class. “It was a very gratifying experience that I wouldn’t change,” she says. “I don’t know if I could do law school again now, but I would never change having had that experience. I don’t regret it at all,” she adds. “I am so grateful for having been chosen.”

Laura Johns, Esq.

Recalling the opening of the law school, charter class student Laura Johns remembers, “Everyone was so excited and so committed to making it [the law school] a success.”

Johns did express concern about the lack of accreditation of the law school. She wondered whether the students would “...invest time and money going there and not be able to sit for a bar exam.” She also expressed concern about whether or not the law school would be “taken seriously.”

When asked about attending law school at the site of a former elementary school, Johns says, “That was one of my favorite things about being part of the first class....” She elaborates by saying that she enjoyed the small size of the campus as well as certain conveniences, such as being able to park within close distance of the classrooms.

Johns says she has absolutely no regrets about attending Boyd and no regrets about practicing law. “The education that I received there and the experience that I’ve gained in this profession have just been invaluable,” she says. “So, I’m happy, really happy with my decision to go to law school and to practice.”

Robert Beyer, General Counsel, The Siegel Group

When asked about starting law school at Boyd, charter class student Robert Beyer says, “It was a very interesting time....No one really knew what to expect. I think that was true for both the students and faculty.”

For Beyer, it was a case of incredibly great timing; the law school’s opening coincided with his college graduation.

Since Beyer did not plan to leave Nevada after graduating law school, he was not overly concerned about the issue of accreditation. He further states that he always believed that the community and the state would support the law school graduates.

Beyer admits there were challenges presented by the early law school facility. Despite those challenges, Beyer says, “It was home to me, and it was home to us.”

“Graduating from the law school in the first class was something truly special. We had done something that nobody had done before,” he says. “It was a great experience. I thought it was a great education,” he concludes.

Cory Santos, Esq.

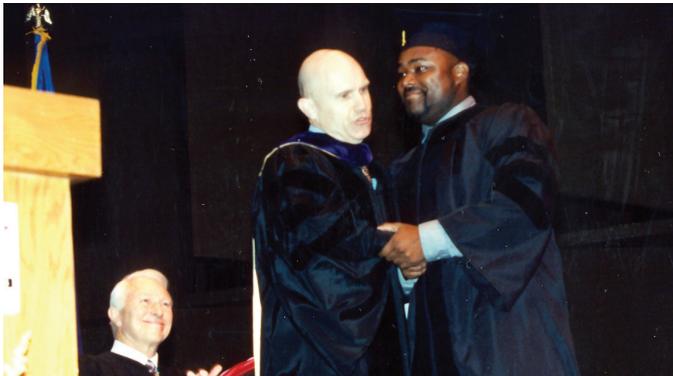
For Cory Santos, attending Boyd was akin to making a big bet, especially in light of the school’s lack of accreditation. He had been accepted to other law schools and in his own words he “had basically rolled the dice and taken a huge gamble to attend Boyd.” As Santos saw progress being made toward the law school receiving accreditation, his concerns regarding the accreditation issue were alleviated.

Regarding the charter class students choosing to attend the then-unaccredited law school, Santos says, “...it kind of speaks a lot to their character, because they really did spend a lot of money on a gamble that realistically might not have paid off.”

Santos says the facility “had a lot of issues” with which the incoming students had to contend. “I think everyone in the charter class really looked at it as an experience to build something and to start a tradition,” he says.

Commenting on the law school administration, Santos says, “I think Dean Morgan did an excellent job...He was always there and accessible to help [the students] out. He is one of the main reasons the law school succeeded,” he continues.

On being a member of the first graduating class, Santos said, “It’s something I’m very proud of and what makes me prouder is that many of the people in our class have gone onto represent us very well.”



Dean Morgan congratulates charter Boyd grad Jason Frierson.

Jason Frierson, Nevada State Assemblyman

Many Boyd charter class students have gone on to represent the charter class and the law school very well, including charter class student and current Nevada State Assemblyman Jason Frierson.

Like other charter class students, Frierson mentions the challenges presented by the converted, old elementary school facility, such as ceiling leaks and air conditioning issues. However, he says that the challenges presented by the facility were overcome by the students’ and faculty’s commitment to making the law school work. He says that the charter class students were a much “closer knit group” of classmates than otherwise would have been the case if the campus had been more like that of a traditional law school. The charter class students, “...were really much more of a

family than I think most law schools because [the Boyd law school] was so new.”

Prior to deciding to attend Boyd, Frierson says he researched the backgrounds of incoming staff and faculty. “I didn’t apply to Boyd on the fly; I actually did my homework,” he says. Frierson was impressed by Morgan’s reputation and says that Morgan’s involvement was the largest contributing factor in his decision to attend Boyd.

Frierson notes that one of the greatest things about Boyd is that it has become such a staple of public service in the community. “I am really proud to be part of a law school that is so committed to not just the legal community, but to the community,” he says.

“I don’t know that I have heard of a new law school that has had such a wonderful start,” he reflects. “I am just really proud to be a part of it.” ■

MICHAEL SAUNDERS was a Boyd charter class student and is now a senior deputy attorney general with the Nevada Attorney General’s Bureau of Consumer Protection. He represents the public interest in cases involving the rates and services of electric, natural gas, telecommunications and water companies before the Public Utilities Commission of Nevada.