During the last 50 years, David M. Becker, associate dean for external relations and the Joseph H. Zumbalen Professor Emeritus of the Law of Property, has taught more than 6,000 students and touched the lives of innumerable others in the extended law school community.

“David has left an indelible mark on the law school through his outstanding teaching and commitment to his students throughout their careers,” says Kent Syverud, dean and the Ethan A.H. Shepley Distinguished University Professor. “David’s friendships with thousands of our students have created a legacy of mentoring, volunteering, and giving that has benefited so many. We celebrate David for this and for transforming the lives, minds, and careers of so many of his students.”

In their tributes to him, Becker’s students acknowledge his brilliant teaching, his compassion, and his genuine affection for them.

“Professor Becker stands out in my mind as extraordinary not only because he was a masterful teacher, but also because he genuinely cared about his students and created an enduring bond with many of us,” says John I. Karesh, JD ’70, a shareholder in the New York office of Vedder Price.

R. Mark McCareins, JD ’81, observes: “Dave Becker is a triple threat: lawyer, professor, and tireless advocate for Washington University. The school, its students, and alumni
Perpetuities, which imposes time limits upon the transferability of property. Employing the Socratic method, he guides his students through these difficult concepts in the classroom. The experience of developing basic tools for analysis and problem-solving, Becker notes, is like learning to ride a bicycle. “Quite simply, the skill of balancing a bike cannot be learned exclusively through books and lectures. Nor can it be learned merely through observation. Balancing on two wheels demands active participation,” he notes. “One must attempt to ride without expectation of instantanous success. One must fall, get up, try again, get up, try again, and over time succeed. One only gets the hang of it by actually doing it, and, if necessary, doing it over and over again.”

For his part, Becker says he is grateful for having found his calling in teaching and for the many friendships that have endured. “What my students have given to me in many ways is much more than I have given to them. They have challenged me with their intellect, ingenuity, and originality,” he says. “They have enriched my life with their vitality, resilience, resourcefulness, and their ability to overcome potholes and giant obstacles in their respective lives,” he continues. “And after graduation they have rewarded me with their accomplishments and the good lives they lead.” Those students have gone on to become judges, members of Congress, heads of corporations, managing partners at large and small firms, leaders in nonprofit organizations, law professors, commissioners for state agencies, U.S. attorneys, and more. Becker’s friendships with them have extended to celebrating marriages and births, offering support during times of illness and tragedy, and simply being available to listen and guide them with his wise counsel long after they are on his classroom roster.

**NÚMEROUS CONTRIBUTIONS**

During the past five decades, Becker has served under the leadership of nine deans and experienced with the law school community much transformation. Becker joined the Washington University law faculty in 1963, after one year of teaching at the University of Michigan. At that time located in January Hall, the law school had 11 faculty members and 210 students, most of whom were from St. Louis. The tuition was $1,350 a year, and there were a grand total of eight endowed scholarships for students. Today there are just under 1,000 students, including visiting students, scholars, and judges. The student body represents almost every state, and more than 120 students hold law degrees from more than a dozen foreign countries. The law school now occupies two state-of-the-art buildings, Anheuser-Busch and Seigle Halls, as well as facilities in Washington, D.C. It also

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< David Becker has taught more than 6,000 students in his 50 years of teaching.

> Professor Becker, center, receives an honorary doctor of humane letters degree at Commencement 2012.
The law school and alumni leaders have also launched the Becker 50th Scholarship Initiative (see page 37), as well as the Becker Career Connections Project. Through the Becker Project, more than 3,000 alumni are available to assist students with networking in their job searches.

In recognition of his many contributions, Becker is the recipient of Washington University’s Distinguished Faculty Award at Founders Day, the first Law Alumni Distinguished Teaching Award, and the Dean’s Medal. During the university-wide 2012 Commencement ceremony, he received an honorary doctor of humane letters in recognition of his distinguished career.

Fittingly, Becker also has regularly received the Teacher of the Year Award from the Student Bar Association (SBA). In 2007, the SBA renamed the award—the SBA’s highest recognition of excellence in teaching—as the David M. Becker Professor of the Year Award.
TEACHER, TRAVELER, SPORTS FAN, AND SAGE

Gala commemorates Becker’s legacy, celebrating his passion for Italy and his students

The sights, sounds, and tastes of Italy. A video featuring Father Guido Sarducci with a “special message from the Vatican.” Buttons printed with “A to B for life.” A moving video tribute. A rebuttal tribute from Max and Myrtle Bibbo commenting on their property law case. A gubernatorial proclamation. These many highlights coalesced to form an unforgettable evening of celebration marking the 2012 milestone of Professor David M. Becker’s 50th year of teaching.

More than 600 alumni and friends gathered for the October 26 Gala Dinner at the Ritz-Carlton to express appreciation, heartfelt thanks, and love for their professor. As a nod to Becker’s high regard for all things Italian, the Ritz’s ballroom was transformed to resemble an Italian piazza and the fare represented the best of an Italian home-style meal. Violin, accordion, and guitar music floated through the venue as guests mingled and reminisced.

In all, more than 1,100 law alumni and friends returned to campus on October 26–27 for Alumni Weekend and the Becker celebratory events. Tribute activities began with a symposium on Friday on The Law School in the New Legal Environment (see page 13) and continued with the Gala that evening. On Saturday, former students went back to “class” in Anheuser-Busch Hall, where they had the opportunity to visit with Becker, followed by reunion activities and class dinners.

Celebratory plans had been in the works for the past two years under the leadership of Becker’s close friend Gene Kornblum and law alumni Alan Bornstein, JD ’81, Tatjana Schwendinger, JD ’72, and Brad Winters, JD ’81, along with a Steering Committee and a 200-plus-member “Becker Brigade.”
As part of the festivities, a Becker website, law.wustl.edu/becker50, houses memories, tributes, photos, event details, and committee and brigade member listings.

Schwendinger, chair of the Becker Brigade, said the efforts spoke volumes about the impact Becker has made on so many lives. Looking around the packed room at the Friday evening Gala, she observed, “I’d say the mere fact that so many of Professor Becker’s friends, students, and colleagues are here to honor him allows us to say ‘Mission accomplished!’“

Schwendinger invited Fred Hanser, JD ’66, on stage to present Becker with a Cardinals #50 jersey. Although originally a Cubs fan, soon after moving to St. Louis, Becker converted to become a loyal Cardinals fan, even throwing out the first pitch at one of the annual Washington University Law School Nights at Busch Stadium. In addition to the presentation of the honorary jersey, the Cardinals Foundation was acknowledged for its generous contribution to the Becker 50th Scholarship Initiative. Also unveiled on stage was a congratulatory proclamation from Governor Jay Nixon formally honoring Becker’s teaching milestone.

Winters, who served as the master of ceremonies, brought just the right spirit of celebratory fun and enthusiasm. He also master-minded the scripts for two short videos that brought gales of laughter from the crowd. One depicted actors playing Max and Myrtle Bibo, a couple involved in a complex 1947 property law case used in Becker’s class. The second, following the Italian theme, was a spoof live message from the Vatican, featuring comedian Don Novello playing the character of Father Guido Sarducci (a popular persona on Saturday Night Live in the late 1970s).

Also making remarks were Chancellor Mark Wrighton; Dean

“What I saw was that David has a very strong bond with his students—a very strong bond.
He really loves his students.”
—Sandi Becker
Kent Syverud; and Bornstein, who spoke about Becker’s lasting legacy of alumni engagement. Kevin E. Packman, JD ’98; Philip D. Shelton, JD ’72; and Heather M. Mehta, JD ’11, all gave humorous and inspirational accounts of how Becker made profound differences at the law school and in their own lives.

A more serious video tribute (available on the Becker website) captured Becker’s many contributions to the law school community, including his own thoughts on his love of teaching and how Washington University became just the right fit for him—his Shangri-La. The tribute begins with an account of how he might not have become a professor had it not been for the faith and encouragement of his wife, Sandi. Apparently, Becker had thrown away a teaching invitation from the University of Michigan, which she then recovered and convinced him to consider. Looking back over the last five decades, Sandi Becker observed that teaching was a natural fit: “What I saw was that David has a very strong bond with his students—a very strong bond. He really loves his students.”

As the video progresses, Becker recounts this bond with his students through stimulating class interactions, sports competitions, promotion of diversity, assistance with career goals, long-lasting friendships, and support during challenging times. His mentoring of other faculty is captured in comments by Professor Kim Norwood. Vignettes and commentary by alumni and friends Sheila Bader, JD ’76; Claire Halpern, JD ’85; Michael Hannafan, JD ’70; Anita Maddali, wife of Chaitanya Maddali, JD ’05, who passed away in 2011; Charles Newman, JD ’73; Peter Thompson, JD ’79; and Harry Joe, JD ’75, also all underscore how Becker influenced their lives.

The video concludes with Chancellor Emeritus William Danforth remarking that Becker was an ideal teacher. “He treated his students as if they were his family, his children almost, trying to make them better lawyers and better people,” Danforth observed. “And they were from having been associated with him. That is the way I saw it, and I thought, what a wonderful life to live.”
“Learning the skills of lawyering is not an easy matter. For most students it is the most significant, difficult, demanding, and anxious learning experience of their lives.”

“The process requires students to formulate an idea that is then subjected to careful scrutiny. Next, in light of that scrutiny, it requires students to improve on that idea or understanding. And if one does this enough times, eventually students are able to master the skill and analyze the rule or problem—critically and comprehensively—on their own.”

“Experiential learning requires extraordinary patience on the part of both the teacher and the student. A student response requires scrutiny through a teacher’s thoughtful reply. And when necessary, the teacher and student must resume the process with a principle and question that are more elementary. Ideally, the student must always see and achieve the light herself.”

“Certainly one can say this about creativity. New ideas may just happen, but one can seldom rely upon them to be there exactly when one wants them. Fresh ideas need to percolate, and that takes time and patience. One may have to work with a problem or puzzle again and again before a viable solution begins to emerge. And then there will be even more time—the time that it takes to test, critique, and shape this new idea.”

Professor David Becker’s highest calling has been his teaching demonstrated through his mastery of the Socratic method. He is well-known for his ability to skillfully and patiently lead his students to that “Aha” moment in their journey to understanding and acquiring legal reasoning. Becker’s own words, gleaned from his law review articles, give insight into his thought processes, as well as his extraordinary commitment to his students.
Focus on Students

“Contacts outside of class offer outstanding teaching opportunities to promote the skill set that lies at the core of legal education, and they are also the most satisfying educational experience for both teacher and student. But they also offer much more, especially opportunities for advice and counsel, greater knowledge of individual students, and humanization of the teacher.”

Maximizing Learning

“The better one knows the players, the better one comprehends the dynamics of the class. And with such understanding, the teacher is in a superior position to anticipate the strengths and weaknesses of individuals and orchestrate class discussion effectively. Ultimately, this makes for higher quality classes, but more importantly, this knowledge enables a teacher to achieve the best efforts from each student and thereby maximize individual learning experiences.”

Accessibility

“Contacts outside of class offer outstanding teaching opportunities to promote the skill set that lies at the core of legal education, and they are also the most satisfying educational experience for both teacher and student. But they also offer much more, especially opportunities for advice and counsel, greater knowledge of individual students, and humanization of the teacher.”

Importance of Writing Skills

“For the lawyer, there is nothing more important than the written word. Lawyers write constantly. They draft letters, contracts, wills, trusts, complaints, motions, memoranda, and briefs. These documents must be clear, precise, comprehensive, accurate, organized, logical, and persuasive. No practitioner ever escapes the written word.”

‘Old School’ Research with Books

“Ongoing synthesis of materials requires forethought and judgment as one proceeds through a search. Some materials stand out as central and essential, but others may be quickly discarded. ... The process of critical thinking takes time. Sound organization, logical and persuasive progression, and creativity cannot be beckoned upon a moment’s notice.”

Getting to Know Students

“While I try to get [students] to talk about any subject, the focus is above all on each of them. This often leads to discussion of their prior lives, their aspirations, and their views on many subjects. Along the way, I hope to discover as much as possible, including anything that offers insight on how they might address and resolve problems or how I might better understand and interact with them.”
“They don’t make someone like David Becker anymore. But he has made a lot of us his disciples. We stand in his giant shadow.”

Harry Joe, JD ’75
Jackson Lewis LLP, Dallas

“I hope that Professor Becker is pleasantly surprised and proud that one of his Property students became the chief justice of the Nevada Supreme Court.”

Hon. Michael A. Cherry, JD ’69
Nevada Supreme Court

“As a first-year law student, I was terrified of being called on in class. So much so that I considered dropping out of law school. Professor Becker said he would cure me of that by calling on me frequently. Which he did. In particular it was in re Estate of O’Connor, which involved a statute imposing a tax when property transferred. But when did a property transfer? We were early on in the tax, no-tax hypotheticals when he called upon me with a question. I gave him an answer, thinking that was all there was to it. But no, apparently I had given him the correct answer so the next tax, no-tax hypo was mine as well. Indeed, in my memory, I became the main tax, no-tax person for the next two weeks. It is no coincidence that for the past 30 years my practice has focused on tax-exempt bonds reviewing and pronouncing either tax or no tax.”

Claire Halpern, JD ’85
Gilmore & Bell PC, St. Louis

“David is the most beloved academic I encountered in my seven years of higher education. Every student who met him was immeasurably enriched by his examples and teachings, both inside and outside of class. He is without equal in either setting, and alumni, faculty, and Washington University would all do well to emulate him.”

Charles Newman, JD ’73
Dentons, St. Louis
It is delicious irony lost on no one that our most extraordinary teacher of future interests turned out to be our teacher with the most extraordinary interest in our futures.”

Brad Winters, JD ’81
Sher Corwin Winters LLC, St. Louis

“First year of law school. First day of Property with David Becker. About 70 very nervous first-year students in the lecture hall. Enter Professor Becker wearing a tan sportcoat and with his pipe in his mouth. Total silence. Professor Becker removes his sportcoat in a very exacting fashion and lays it over the lecture table in the front. Professor Becker then spends what seemed like an eternity ministering to his pipe, which he eventually places next to his sportcoat. Still total silence. Professor Becker then commences to speak, giving the class a rather lengthy and detailed hypothetical question. All of us in the class are now seriously considering withdrawing from law school. Professor Becker finishes his hypothetical question and pauses as he scans the class list. Total silence accompanied by sheer panic. Professor Becker looks up and says something like ‘What do you think the holding should be, Mr. Big Bird?’ (name changed to protect all, even though I’m quite sure the applicable ‘statute of limitations’ has expired). Mr. Big Bird is seated two seats away from me. Sixty-nine people in the lecture hall all heave an audible sigh of relief. Mr. Big Bird mutters under his breath ‘Oh @#$%. ’ Without missing a beat, Professor Becker deadpans: ‘No, would you like to try again?’ Game, set, and match—Becker.”

Edward Richard, JD ’74
Manetti & Griffith Ltd., Oak Brook, Illinois

“David Becker changed the trajectory of my career in the most positive way. When he reached out to me as a young law student, he truly helped me reach my potential. His assistance in helping me improve my performance has aided me both in law school and in my career.”

Bob Millstone, JD ’88
The Millstone Company, St. Louis
Tatjana Schwendinger, JD ’72, also stressed the importance of ongoing volunteerism. “In the same spirit of encouraging alumni to support a financial commitment for scholarships, which is near and dear to David, equally important is a commitment to ‘leave our legacy’ through our relationships with current students,” she says. “Every time we, as alumni, reach out and connect with a student, we honor David. He lives his life connecting with students, and now it’s our turn to give back and lend a hand to the next generation.”

For more information on alumni volunteer opportunities, visit the website law.wustl.edu/alumni/volunteeropportunities.aspx.

**FULL CIRCLE**

Alumni reinforce Becker’s belief in supporting students

A term from Professor David Becker’s Real Property class, “A to B for life,” has become the motto for Becker’s legacy. Lead organizers for the Becker celebration have adopted it as a way to encapsulate their favorite professor’s life’s work of reaching out to each generation of students.

The phrase, which appeared on buttons distributed at the Gala, challenges alumni to support students in any way they can. Alumni are encouraged to actively engage in the school—by being involved in everything from scholarship support to hosting student dinners, judging competitions, assisting students with their employment goals, mentoring students, serving on an alumni panel, and/or partnering in a public service event.

The A to B for life concept, which launched many a “heart-pounding, palm-sweating, roller-coaster class discussion,” has come to mean much more, says Alan Bornstein, JD ’81.

“It is what David asks of us. It is how he has led his life. It is what he has demonstrated in his teaching and service to us and the law school,” Bornstein says. “Simply put, we, as alumni, are all A’s.

Today’s students are B’s. David has been saying to us all along to make a conveyance of scholarship, friendship, and mentoring for life to today’s students so they may do the same for tomorrow’s students. It is in this commitment to the next generation of students that we truly celebrate David and ‘A to B for life.’”

—Alan Bornstein

Giving Back to Students Is a Lifetime Commitment

“A to B for life: It is what David asks of us. It is what he has demonstrated in his teaching and service to us and the law school.”

—Alan Bornstein

< Alan Bornstein at the Becker 50th Gala
> Panelists at The Law School in the New Legal Environment symposium