



Donor Thomas Kline ushers in a new era at Duquesne's law school

By Patty Tascarella – Senior Reporter, Pittsburgh Business Times

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Thomas R. Kline missed making the law review by two hundredths of a point back in his student days and pleaded his case to no avail.

“I didn’t win the battle but I guess I won the war,” Kline said Wednesday to a roar of applause at Duquesne University.

Kline had just gifted Duquesne with \$50 million, a new record, and on top of a \$7.5 million donation he'd made in 2017. The university’s board took the step of renaming its school of law to honor Kline. Duquesne President Ken Gormley presided over a room filled with local leaders, judges, faculty past and present, lawyers and, above all, students for the announcement and to celebrate. It was the first time in three decades that the university named a school and the largest gift in its history.

Kline gave Duquesne wide latitude in how best to invest the resources to maximize their benefits for students and the institution. His commitment will broadly support student scholarships, faculty grants for excellence in teaching and scholarship, the law school's bar preparation program, new clinical offerings that benefit the community and other strategic priorities.

“Beyond the financial component, this is a big deal on a more fundamental level,” Gormley said. “In a very real sense, Tom Kline’s story embodies the spirit of our law school.”

Kline, a nationally renowned trial lawyer and co-founder of Philadelphia firm Kline & Specter, was the last to speak. He teared up on occasion but gave a free-wheeling talk about moments in time.

“All right, so they all prepared speeches except me,” he began.

Kline wasn't immediately accepted to the school which now bears his name, the Thomas R. Kline School of Law of Duquesne University. He was wait-listed, but visited the campus in July 1975 and literally knocked on the door of then-associate dean John Sciullo.

"What strikes in my mind today was that he didn't want to talk about law, he didn't want to talk about academics, he wanted to know who I was," Kline said. "And three days later ... I got a letter in the U.S. Mail which said, 'You are accepted.' And the journey began."

Kline said he views the future for the law school as doing what it has always done, preparing mostly young people for the challenge of being a lawyer.

"We have a democracy in this country which depends on not just the justices in this room, not just the judges, not just the lawyers, but the lawyers-to-be in this room," he said. "So to you I give this gift, not only in recognition in what this law school has meant to me and what it's allowed me to achieve for others, but what you'll be able to achieve and how you'll be able to preserve every cherished value we have and every constitutional right that needs to be protected. With that lofty goal and in this setting I consider home, I now welcome a new era at the — I'm going to say it out loud — Thomas R. Kline School of Law of Duquesne University."