

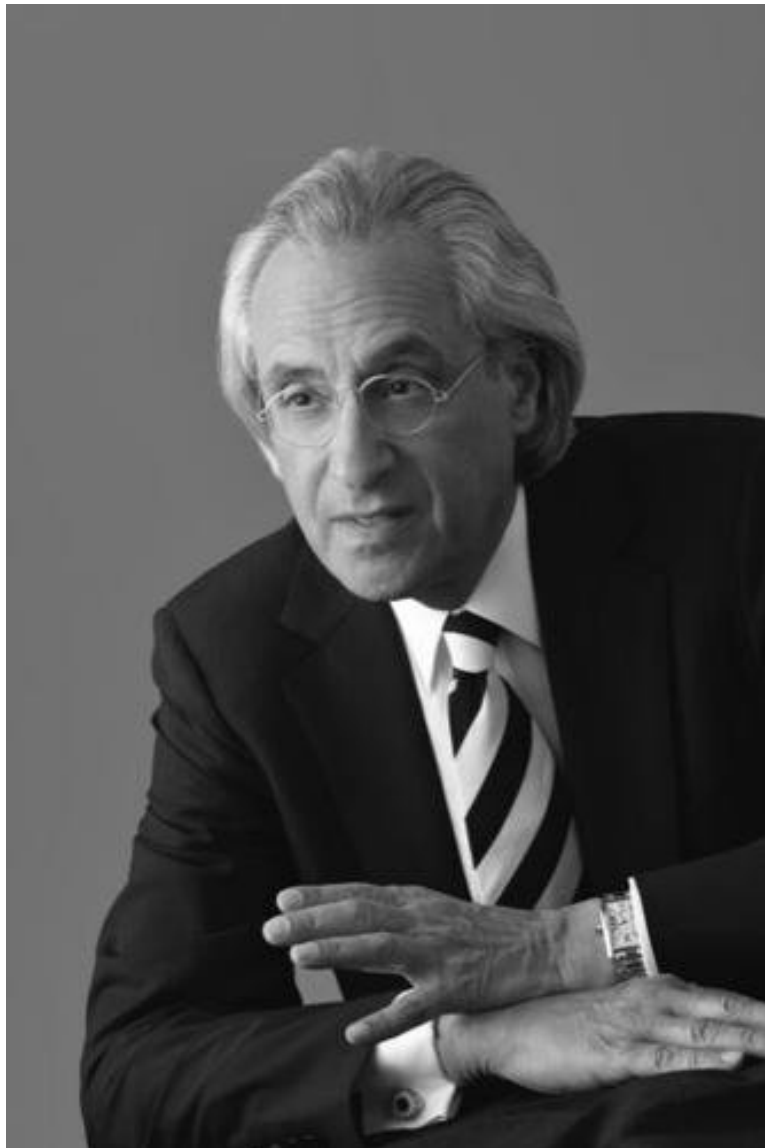
Standard Speaker



Hazleton native endows second law school with \$50M donation

By Kent Jackson Staff Writer

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Attorney Thomas R. Kline, the Hazleton native and benefactor for whom law schools are named at Drexel and Duquesne universities

Tom Kline used to teach sixth grade in Freeland.

Now two law schools are named for him.

On Wednesday, after he donated \$50 million to Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, the lettering on the place where he earned his law degree in 1978 was changed to read Thomas R. Kline School of Law.



Thomas R. Kline, a Hazleton native, stands beside the law school named for him at Duquesne University, his alma mater, on Wednesday.

He gave the same amount to the other law school bearing his name at Drexel University in Philadelphia, where his law firm is based, in 2014.

But Hazleton, his hometown, is never far from his thoughts.

"Hazleton is where I learned the values that I live my life by. The place will always be in my heart," Kline said Thursday, paraphrasing what he told the students and others listening to his remarks at Duquesne.

From his parents, Isadore and Jeanne Kline, his teachers and neighbors in Hazleton, Kline said he learned the values of family and community, and that "hard work will take you a long way."

As an attorney, Kline started winning multimillion-dollar settlements, such as an award of \$5.1 million for women harmed by an intrauterine device called the Dalkon Shield in the early 1980s, even before he formed his own law firm with Shanin Specter, the senator's son.

Since then, the dollar amounts have only grown with the profile of the cases.

While representing a victim of former Penn State assistant football coach Jerry Sandusky, Kline became a de facto spokesperson for all of Sandusky's victims.

He won \$265 million for families and victims of a train crash that killed eight people and injured others in Philadelphia in 2015, but a settlement against Johnson and Johnson for an antipsychotic drug that caused boys to grow breast tissue hit \$8 billion in punitive damages.

'These kids are me'

At 74, Kline wants to keep practicing law. "I consider myself in mid-career," he said. But thinking about the start of his career helped him decide to endow the law schools, where the bulk of his gifts will go for scholarships for students.

"It struck me that these kids are me," he said. "I'm interested in those students being given an opportunity like I was to lift themselves up."

In what he calls the prototypical Hazleton story, Kline and his wife, Paula, packed their car, a brand new Oldsmobile Delta 88, and drove to Pittsburgh in August 1974.

During his three years in law school at Duquesne, she taught school in the suburbs to pay their bills.

While they lived in Hazleton, Kline also had been a teacher, presenting classes in history and geography to students in sixth and seventh grades at Foster Intermediate School from 1969 to 1974.



Thomas R. Kline stands by the chalkboard at Foster Intermediate School near Freeland where he was a teacher from 1969 to 1974 before he became an attorney.

The teaching job brought him back home to the Hazleton area where he had grown up on West Diamond Avenue and attended A.D. Thomas Elementary School.

"I was captain of the safety patrol in sixth grade at A.D. Thomas so you knew I was going to head somewhere," he quipped.

He went to H.F. Grebey Junior High School and then Hazleton High School, where was vice president of the class of 1965.

Neither his parents nor grandparents had gone to college.

His father managed a dress factory in McAdoo, and his grandfather owned a footwear and clothing store on North Wyoming Street. "Look For The Big White Size 27 Boot Outside," an advertisement for Abe Kline Clothing Store said in the Standard-Sentinel on Feb. 3, 1933.

Kline followed his older sister, Lois, now a retired teacher who lives in San Francisco, to college. His bachelor's degree, earned in 1969, is from Albright College.

Even while he taught at Foster Intermediate School, Kline kept taking courses at Lehigh University.

Driving night after night between Hazleton and Bethlehem, he earned a master's degree and completed all the courses without finishing a dissertation for a doctorate in American history.

"Teaching and education became the lifeblood of our family," Kline said.

In addition to his sister and his wife, who died of breast cancer in 2004, Kline's daughter, Hilary, also was a teacher of pre-school children for many years, and his son, Zac, is a playwright.

Still teaching

Although his name is on the law schools, he hasn't taught at any as a faculty member, but he keeps in touch with students, especially those from Hazleton, and developed a course called Trial as Theater that he has led in various places.

On Wednesday after speaking at the law school's dedication at Duquesne, Kline followed some students to their next class, on contract law



Law students and Dean April Barton on the left gather around attorney Thomas R. Kline and Duquesne University President Ken Gormley when the law school was dedicated to Kline on Wednesday.

“It happened to be a case they were learning I had taught about at Drexel,” said Kline, who ended up as co-teacher for the lecture.

It was, he said, the highlight of his day.