New Duquesne Law Dean Maureen Lally-Green Aims to Prepare Students for 21st Century Law

By Peter F. Vaira
How Maureen Lally-Green was named Duquesne University School of Law’s first woman dean is a great story. Some of our colleagues from the eastern part of the state might comment, “It could only happen in Pittsburgh”; some members of the Pennsylvania academic community may politely say, “Duquesne has a different management style,” but the story is exceptional no less. Lally-Green was selected interim acting dean in 2016 when then-dean Ken Gormley was named president of Duquesne University. She informed the administration she was not interested in the permanent position. A search committee was formed and began the process of interviewing applicants. There were numerous announcements of the persons under consideration. Alumni groups were invited to meet some of the candidates at informal gatherings. Then, in May 2017, Maureen Lally-Green received what is referred to in the East as a “battlefield commission.”

Gormley convinced Lally-Green to become the permanent dean, despite her initial reluctance. The announcement was greeted with much enthusiasm among law school alumni and members of the bar. As one alumni said in typical “Pittsburghese,” “Now we are talkin’. Translated, that means, “This is real progress.” The fact that she had not been in academia her entire career before becoming dean is seen by many as an advantage. Robert Pierce Jr., a Duquesne Law graduate and alumni fund contributor, remarked, “Duquesne Law alumni are impressed with a dean who came from an active law practice and ran a successful statewide political campaign to be elected judge.”

Kimberly Tague, president of the Duquesne Law Alumni Association, said, “I can’t think of anyone who would be better to serve as the first woman dean of the law school.”

After graduating from Duquesne Law, Lally-Green joined a private Pittsburgh law firm. She then served three years as counsel to the Commodity Futures Trading Commission in Washington, D.C., then as in-house counsel for the Westinghouse Electric Corp. for more than five years. She was a professor at Duquesne Law from 1983-1998. Then, beginning in June 1998, she served as a judge on the Pennsylvania Superior Court until July 2009, when she retired from the bench. Thereafter she served as director of the Office of Church Relations and associate general secretary for the Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh.

Lally-Green’s law school management style reflects her concentration on the practical aspect of legal education and law practice. During her term as interim dean, 91 percent of Duquesne Law graduates passed the July 2016 Pennsylvania bar exam on their first attempt, the second highest rate in the state. She emphasized that this is a statistic that can get the attention of prospective students and their parents. “This is a real number on a real scoreboard,” she said.

Lally-Green praised the efforts of the Duquesne Law School faculty for providing assistance to graduates in preparing for the bar. “[Our] program works because our faculty members are committed to the success of our students in the first crucial test of their professional careers,” she said. The school offers core competency courses in both semesters of the student’s senior year. A mentorship program allows graduates who are preparing for the bar exam to meet with a designated faculty member to discuss problem areas that the graduate has discovered in his or her preparation.

Duquesne Law graduate Matthew Bolewitz said, “This mentorship program illustrates the dedication of the faculty, who offer assistance to students after they have graduated, in the first real post-graduate test of their skills.” One could also use a sports metaphor for this program and its participants: These people — faculty and student body — come to win.

Lally-Green seeks to insure the practical applications of the law in today’s legal education practices. “The Duquesne faculty is committed to preparing our students with an understanding of the law and practical aspects of the 21st century,” she said. “This means classes and experiential opportunities should involve the academics, ethics and professionalism [aspects] of the issues being discussed.” To that end is the dean’s fellows program, which will give qualified students the opportunity to work in areas of the law as part of their studies to prepare them for entry into those areas upon graduation. The program will allow fellows to design an individual program of study in three core areas of the law: litigation-conflict resolution, public service and business.

Lally-Green points out that Duquesne Law School has a history of graduates serving in public service. “Many Duquesne Law
graduates serve and have served both as federal and state prosecutors and defense attorneys. Two of our graduates have received presidential appointments as U.S. Attorneys. One of our graduates served as an interim attorney general of Pennsylvania, and several have served as county district attorneys and assistant district attorneys,” she said.

The dean is especially proud of the opportunity students will have to participate in the Thomas R. Kline Center for Judicial Education. This program was funded by a $7.5 million grant by the dean’s law school classmate and friend, Philadelphia lawyer Thomas R. Kline. The program will fund a cooperative effort between the Administrative Office of the Pennsylvania Courts and other law schools and universities for the continuing education of trial and appellate judges in Pennsylvania. Duquesne students will work with the judges and instructors in this innovative, nonprofit program. Lally-Green said, “There is no other program like it in the country. This program will deliver over 2,400 education credit hours every year to over 600 judges. It is a privilege for the students and faculty to serve in his effort.” Retired Judge Joseph Del Sole, who served with Lally-Green on the Superior Court, noted that the Supreme Court has appointed her an initial member of the Continuing Judicial Education Board of Judges, which supplements the program. “This is recognition of her unwavering service to education,” he said.

Duquesne’s legal writing program under Lally-Green has received national recognition. U.S. News and World Report provides specialty rankings of certain law school programs. Legal writing is one. In the 2017 report, Duquesne ranked number 15 in the country. Law professor Jan M. Levine, who came from Temple Law School, where he started the program, is director of the legal research and writing program. Levine said that classes are small and each student gets close attention. There are two regular courses: a three-credit course in the fall semester and a two-credit course in the spring semester. “The goal is to make this legal writing course as close to real law practice as possible,” he said.

In the fall, students draft formal memoranda as if they were writing them for a senior law partner in preparation for a lawsuit. There are meetings and critiques with professors regarding style, strategy and clarity. In the spring, the students prepare a brief and deliver an argument before an appellate panel of alumni and one professor — and this time they are assigned the opposing side of the argument. Bolewitz remarked that the program was one of his favorites, as it taught him to think and write like a lawyer. He said he really appreciated those skills when he began private practice.

Professor Levine equated the law school professors in this process to “coaches,” who provide hands-on attention. The students learn from making mistakes. “The metaphor we use — this process is like learning to ride a bicycle — first it is done physically,” he said. “It is not a mental exercise until the student is comfortable riding the bike, and then he or she can start to think about racing.”

The practice of law has changed a great deal and law school is no longer what it was 20 years ago: Read 3,000 cases, take the bar exam and then begin to learn the law practice. Duquesne Law Dean Maureen Lally-Green said, “Our goal is to educate our students to be great 21st century lawyers. They must be able to meet the challenges of today when they walk out the door.” Using another military analogy, this writer concludes that, since receiving her “battlefield commission,” Dean Maureen Lally-Green’s mission is to ensure that when Duquesne students graduate, they are “combat ready.”

Peter F. Vaira is a member of Greenblatt, Pierce, Funt & Flores LLC. He is a former U.S. attorney and is the author of a book on Eastern District practice that is revised annually.

If you would like to comment on this article for publication in our next issue, please send an email to editor@pabar.org.