CATALYSTS FOR CHANGE
Building on its long commitment to animal law and policy and the groundbreaking work of alumni in the field, Vermont Law and Graduate School has launched a new Animal Law and Policy Institute.

By Rebecca Beyer

The career paths of two Vermont Law School alumni took very different tracks, but would converge years later—in the wilderness.

By Corin Hirsch
Dear Alumni,

No school is better positioned than Vermont Law and Graduate School to produce tomorrow’s changemakers. Our graduates are a diverse group of leaders, lawyers, environmentalists, justice champions, policy experts, and community advocates serving as catalysts for change across the globe.

Embracing the Vermont community values that make our school unique, we’re marking our 50th anniversary with bold action to pursue global change. We dare to achieve a virtuous circle of support—form graduates like you, your family and friends, and all who care to protect our world from injustice and environmental distress.

Our 50th Anniversary Campaign offers many ways to make an impact—from annual and planned giving options, to legacy bequests, to the naming of campus buildings.

There is nothing like the power and compassion of the VLGS community. It will help you grow and give you the confidence to go out and better our world. And your support will ensure the legacy of VLGS for the next 50 years.

Please join us and donate today!

Dave Celone JD’92
Vice President, Alumni Relations and Development

We envision a time when all students can readily access and afford a VLGS education to become leaders and catalysts for change with the full support of our alumni, faculty, staff, community members, and friends around the world.

Mission
To educate students in a diverse community that fosters personal growth and that enables them to attain outstanding professional skills and high ethical values with which to serve as lawyers and environmental and other professionals in an increasingly technological and interdependent global society.

Strategic Goals
With four overarching goals, our Campaign will enable VLGS to fully support its Strategic Plan, to ensure the school will thrive over the next half-century and beyond. These goals include:

• Transforming into a graduate institution that houses both a law school and a graduate school
• Establishing a new president position to serve as chief executive
• Developing three new public policy master’s degrees and enhancing existing ones
• Launching an Online Hybrid JD (OHJD) program for working professionals

Make an Impact!

DONATE TODAY

connect.vermontlaw.edu/50
For fifty years, people from around the world have journeyed to join the community that is now named Vermont Law and Graduate School. My personal reasons for undertaking this pilgrimage are much the same, I suspect, as the reasons that motivated most of you. Yes, I was drawn to the state of Vermont. But more profoundly, I was drawn to a state of mind.

I have found what I was looking for. I hope the same may be said for all of you, and for future generations who will undertake the journey.

The state of mind that is uniquely Vermont Law and Graduate School (VLGS) is captured by its motto—law for the community and the world—and by its mission—to educate students in a diverse community that fosters personal growth and enables them to attain outstanding professional skills and high ethical values.

We are now embarked on an exciting strategic plan to ensure the vitality of that mission for the next fifty years. It is ambitious, as all worthy striving is ambitious. In the words of the architect Daniel Burnham: “Make big plans, aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical diagram once recorded will never die, but long after we are gone will be a living thing, asserting itself with ever growing insistency.”

With such growing insistency, we are now pursuing big plans, and for big reasons. Our physical environment is challenged by a crisis that threatens our posterity. Our moral environment is challenged by threats to the most fundamental values of a decent society: respect for human dignity, autonomy, and the rule of law.

We are dedicated to recruiting and educating a new generation of leaders committed to causes larger than themselves. In the words of Martin Luther King Jr., “we are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.” And we are dedicated to filling yet another urgent necessity: the world desperately needs professionals with the intellectual and practical skills to study, design, and advocate wise policies relating to climate change, environmental policy, and social justice.

This does not mean that we are only seeking future “public interest” lawyers and professionals. It does mean that no matter what specific arena of law, business, politics, or policy they may someday enter, our graduates will be imbued with a sense of the public interest.

Vermont Law and Graduate School occupies a distinctive place in the panoply of higher education. It is indeed a unique state of mind. I invite you to join in our noble rededication to that state of mind, as with pride we celebrate our history, and with audacious ambition, forge our future.

Rodney A. Smolla
President, Vermont Law and Graduate School
“We equip our students with a full toolbox of knowledge and skills for making change. In this time of climate crisis and its disproportionate impacts on people of color and low-income communities around the world, training leaders in environmental protection and community resilience is critical to our future.”

Maverick Lloyd School for the Environment

Last fall, Vermont Law and Graduate School launched the Vermont School for the Environment, a specialized public policy professional school to concentrate on cutting-edge solutions to today’s urgent environmental challenges. VLGS then received a $2.5 million gift from the Maverick Lloyd Foundation, and to recognize this transformational gift, changed the name of the Vermont School for the Environment to the Maverick Lloyd School for the Environment.

The entirety of the Maverick Lloyd School for the Environment’s interdisciplinary graduate curriculum puts climate change and racial and economic justice at the center of the learning experience—a lens critical to understanding the issues and developing the solutions to address the world’s most pressing problems.

“Our School for the Environment is the runway for tomorrow’s environmental leaders to launch their careers,” Jennifer Rushlow, dean of the Maverick Lloyd School for the Environment, said. “We equip our students with a full toolbox of knowledge and skills for making change. In this time of climate crisis and its disproportionate impacts on people of color and low-income communities around the world, training leaders in environmental protection and community resilience is critical to our future.”

Part of the creation of the school includes two new degrees: a Master of Climate and Environmental Policy (MCEP) and Master of Animal Protection Policy (MAPP). These are in addition to the existing Master of Energy Regulation and Law (MERL) and Master of Food and Agricultural Law and Policy (MFALP) degree programs that are now part of the School for the Environment.

The school will build on VLGS’s long-running expertise in domestic and international environmental, clean energy, food and agriculture, and animal protection law and policy. Courses are designed to prepare students to succeed in the job market—public, private, or nonprofit sectors—through practical skills, rigorous training and exceptional experiential learning opportunities.

“At no time in history has the need for well-trained professionals equipped with the intellectual and practical skills to study, design, and advocate wise public policies and practices on matters relating to climate change and environmental protection mattered more to the world,” said VLGS President Rod Smolla. “The faculty and students who will power the Maverick Lloyd School for the Environment will be catalysts for progress in what may be the single most important policy arena facing humankind.”

Online Hybrid JD (OHJD) Program Running Strong

When Vermont Law and Graduate School’s new Online Hybrid JD program was announced, admission officials worried that a goal of 15 students in the inaugural March 2023 cohort might be difficult to achieve given the shortened recruiting timeline. As it turns out, that wasn’t a problem. When classes began on Aug. 29, the program was filled to capacity with 20 students—the maximum number of students allowed by the American Bar Association when it approved the new program. The ABA has since increased the allowed capacity to 100 students annually.

Developed to make it easier for working professionals to earn their law degree in environmental law or restorative justice, the program is delivered through a mixture of online classes and three brief, in-person residential sessions. The OHJD offers the same rigorous legal education as the school’s residential JD, but with flexibility that allows working professionals to earn a law degree without giving up their ability to earn an income or having to move to Vermont.

“The Online Hybrid JD is perfect for experienced, working professionals who want to boost their careers or start a new one in the law,” says Vermont Law School Dean Beth McCormack. “The program’s flexibility means that students can earn their JD while still meeting the many other obligations in their lives. The ability to keep working, to take care of their families, to minimize student debt, that’s a game-changer.”

The OHJD offers students the opportunity to choose a general practice track or specialize in one of four areas in which VLGS is widely known for—and that represent some of society’s most pressing issues: environmental law, food and agriculture law, energy law, or restorative justice.

“We chose these four specializations because our faculty and staff are known to be among the best educators on these topics in the U.S. The world needs legal experts and leaders who can tackle today’s difficult problems,” said Dean McCormack.

The OHJD program may be completed in as little as three years and one semester (a total of 10 semesters). The classes are delivered in synchronous and asynchronous formats. Synchronous classes are held virtually in the evenings, Monday through Thursday, 6:30 to 9 p.m. ET. The asynchronous classes enable students to interact with classmates and faculty through discussion, projects, and feedback with no set meeting times. Students participate in in-person (Thursday through Sunday) residencies held at the school’s downtown Burlington, Vt., location during the first, sixth, and final semester. At the end of the program, students will be prepared to take the bar and practice law in most states.

The program builds on the school’s decade-plus track record of delivering successful, impactful, online degrees. VLGS established the nation’s first online master’s degree program in environmental law in 2011.
On June 22, 2023, VLGS celebrated the grand opening of its new Burlington location. Located on College Street just blocks from Burlington City Hall, Church Street Marketplace, and the shoreline of Lake Champlain, VLGS – Burlington will host residencies for the Online Hybrid JD program, an admissions office, and classes through the Center for Justice Reform and National Center on Restorative Justice.

The grand opening also marked the celebration of the new Center for Justice Reform Clinic. Funded by a $975,000 federal grant secured by Senator Bernie Sanders through the Fiscal Year 2023 Congressionally Directed Spending process, the new clinic will merge the school’s immigration assistance work and broader justice reform work to reduce recidivism, address mass incarceration, and improve community-based restorative alternatives at all intercept points, from pre-charge to post-conviction, across the state of Vermont.

VLGS marked the grand opening with a ribbon cutting ceremony and open house reception featuring a “Cocktails with the Constitution” lecture by VLGS President Rod Smolla, who provided an update on recent Supreme Court decisions. Burlington Mayor Miro Weinberger, as well as representatives from the offices of Senator Bernie Sanders and Senator Peter Welch, joined President Smolla and Dean Beth McCormack for the press conference and ribbon cutting.
The Strategic Plan and the New VLGS: A Q&A with Board of Trustees Chair, Glenn Berger JD’78

The strategic plan announced in 2022 was the result of an 18-month process that ultimately included more than 60 faculty, staff, and trustees participating in working groups and committees. They solicited and received feedback from more than 700 alumni, students, prospective students, staff, faculty, and funders through surveys, town halls, focus groups, Q&A sessions, facilitated discussion groups, and more.

The result of all that work was a number of important new changes for the entire school going forward. The dean and president position so that we now have two deans—one for the law school and one for the graduate school—and one president for the entire institution. I think that is a long overdue change that will help the executive functions of the school tremendously.

To you, what is the most exciting part about the strategic plan?

To me the most exciting part is the reorganization of the school by splitting out the graduate programs from the JD program. We are reinventing ourselves to a certain degree by doing that. It puts more emphasis on the graduate programs, so that they are equal with the JD program. That is a big change for the school, and I think it’s going to be a very positive one. Another thing that excites me is bifurcating the dean and president positions so that we now have two deans—one for the law school and one for the graduate school—and one president for the entire institution. I think that is a long overdue change that will help the executive functions of the school tremendously.

Why was it necessary to undertake the strategic planning process, and ultimately, go in this new direction?

I think to understand that you have to go back to 2019 when I first became chair of the board of trustees. At that point in time, the school didn’t have a sustainable financial model. We weren’t generating the revenue we needed in order to ensure that the school would be viable in the long term. And that wasn’t just Vermont Law School, but a larger trend in higher education in general, and law schools in particular. There were fewer and fewer students applying to law schools and a significant dip in applications over a ten-year period that many law schools were experiencing, including us. The board decided we needed to come up with a plan to attract more students and create a sustainable financial model, which is why we started the strategic planning process.

How does elevating the master’s programs strengthen the JD program and the school itself?

The bottom line is that separating out and emphasizing the graduate programs will support and help maintain the JD program. Again, if you go back to the basic premise, which is that we needed more revenue for the entire school going forward, an energized graduate program will support the JD program in a big way by helping to create a sustainable financial model for the entire school going forward. I think for everybody, alumni especially, it’s important for the school to continue to do so well into the future.

What does the future look like for VLGS?

I think it looks a lot brighter than it did before we started this process. Not to say that there won’t be hiccups along the way; that’s the nature of the business of being an independent institution. But we’ve always been entrepreneurial, and we are headed in the right direction. I think this is going to be a very successful strategic plan.

Is there anything else you’d like to add?

While developing the strategic plan, a lot of thought went into separating the dean and president positions and there was some initial pushback to that, but from what I’ve seen since [VLGS President] Rod Smolla came on board, it has been extremely successful. I think we were fortunate to find Rod; he’s the perfect person for the job. He brings not only impeccable academic credentials, but a lot of experience managing academic institutions and it’s already paying off.
A NEW LEADER FOR A NEW ERA

Rodney Smolla—accomplished educator, litigator, scholar, and author—takes the reins at an opportune time.

BY DAVID GOODMAN
Rodney Smolla, Inaugural President of Vermont Law and Graduate School (VLGS), Didn’t Plan to Attend College, But He Has Spent Much of His Life Leading Them.

Hailing from a large family of Nebraskan farmers, Smolla’s father was one of 10 children, and his mother was one of 17. None of his relatives attended college. When Smolla wasn’t helping on the farm, he was playing football. His talent on the gridiron earned him a scholarship to Yale University, and he continued his academic career by attending Duke University School of Law.

Officially beginning his term in July 2022, Smolla joined VLGS from Widener University Delaware Law School, where he served as dean and professor of law since 2015. He was previously president of Furman University, and dean at Washington and Lee University and University of Richmond law schools.

Smolla takes the helm at a turning point for the 109-year old school. On June 21, 2022, the school formally announced its reorganizing as a graduate institution housing two schools—law and graduate, and new name, Vermont Law and Graduate School.

In addition to launching the Maverick Lloyd School for the Environment, which houses the environmental master’s programs within the graduate school, several new degrees have also been introduced: a Master of Climate and Environmental Policy, a Master of Animal Protection Policy, a Master of Legal Studies, and an LLM in Animal Law.

The change, which officially took effect on July 1, 2022, was the culmination of an 18-month long process to devise a new strategic plan that involved input from faculty, staff, alumni, students, and the board of trustees. The plan affirms “an all-in commitment to public interest law and policy” and is buoyed by an anonymous $18 million donation to the school.

Jennifer Rushlow, dean of the Maverick Lloyd School for the Environment, notes that the school “has the space to focus most on external matters and revenue generation. Keeping all of those responsibilities in one person was no longer best for the institution given how complex we have become.”

Smolla explained, “I’m the external person trying to drive admissions, bring more students to the school, market the strategic plan, and dramatically increase fundraising. I’m excited about selling people on the future of the school and its importance to the world, because of its identity as a leading place to protect the environment and its emerging identity for social justice issues, including restorative justice.”

“A Passion for Law and Free Speech

I think the school has been one of the gems in legal education and it has a really bright future. I’m excited to be the voice of that message.”

Smolla had not planned on being a lawyer. “I had never met a lawyer in my life,” he exclaims. He developed a passion for American history and political science as an undergraduate, which led him to Duke. “Most people don’t love law school, but I did,” he says. He took a keen interest in constitutional law, then clerked for a judge on the Fifth Circuit and went into corporate law in his hometown. But Smolla “yearned for academic life.” This led him to teach at DePaul University College of Law outside Chicago, and he has also served as a faculty member at William & Mary, University of Illinois, and University of Arkansas law schools, and as a visiting professor of law at Duke, University of Chicago, University of Indiana, Denver University, and University of Melbourne.

Smolla had been born in 1953, a year before the United States Supreme Court handed down its landmark civil rights decision, Brown v. Board of Education. “Think of how different we are today than how we were then,” Smolla muses. “The tremendous progress in race relations, equality for women, LGBTQ+ rights, protection of the accused, the robust commitment to freedom of speech—that’s all since I was born.” He attributes much of that social change to the power of the law. “There is no country in the world where the court system and the ideas of rights has a bigger impact on a nation’s identity. That’s very powerful and I felt so lucky to be a small piece of it, to teach and write about it, and argue cases about it.”

It’s part of my identity. I was a relatively rare legal academic and among a handful of law professors who was both a teacher and writer and also appeared in court three to four times a year to argue cases.”

Smolla became a First Amendment lawyer by “pure accident.” He was working for a law firm in Chicago that was representing the Catholic Church, which wanted to sue an author for defamation over a novel that was a thinly veiled exposé of priest sexual abuse, which Smolla says was “prescient.”

“Nobody in this law firm knew anything about First Amendment and defamation law, and I didn’t know much about it,” he says. “I was sent to research it just as a lot of modern free speech law was forming in the 1970s. The only treatise on defamation was 40 years old.” Smolla went on to write a textbook on defamation, as well as more than 100 articles published in law reviews and other publications, and has been arguing cases about it and freedom of speech, civil liberties, and constitutional law ever since.

Separating the President and Dean Position Was Necessary to Reflect Who We Have Become; a Law School and a Graduate School.
There is a smaller pool of students to fill the class and the competition among law schools is fierce to get the best students you can,” says Glenn Berger JD’78, chair of the school’s board of trustees. “The financial issues and what people are looking for in the world has changed. Now we have online learning and that is becoming more popular for many reasons, so it changes how we learn and teach.”

“How attend VLGS versus another institution?” Berger asks. “With the strategic plan, we try to address that. We are essentially changing the way we teach, changing what we are teaching, and we are emphasizing the graduate programs more than in the past because that seems to be where more people are applying.” The JD program “is still our jewel in the crown,” he asserts, “but you have to change with the times.”

Founded in 1972 and first holding classes the following year, VLGS boasts one of the top environmental law programs in the country.

“It’s famous for environmental law and being unique in a small town and being an independent school,” says Smolla. “I was watching the recent struggles the institution had and I was rooting for it.”

The school’s challenges are not unique. In 2021, the size of the law school applicant pool nationwide dropped five percent from the previous year (though there was a 13 percent rise in applicants in 2020). Vermont Law School has struggled with declining enrollment, but its graduate programs have been growing.

A NEW ERA

One of the most famous cases that Smolla was involved in was Hustler Magazine v. Falwell, in which televangelist Jerry Falwell sued Hustler for a parody that it published in which Falwell was depicted as an incestuous drunk. Smolla wrote an amicus brief for The New York Times and was part of a team that helped prepare the lawyers representing Hustler publisher Larry Flynt. Smolla told a gathering of reporters and attorneys at the time, “I know the mainstream media has no will power to be on the side of Hustler and Flynt. But you need to participate because if you don’t, The New York Times will be used for an opinion piece, or ‘Saturday Night Live’ for parody. The idea that through satire or opinion you would be liable and offend a famous person, that flips the First Amendment upside down. The case would become the subject of a 1996 film, “The People vs. Larry Flynt.”

Smolla’s other notable cases include representing the families of the victims of a triple murder who sued the publisher of the book “Hit Man,” a supposed manual for how to commit murder. Smolla went on to write a book about the case, “Deliberate Intent: A Lawyer Tells the True Story of Murder by the Book,” which was made into a television movie in which actor Timothy Hutton played the role of Smolla.

In 2022, Smolla was one of three attorneys representing Dominion Voting Systems in its defamation suit against Fox News, which repeatedly aired false stories alleging that the company’s machines had altered votes in the 2020 election. In early 2023, Fox agreed to settle with Dominion for $787.5 million, one of the largest settlements in a defamation case in U.S. history.

“I’ve been a scholar that has written about defamation law for 40 years,” Smolla told the Valley News. “This was the most important case I’ve ever been involved in, not just for the monetary stakes but for the importance for the country in setting the record straight.”

“Even though I have become most well known as a First Amendment scholar and litigator, I love every part of constitutional law,” Smolla says. “Issues of presidential power and federalism, economic regulation, race and gender, and LGBTQ+ rights—there’s a whole spectrum that forms American constitutional law and I care a lot about it. It’s a huge part of our American identity.”

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The new part-time Online Hybrid JD program is a keen innovation. The program includes a mixture of online classes and three brief, in-person residential sessions. “The program has opened up a new dynamic population of students for us; students who work full time and who are unable to move to Vermont for three years,” says Dean McCormack. “The students in our first class were from all over the country; have jobs in the public and private sector, and are drawn to VLGS because of our expertise in environmental law and justice reform. The program utilizes best practices in online learning and builds on our decade-plus of experience offering online degrees. As one of only 18 ABA-approved law schools to offer such a program, the interest from prospective students has been profound.”

Smolla embraces online learning. “One of the few silver linings of the Covid crisis was that the American Bar Association [the accrediting body for law schools] realized you can be very effective with online education. Vermont will be one of the pioneers with this program.”

“It’s a new world and all of higher education has to adjust,” Smolla declares.

“Vermont Law and Graduate School has a history of empowering changemakers,” said Dean Fromberg. “This institution has the potential to lead higher education into a new era of rigorous, inclusive, and accessible graduate education, especially in environmental policy and justice reform.”

Dean Rushlow said the changes are driven by core values of the school that have been updated. “We are revisiting what we need to offer our students: environmentalism as it is today, not environmentalism in the 1970s. Climate change, environmental justice, and the racial impacts of environmental degradation will be at the center of everything we do. We want more people going into the world who reflect our environmental problems today and who are most impacted by those problems.”

She added, “This is an important way that we can ensure our long-term sustainability.”

President Smolla said of his leadership, “On a scale of authoritarian to very egalitarian, I’m very egalitarian. I don’t have much of an ego. It’s common for me to come into a meeting with an idea of what we should do and come out of it with the exact opposite idea. I don’t have an investment in having it follow my idea.”

“When you first take a new job, you get asked a thousand times, ‘What is your vision?’” he insisted. “I am always resistant to that. It shouldn’t be mine. It should be the groups. I don’t come in with it all figured out.”

Smolla believes that Vermont Law and Graduate School can be part of the solution to what currently ails society.

“The country and the world need people dedicated to human rights and dedicated to the rule of law. And they need people who are able to understand the world from an opponent’s point of view and engage in civil discourse.”

Smolla has not lost faith in the role of the law to make change, even in the wake of the Dobbs decision that ends constitutional protection for abortion.

“I am not naive, and I share the disappointment of many with the Court’s most recent term. But this day too shall pass. I believe in progress, and I believe the next generation of VLGS lawyers and policy-makers will lead that progress.”

I BELIEVE IN PROGRESS, and I BELIEVE in the NEXT GENERATION OF VLGS LAWYERS and POLICY-MAKERS will LEAD that PROGRESS.

PRESIDENT RODNEY A. SMOLLA
Building on its long commitment to animal law and policy, and the groundbreaking work of alumni in the field, Vermont Law and Graduate School has launched a new Animal Law and Policy Institute.

**BY REBECCA BEYER**
When Monica Miller JD’12 stood before New York’s highest court to argue that an elephant named Happy should be released from the Bronx Zoo under the centuries-old common-law writ of habeas corpus, she was coming full circle on a path set in motion when she was a student at Vermont Law School.

Back then, Miller was a volunteer for the Nonhuman Rights Project (NhRP), which was created by Steven Wise in 1996 to secure legal rights for animals. Wise taught one of the world’s first animals’ rights law courses in VLS’ summer program, but Miller first met him when she attended an animal law conference where he was a featured speaker.

One of Miller’s main roles as a student volunteer was to research which states might be most amenable to NhRP’s novel attempts to apply habeas corpus—also known as the Great Writ—to animals. As the first state high court anywhere to consider habeas for a nonhuman animal, New York was her top choice, and Happy’s case was one of several the organization has filed in the state. It was also the first to be accepted on appeal by the New York Court of Appeals.

“We’ve petitioned to get our cases before the court of appeals numerous times,” Miller explains. “To have them finally take it as a victory.”

Victories in the relatively new field of animal law are hard to come by. In part because animals are legally considered property, it can be difficult to move cases challenging their treatment or confinement past even purely procedural obstacles such as standing. But Vermont Law and Graduate School (VLGS) graduates like Miller have been pushing the boundaries of animal law for decades in the United States and around the world. And, thanks to the newly launched Animal Law and Policy Institute (ALPI), the next generation of advocates is well on its way.

“I’m very excited to embrace the energy and optimism of new people entering this space,” said Laura Fox JD/MELP’13, a former Humane Society of the United States attorney who is helping lead the institute’s new Farmed Animal Advocacy Clinic. “As we get more people involved, we’ll generate more creative ideas and new ways of viewing problems.”

VLGS has long been a leader in animal law and policy. In the years since Wise’s course led it to become one of the first law schools to offer a course on the subject in 1996, it has continued to feature animal law programming ever since, especially during summer sessions. However, students have always wanted more—and, with support from several funders, the Animal Law and Policy Institute formally launched with Professor Delcianna Winders, former vice president and deputy general counsel for the PETA Foundation, at the helm as director. Winders is a leading scholar who has practiced animal law for more than fifteen years and taught the subject for nearly as long. She has also taught at Pace and Lewis & Clark.

The program offers an expanded summer curriculum, including a class on undercover investigations, a 14-credit animal law concentration, the clinic, and an animal protection policy master’s degree that was offered for the first time during the 2023-2024 academic year.

“I’m very excited to embrace the energy and optimism of new people entering this space.”

~ Laura Fox JD/MELP’13
positions at the ASPCA, PETA Foundation, Humane Society of the United States, Center for Biological Diversity, and many other organizations.

Except for Abate—who was a student before animal law was offered at VLGS and came to the field much later—each of those graduates says the school was instrumental in helping them get their footing.

Page read about Wise and his course in a magazine she found in an airplane seat-back pocket. Even though there weren’t any other animal law offerings at the time, she applied to the school because she was also interested in environmental law, for which VLGS was then—as now—highly ranked.

"I kind of had the blind faith that I could white-knuckle it and make it work” in animal law, she laughs. “There was no path.”

Once on campus, however, Page applied every opportunity she had for independent study to animal law research, including papers on the consequences of treating animals as property and search and seizure procedures for humane officers and the application of RICO laws to dog-fighting enterprises.

"I didn’t even know what was out there,” she says. “I was trying to teach myself.”

Fox pursued a Master of Environmental Law and Policy in addition to a JD because so many of the animal law courses were offered through that program. One of those courses was taught by a U.S. Department of Justice attorney focused on prosecuting utility companies whose power lines interfered with birds. When she told the attorney she had written a paper on the impact of wind turbines on wildlife, he offered her a summer internship with him in Missoula, Montana.

“It was the best experience of my life,” she says. “I loved every second of it.”

Lowrey came to VLGS after two decades working in business when he realized he was spending as much time volunteering for animal rights and animal welfare issues as he was at his full-time job.

“I was laser-focused on animal law,” he says.

In addition to chairing the Animal Law Society, which won best student chapter of the Animal Legal Defense Fund under his direction, he won second place in the 2016 National Animal Law Competitions for his mock bill restricting ownership of exotic animals. Professor Margaret York JD’15 coached Lowrey in the competition (Lowrey was a guest speaker in York’s undercover investigations class). For his semester in practice as a student, Lowrey worked in the animal crimes unit of the Virginia attorney general’s office.

Bender’s career has progressed on two tracks. After taking a class with Adjunct Professor Don Baur—who was a leading expert in both animal and environmental law who taught Ocean and Coastal Law in the school’s summer program for a quarter century, and who mentored innumerable aspiring animal lawyers—she continued to work with him on cases seeking to protect marine mammals under existing federal and state laws. But she also discovered a different approach to conservation in a course on earth law with Linda Sheehan, former executive director of the Earth Law Center, where Bender now works.

“One of the premises of the course was that our environmental laws and policies are deeply flawed because they allow pollution—just at a regulated pace,” Bender says. “They’re designed to slow degradation rather than reverse and restore it.”

At the Earth Law Center, Bender launched an ocean rights program that seeks to apply a rights-based approach to ocean animals and governance. The rights-based approach—also the strategy in Happy’s case—has been gaining momentum. In 2008, Ecuador became the first country in the world to include the rights of nature in its constitution, and in 2017, New Zealand recognized the Whanganui River as a legal person.

Although the idea is new in the “Western construct,” Bender says, “Indigenous communities have had this foundational belief and have been advocating for stewardship structures for centuries.”

Rushlow says the new Animal Law and Policy Institute has revealed the “huge community” of VLGS graduates working in the field. And now that community is united behind the institute and Winders.

“I could not be more pleased that Delci is leading the charge on this very exciting, innovative program,” Abate says. “She’s an ideal leader. She has a grand vision for what this program can and should be.”

“ANIMAL LAW AT VLGs IS VERY MUCH FRONT AND CENTER. THE ANIMAL LAW STUDENTS ARE HERE FOR A REASON; THEY’RE FOCUSED ON A GOAL.”

~ Delcianna Winders
Winders praised the alumni and current students for their commitment to animal law and policy issues.

At other schools, animal law can feel “off to the side, a little bit sidelined,” she says. But at VLGS, “it’s very much front and center. The animal law and policy students are here for a reason; they’re focused on a goal.”

Those students include Ashley Monti JD/ALP’22 and Michelle Amidzich JD/ALP’22, the school’s first two students to graduate with a concentration in animal law; and Vanessa Beane ALP’22, who participated in an animal law practicum Winders taught as a precursor to Fox’s clinic.

As part of the class, Beane researched wildlife compounds that charge photographers to take pictures of captive animals who are often mistreated. The photos are then promoted—sometimes unwittingly by animal welfare organizations—as if they had actually been taken in the wild. Beane’s paper makes recommendations to help eradicate the practice, including the use of accurate captions, an acknowledgement that the animals in the photos are captive, and the removal of falsely labeled photos from stock photo agency archives.

“Animals are not for our enjoyment,” Beane says. “People are not entitled to these photos; we’re not entitled to see these animals. In no way should these horrible practices be occurring just for people’s enjoyment.”

Beane, who wants to work on behalf of captive animals, praised Winders as a mentor and teacher.

“She’s incredible,” Beane says. “She really aims to equip her students with the skills to go forth in a career.”

That’s the idea, Winders says.

“We’re trying to make sure we’re meeting students’ interests,” she says. “We want to help them identify job opportunities and make connections.”

In an interview shortly after her arguments on behalf of Happy the elephant, Miller says her entire career can be traced back to VLGS. She used a final paper for her animal law class with Professor Pamela Vesilind JD’08 to do research for Wise, who then asked Miller to volunteer for the NhRP and later offered her a job as the organization’s first staff attorney before she had even graduated.

When Miller argued Happy’s case before the New York Court of Appeals, it was the first time someone other than Wise had handled an NhRP argument in court. In June 2022, five justices of New York’s high court joined a 17-page ruling finding that Happy was not entitled to even a hearing on habeas relief. But two other justices wrote more than 90 pages in dissenting opinions.

Happy’s captivity “is an affront to a civilized society, and every day she remains a captive—a spectacle for humans—we, too, are diminished,” Judge Jenny Rivera wrote in her dissent.

“We see the ruling as a victory,” Miller says. “As a result of Happy’s case, we are now armed with two compelling dissents from the highest court of New York and a majority opinion that recognizes the extraordinarily cognitively complex nature of elephants and calls upon the legislature to take action for elephants.”

Miller says Happy’s case is “unquestionably the most important thing I’ve ever done.” And that’s coming from someone who argued a separation of church and state case before the U.S. Supreme Court in 2019 for the American Humanist Association.

The reason?

The majority decision from the Supreme Court was a “step away from church-state separation,” she says. In contrast, the Happy case—even though it wasn’t successful—is a “step forward into the future of animal rights.”
The career paths of two Vermont Law and Graduate School alumni took very different tracks, but would converge years later—in the wilderness.

by Corin Hirsch
In late 2021, after a complex year-and-a-half long process, the land became the largest privately owned “forever wild” preserve in the state, renamed Woodbury Mountain Wilderness Preserve. NEWT won its new owner and it was Leibowitz’s former VLGS acquaintance, Merrill Bend JD’11, who provided a key assist during a collaboration that might have seemed unlikely just a few years prior when each cut a different path after graduation.

The Seeds of a Save

For Leibowitz, who grew up in Miami, a post-college stint with the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps at Elmore State Park steered him toward Vermont Law School. “It was there I really fell in love with Vermont,” says Leibowitz. “It’s rugged country with lots of special features,” says Andrew Meyer, whose grandfather, Hugo Meyer, purchased the tract in the 1950s and managed it as timberland. “Woodbury Mountain itself is a wonderful area of backcountry, waterfalls, wonderful wildlife, and ridges. There’s a nice ridge line along the top, lots of hardwood, some in areas that hadn’t been touched because it’s hard to access. Once you get there, it becomes rugged in terms of feeling like you’re in the middle of nowhere.”

Over time, the family became interested in directing from long term timber holdings, and as they looked at options, including selling easements, they were approached by Jon Leibowitz JD’11/MELP’08. NEWT’s executive director. NEWT had become interested in maintaining the land as “forever wild,” a designation that would not only preserve its character but could impact climate resilience.

“Old and wild forests, on average, soak up more carbon on an annual basis than a young and managed forest,” says Leibowitz. “When it comes to one of the greatest needs of human society right now, which is figuring out how to deal with climate change and reduce carbon in the atmosphere, old and wild forests are very valuable.”

As a 3L, Leibowitz took a class with Professor Jessica Jay JD’97/MSEL’99 that focused on land trusts and conservation easements, and “became intrigued with the idea of land conservation through private, transactional work, and using the land trust model to achieve conservation.” After earning his JD and Master of Environmental Law and Policy degrees, he began a fellowship with the Montenoua Land Conservancy in Colorado. About five years later, he saw the executive director opening at the Montpelier-based NEWT. “I was very lucky,” commented Leibowitz, who landed the job and moved back east. “I immediately hired Merrill as our staff attorney.”

NEWT had been founded in 2002 to fill a perceived gap in land conservation, which had long centered on managing land for multiple uses, from forestry to recreation to biodiversity. Instead, NEWT’s aim was to let land mature at its own pace, without interference from logging or mechanized recreation. “There was no other land trust in the Northeast at the time that was exclusively focused on conserving nature for nature’s sake, the intrinsic value of nature,” Leibowitz says.

Relying primarily on private and institutional donations, NEWT has protected over 82,000 acres across five New England states and New York, where about five percent of land is protected as “forever wild.” Some of that is outright owned by the organization. “We are in the real estate transaction business. It’s just that the end result of what we do is conservation rather than development,” explains Leibowitz. “Once we buy a piece of land, it won’t get logged ever again.”

With their work extending across multiple states, transactions and conservation

In the fall, the nearly 6,000 acres that stretch east and west across Woodbury Mountain in Vermont’s Northeast Kingdom are a technicolor blanket of crimson, gold, and evergreen, at least from the air. Beneath that canopy are snake dens and beaver dams, saw-whet owls and black bears, as well as headwaters for both the Lamoille and Winooski Rivers.

To the casual eye, it’s quintessential Vermont forest. What’s less visible along the ridges and wetlands here is a history that spans generations—from timbering to fishing and hunting—as well as a pool of carbon, some 500,000 tonnes, stored in its trees and soil. All of this piqued the interest of the Northeast Wilderness Trust (NEWT) when they learned that the longtime owner of the tract, the Meyer family, was exploring options to change the land’s use.

“It’s rugged country with lots of special features,” says Andrew Meyer, whose grandfather, Hugo Meyer, purchased the tract in the 1950s and managed it as timberland. “Woodbury Mountain itself is a wonderful area of backcountry, waterfalls, wonderful wildlife, and ridges. There’s a nice ridge line along the top, lots of hardwood, some in areas that hasn’t been touched because it’s hard to access. Once you get there, it becomes rugged in terms of feeling like you’re in the middle of nowhere.”

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– Jon Leibowitz JD’11/MELP’08
sasses can involve a lot of moving parts. "We need to be aware of tax laws across six states, and we have to have attorneys in every one of our states, or barred in multiple states, to represent us," he says.

Bent, who grew up in the Northeast Kingdom as the daughter of two Vermont Law School graduates, hadn’t necessarily considered environmental law and conservation as part of her career plan. “I never took a single environmental law course at Vermont Law School,” she says. “Instead, I thought I was going to be more of a general practice person—maybe have a practice of civil and family and criminal. That [plan] really evolved organically.”

After she graduated in 2011, she worked as a judicial clerk in the appellate court in Albany, N.Y., before joining the firm of Wasington, Campbell, Bent & Stasny in Manchester Center in 2013. “I have the luxury here to work on what I genuinely want to be working on, and to evolve my specialties,” Bent says. “I represent a lot of different towns in Vermont, which is one of the most interesting practice areas. I also represent conservation organizations and civic and community-minded individuals making positive changes and contributions to the state.”

Bent’s work touches on zoning, housing, and permitting, as well as assisting with real estate transactions. For NEWT’s sometimes complex conservation projects, she became integral to the due diligence process. “I document for the transactions. For NEWT’s sometimes complex permitting, as well as assisting with real-estate diligence, but he’s the one out there coming up with these amazing plans and executing them,” she says.

### Anatomy of a Land Deal

When the Meyer family first put out feelers for how to conserve the tract around Woodbury Mountain, a colleague of Leibowitz’s introduced him to Andrew Meyer, who had been involved in the land’s management over the decades. “Cutting less than the growth rate had been [Hugh Meyer’s] philosophy,” Meyer says. Occupying part of what’s called the Worcester-to-Kingdom linkage, the string of tracts also acted as a wildlife bridge of sorts, providing passage for foxes, deer, fisher, and dozens of other species as they moved around in response to development or changing climate. “It’s been a good place for wildlife, a corridor from east to west.”

The family worked with the state of Vermont and the Vermont Land Trust on protecting neighboring land as a managed forest. “Good conservation, but very different than what we do,” Leibowitz says. NEWT shared with them the ‘forever wild’ conservation approach, along with its unique parameters and rules, eventually winning them over.

The scale of the sale was enormous, and meant raising at least $6.5 million, as well as intricate title research. “We do a thorough title search to try to understand the history of the property and make sure that the title is clean,” Leibowitz says, so that boundary lines, easements, and prior or ongoing property rights disputes are clear.

In Vermont, title searches are done on the town level—and for a tract as vast and unique as Woodbury, Bent drew on a team of attorneys in a handful of towns. “It’s always better [in Vermont] to have somebody local look at a title because they better understand the local records office and how it operates,” Bent says. “You have to go through a process, searching grantor and grantee all the way back at least 40 years, and you have to make a lot of discretionary determinations about the quality of the title.”

As NEWT raised money, selling carbon credits became integral toward financing the sale. “Allowing somebody to offset their carbon emissions by purchasing carbon credits, which requires the underlying carbon bank—for lack of a better word, the forest—it requires the center of the forest to covenant and agree and promise that they won’t do certain things in that forest that would impact the amount [of carbon offset] available,” Bent continued. “It’s an incentive to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and basically monetizes good stewardship of the land.”

In the end, over 130 donors contributed to the purchase during the leadup to the sale in November 2021, and NEWT partnered with two organizations, one each in Quebec and Utah, through its Wild Carbon® program. “Carbon credits are not going to solve climate change, but they are also providing necessary capital to do good conservation work. They truly helped this transaction work in generating a serious amount of income,” Leibowitz says. “We’re trying to avoid the worst of climate chaos and help the biodiversity extinction crisis. Access to capital is important, and carbon markets are providing a place to do that. It was a real-world example of carbon credits being used to actually conserve wilderness.”

In late 2021, NEWT also purchased an adjacent 500 acres, called the Eagle Ledge Addition, that was a puzzle piece of sorts linking parts of the original tract. In 2022, NEWT added another 125 acres and, this year, plans to add another 160 acres. Besides a planned hiking trail, the land will be left as it is. “We’re simply protecting the land, and then taking a step back and allowing nature to direct the ebb and flow of that landscape,” says Leibowitz. “The more we learned, the more we felt it was aligned with our belief of what we felt was important not only for the land, but the whole region as far as conservation of wilderness,” says Andrew Meyer. “It’s a good model for the state to have pockets [of land] that are dedicated to wildlife and parts that are managed well. They balance each other.”

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Merrill Bent JD’11

The owner of the forest [agrees and promises] that they won’t do certain things that would impact the amount of carbon offset available. It’s an incentive to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and basically monetizes good stewardship of the land.”

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Merrill Bent JD’11
WITH THANKS FROM THE JD EXTERNSHIP PROGRAM

Vermont Law and Graduate School thanks all of our dedicated alumni externship supervisors during the 2021–2022 academic year. We greatly appreciate your time and commitment to our students and our program.

If you, or any individuals in your network, are interested in hosting a VLGS externship student in the future, please email JDexternships@vermontlaw.edu.

“My externship was essential. It was more than just an experience I could include on my resume. My supervising judge cared about me as a person and continues to provide mentorship to me now. The exposure to a wide range of people and areas of law improved my understanding of what’s required of me as an attorney.”

~ Chianna Hart JD’22

“My externship was hands down the most valuable experience I had while at VLGS. Being able to work directly with alumni gave me great perspective on the value of my education.”

~ William Stocker JD/MELP’21
Ed Keable
JD’86

Nearly four years ago on his birthday, Ed Keable was about to leave for a ski vacation with his husband, then Sen. David Bernhardt of the United States Department of the Interior (DOI) called him into his office.

Keable had spent seven years as a staff attorney in the U.S. Army Judge Advocate General’s Corps; six years as a staff attorney with DOI’s legal office; and seventeen years leading DOI’s legal office in three different positions, serving at the pleasure of the secretary. Upon entering Bernhardt’s office that day, Keable was greeted with a major opportunity—an offer to become the superintendent of Grand Canyon National Park in Arizona.

With his husband’s blessing, Keable said yes, and soon began overseeing one of the most important and iconic places in the world. From staffing to drinking water to wildfire management, he had to bring to these difficult decisions that touch the 5+ million people who visit the park—some as far away as New Mexico. For the next 100 years, he said, the National Park Service will also allow visitors don’t know the history of Indigenous people as we manage the park,” Keable said. “Frankly, it took years for the park to build trust with Indigenous leaders... because of how we managed the park for 100 years. But we were able to rebuild trust over time by listening to and incorporating ideas that Indigenous people brought to the Desert View Watch Tower, it is located near the park’s east entrance.

“We’ve focused on how we can reconnect with Indigenous people as we manage the park,” Keable said. “Frankly, it took years for the park to build trust with Indigenous leaders... because of how we managed the park for 100 years. But we were able to rebuild trust over time by listening to and incorporating ideas that Indigenous people brought to the Desert View Watch Tower, it is located near the park’s east entrance.

“I am glad I could bring back something for my country,” Rakotoson said. “In 1999, jointly with another returning Malagasy lawyer who went to VLS after me, a conference was organized to evaluate the effectiveness of environmental law in Madagascar. It was sponsored by the National Office for the Environment, the University of Fianarantsoa, and DELC. The United States Agency for International Development was also able to support the travel of two VLS professors—David Firestone and Karin Sheldon—to attend the conference. Rakotoson has helped stem some of the negative environmental impacts by changing the natural resources governance policy in Madagascar for the better.

Through Rakotoson’s steadfast commitment to the cause, DELC has continued to grow over the years. The organization received its first grant in 2006 from the MacArthur Foundation to support the expansion of its environmental justice work throughout Madagascar.

Rakotoson acquired the grant while completing her doctoral program in California, and she chose VLS to be the U.S. Fiscal manager for the grant through its three-year term. In 2010, DELC joined The Access Initiative—a global network of more than 300 civil society organizations and more than 50 countries from all continents focused on promoting environmental democracy—and it currently serves as Madagascar’s local organization within the network. Additionally, DELC is Madagascar’s national chapter for the Pan-African Climate Justice Alliance, a consortium dedicated to addressing climate and environmental challenges.

Rakotoson has further strengthened her international relationships by sitting on the East Africa Board of Advisors for the Global Greengrants Fund, where she has represented Madagascar’s national chapter. Along with 24 other international leaders, the board offers grants for community organizations in Madagascar, Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya, and Ethiopia to address environmental justice issues. In March 2024, Rakotoson hosted the board’s annual meeting in Madagascar for the second time.

Reflecting on her career, Rakotoson is incredibly grateful for the many opportunities she gained through her VLS experience, including the ability to earn a full tuition scholarship. She encoded in her coursework, absorbing as much information as she could. In Rakotoson’s first semester on campus, she received the VLS Excellence Award for her work in her environmental ethics class.

“I so enjoyed my time at Vermont Law, especially my environmental law class taught by Professor David Firestone,” Rakotoson said. “Professor Firestone published a book titled, “Environmental Law for Non-Lawyers.” I remember any time he finished reading an excerpt from the book, he would always say, ‘What does it mean in English? For me, learning in English as my third language is one thing, and speaking legalese as a fourth language is another thing!’

Rakotoson looks forward to continuing to deepen the connection with Vermont Law and Graduate School—perhaps through establishing a research partnership and exchange on environmental justice in Madagascar. “It’s exciting to think about exploring opportunities to extend VLS’s collaboration with DELC,” she shared.
As a personal injury attorney, Ricky Armand has the opportunity to help clients through some of the most challenging times in their lives. And when resolution leads to a monetary settlement, it can be one of the most life-changing moments in their clients’ lives.

“A lot of the time, it’s the largest amount of money they’ve ever seen at one time,” Armand said.

Armand works for Kelley | Uostal, a nationally recognized law firm known for its track record of winning large verdicts and settlements from personal injury cases. He focuses on cases that range from slip-and-falls to catastrophic injuries and wrongful deaths. One of the things he likes about this area of practice is that anyone can afford to hire him, because it’s based on a percentage of the amount won.

One of Armand’s more memorable cases involved a family where a woman was killed by her ex-boyfriend, and the father of her two sons. The mother of the woman—the grandmother to the children—arrived at the woman’s apartment complex to pick her up one morning for work. When she didn’t come down to the car, the mother went to the door. There, she saw the ex holding a gun, and she screamed, but the man still shot and killed her daughter right in front of her. He then came after her, but she was able to run and escape. The perpetrator is spending life in prison, and the children were left with no parents.

The grandmother and grandfather took in the grandchildren, and worked with Armand to sue the apartment complex. During the discovery process, Armand learned the complex was supposed to have a security officer on duty, but they had called in sick that day and there was no replacement. He argued that had that officer been on duty, the tragedy could have been prevented. Armand said it wasn’t a slam dunk case—the apartment complex argued a “victim-targeted” defense—but he and his team successfully litigated it. Armand will never forget the moment when he and the grandparents, after an eight-hour mediation, reached a seven-figure settlement. “I recall the grandparents crying,” he said. “We all choked up a bit.”

The case personally resonated with Armand as well.

“I remember the Sunday before mediation was Father’s Day,” Armand said. “I remember lying down next to my own son that day. After they bill asleep, I started to get a little emotional, I was holding them tight. The young boys in the case lost both of their parents. Their father killed their mother.”

Armand, who is of Haitian descent, believes it is important to speak to young people of color to serve as a role model. “When you see me, it’s proof that it’s possible,” he said. “Here I was thinking that to be successful I had to go into music, sports, or some other form of entertainment.” Armand wants young people who look like him to know there are other avenues to success.

Armand credits Vice President Shirley Jefferson JD’86, who is a Black woman, as the reason he found Vermont Law School, now Vermont Law and Graduate School. He met her at a law school fair in Houston, Texas, and said her warm, motherly vibe made him feel welcomed. “She’s a fighter and always tries to protect her students,” he said.

More than a decade later, Armand is still paying it forward by mentoring and supporting the next generation of lawyers of color.

While these two roles are separated by decades, time zones, and a hemisphere, Whalen can draw a direct throughline from her work helping disadvantaged Vermonters to helping survivors of one of the world’s most notorious regimes.

“I have had amazing legal opportunities to be honest,” Whalen, of Westminster, Vermont, said. “I have not had one boring legal day.”

Whalen and her organization have helped approximately 200 judges and their families—more than 1,000 Afghans total—escape the Taliban and relocate outside of the country. Women judges are high level targets for terrorists. Not only are these women highly educated and serving in positions of power, they are also the individuals who sentenced many of the Taliban and ISIS K members in terrorism cases. When the U.S. withdrew from Afghanistan in 2021, those on terrorism and other criminal charges escaped from prison and are seeking revenge.

Whalen first began working with Afghan women judges in 2001, a few years after the United States invaded Afghanistan. She attended an IAWJ conference in Washington, D.C., where she met an Afghan judge, Marzia Bash. “I said, how can I help?” Whalen recalled. Bash told her she needed judicial training, and that while the U.S. had offered some training to Afghan judges, it had taken place in high-security, advanced courts, which were intimidating. Whalen invited her to Vermont, where our “fundus” courtrooms and slower pace would remove some of the barriers to legal training.

From 2004 to 2014, as the project director for the Vermont Afghan Women Judges Judicial Education, a project of the IAWJ and the Rural Women Leadership Institute of Vermont, Whalen and her colleagues brought 35 Afghan women judges to Vermont for training.

In recent years, her involvement with Afghan judges turned to evacuations, when these women became prime terrorist targets. The threats to them are severe—a judge Whalen knew personally was assassinated. Initially, Whalen’s team of seven were working around the clock, seven days a week to coordinate evacuations. Her team works with a network of lawyers, translators, and intelligence agents to move these judges to safety.

“Time of promoting an independent judiciary is coming to an end,” Whalen said. “What they’re at risk of is something far worse than death—it is being erased. They live in a back room, they can’t go out, they’re isolated from work, their broader family. They’ve had everything taken from them. And that is the refugee story.”

The drive to help these women stems from Whalen’s friendship and kinship with the Afghan judges. Early in her own career, Whalen was appointed as a family court magistrate, and in this work, she remembered what her VLS professor Lowell Schachter had said: Don’t only think about the domestic implications of an issue you’re working on, think about how it works globally. Whalen joined a then-fledgling organization, the IAWJ, and through her connections there she was invited to work at The Hague on the family maintenance treaty. From there, she went to Bonn and worked on the war crimes tribunal.

The experience wasn’t so much different from family court, “Whalen said of the war crimes cases. “It’s good people who once lived with each other now doing unspeakable harm to each other.”

Whether working locally or internationally, Whalen’s passion for humanitarian work is apparent. Her steadfast commitment to helping others has not gone unnoticed. Most recently, she was recognized with the American Bar Association’s 2023 World Order Under Law Award for providing visionary leadership in international law. Additionally, the IAWJ was awarded the 2023 Bolch Prize for the Rule of Law in recognition of the organization’s dedicated support of Afghan women judges. Through her role with IAWJ, Whalen was invited to the ceremony to accept the award.

“Working on this Afghan project has been as basic as any humanitarian kind of relief,” she said. “These are people who need help. They’re our friends, they’re our colleagues, and I feel an acute responsibility as well, mostly that they’re at risk now because of their belief in us…I feel like we’ve abandoned them.”
The next step was conducting a gap analysis, facilities should be able to do,” Meezan said. “A benchmark for what the organization’s... of carbon per acre, this metric was used as an example of how this works in practice. Meezan... future, sparking promise for the impact on the supply chain, products, and broader value chain, and measuring and reporting against key goals and targets.

With seven factories around the globe, and five focus areas (factories, people, raw material supply chain, products, and broader value chain), Meezan mapped out a regenerative supply chain, products, and broader value chain, and focusing on this new journey with JLL, I’m excited to be game changers as we move forward.”
Dear friends,

Community: a sense of; partners within; a physically defined boundary; the countless traits that define a group of people.

However you define or enjoy a community, the vital role it plays in one’s well-being and existence is undeniable. At our most basic level of need, we seek connections—to each other, to a cause, to the greater good, to a community. At Vermont Law and Graduate School (VLGS), we pride ourselves on the philosophy of law for the community and the world, and long have we recognized community as the durable foundation and bedrock principle guiding our beloved institution.

This unwavering tenet has transcended decades of classes whose students have enjoyed the VLGS experience. We carry that mantra with us into all parts of the world and workforce, bettering our own communities in both large and small ways.

Our alumni community is almost 9,000 strong, with members working in influential roles from the World Wildlife Fund to the U.S. Department of Justice, and many amazing organizations in between. VLGS alumni advocates are hard at work every day, continuously improving the lives and livelihood of countless others.

Vermont Law and Graduate School is an institution with a remarkable ability to foster an environment that decade after decade, almost effortlessly, creates genuine connections. This vaunted accomplishment is even more impressive in this demanding day and (digital) age. Perhaps VLGS’s most meaningful achievement is our alumni community—all the unique individuals who choose our brave and mighty school which resides in a bucolic Vermont valley, and who graduate as learned advocates, but also as better humans.

I recently heard the term “friendraising,” as opposed to, or realistically used in conjunction with, fundraising. I believe it perfectly intertwines with our emphasis on meaningful relationships. These are very exciting times at VLGS as we enter another era of educating the Earth’s changemakers and preparing our students to make a difference in all corners of this world.

I hope you’ll consider joining the alumni community in whichever way—maybe by attending an alumni webinar or hosting a regional event—resonates most with you and your experience. We look forward to your involvement!

Gratefully,

Meg Munsey JD’05
Immediate Past President and Current Member
VLGS Alumni Association Board of Directors

To learn more about the VLGSAA, please click here.
Andrew Kossover JD’77
was honored by the New York State Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers (NYSCDL) with the Lifetime Achievement Award at its annual dinner on January 18, 2024. In addition to his outstanding criminal practice, as legislative chair for NYSCDL and the New York State Bar Association (NYSBA), Andy spearheaded successful legislative campaigns for Rockefeller Drug Law Reform and New York’s new Discovery Laws. He also represented former New Paltz Mayor Jason West, who was at the vanguard of the same-sex marriage movement prior to the landmark Supreme Court decision of Obergefell v. Hodges (2015). Andy recently completed his term as co-chair of the NYSBA’s Task Force on the Modernization of Criminal Practice. He remains a member of the NYSBA’s Criminal Justice Section Executive Committee and is the criminal justice chair of the new Cannabis Law Section.

Bill Sasiris JD’77 retired in the fall of 2017. He began some new adventures and challenges. Initially, and during the school year, he served as a partner on December 1, 2021. He joined the firm of Nicoletti & Nicosia, LLP, as a partner on December 1, 2021.

John Woodland JD’79 reports that they were involved in the Verns Fork River, it was time to leave Montana. A lot of factors played in, but you might say they’re climate refugees. Too many smoke filled summers, a Stage II evaporation notice, and too many days over 100 degrees—it was time to go. His WigE’s health and aging out of the lifestyle they had adopted played a role as well. House shopping from 2,000 miles away during the summer of 2021 was difficult and they certainly had to make some compromises. After two attempts in Montpelier fell apart, they ended up in Brattleboro, a place John knew from his years at Marlboro College. They are now fixing up the house they bought and enjoying the ability to walk downtown and to the Waits River trailhead. John has met with classmate Martha Smyrski JD’79 and Jean Kievel JD’79. He has also maintained contact through the years with Robin Bren JD’78. After years as a co-chair of 350 Montana, John is working with 350 Brattleboro and practicing with the Brattleboro Zen Center.

45th Reunion June 2024

Please email the Alumni Office if you are interested in serving on class secretary.

1978 Robin Bren

1979

Joel Burcat JD’80

Fourth novel, “Reap the Wind,” came out on February 6, 2024. Published by Sunbury Press, Inc., it is an action/adventure thriller in which three lawyers set out from Houston heading to Cincinnati in a rented Lincoln Town Car. They must drive across Texas and the Midwest in the midst of the worst climate change-induced hurricane of the century so Josh Goldberg can be with his girlfriend who is giving birth to their baby. They have to survive a hurricane, tornado, hailstorm, driving rain, and each other to get there. Josh’s travel companions are his best friend—an alcoholic, drug-addicted lawyer who connives to derail his plans so she can get to Philadelphia for a business meeting. The odyssey is dangerous on many levels and may be a suicide trip. Learn more about Joel and his work at joelburcat.com.


Michael Kessler JD’90 is featured in a recent issue of Vanguard Law Magazine for his work as managing assistant general counsel for the Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO). He discusses his career journey, the current state of the energy industry, and some of MISO’s priorities.

1980 Scott Cameron

JSCameron@zirc.com

Judy Burkett JD’80

Tom McGrath
timbomcc@juno.com

Bill Kakoulidis JD’81 reports that he joined the firm of Vociodetti, Spinner Ryan Guino Pinter LLP as a partner on December 1, 2021.

1981

Larr Kelly
photolarr@verizon.net

John Shea MSEL’82 has been named to the 2024 Lawdragon Green 500: Leaders in Environmental Law.

1982

1983

Martha Lyons
martha.lyons@broomecountyny.gov


Michael Kessler JD’90 is featured in a recent issue of Vanguard Law Magazine for his work as managing assistant general counsel for the Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO). He discusses his career journey, the current state of the energy industry, and some of MISO’s priorities.

1980

Scott Cameron
jscameron@zirc.com

Judy Burkett JD’80

Tom McGrath
timbomcc@juno.com

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Michael Kessler JD’90 is featured in a recent issue of Vanguard Law Magazine for his work as managing assistant general counsel for the Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO). He discusses his career journey, the current state of the energy industry, and some of MISO’s priorities.
Dominique Pollara JD’84 was honored by the Sacramento Valley Chapter of the American Board of Trial Advocates as the 2021 Trial Lawyer of the Year at its annual President’s Dinner on June 19, 2021.

John Mercer JD’85 completed his 33rd year at Williams Mullen, and after 14 years as chair of the Real Estate and Finance Section, he transferred those duties to one of his section colleagues. John now devotes his workday to his clients, without the distractions and demands of section and firm administration. On a professional note, John is honored to be recognized again in The Best Lawyers in America®, Virginia Super Lawyers, Chambers USA, and he was named to the 2022 class of “Leaders in the Law” by Virginia Lawyers Weekly. But more importantly, and most rewarding, in the past few years, he and his wife rejoined in the marriage of one of their daughters and celebrated the birth of their other daughter’s second child. John reports that, without a doubt, being a grandparent is the best!

1986
Pat Zimmerman
pattyzimmerman@comcast.net

Bob Maxwell JD’86 continues to serve as regional and national counsel for vehicle manufacturers in products liability suits. In 2021, he won defense verdicts in jury trials involving serious injuries to a Navy officer in New London, Connecticut (Ryan Brown v. Honda), and a triple death case in Prestonburg, Kentucky (Annette Bauce v. Honda). Bob is based out of New Orleans, Louisiana.

1987
Mark Ouellette
mouellette03@gmail.com

At the conclusion of Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan’s term in January 2023, Ron Gumpert’s JD’87 position as senior advisor (political director) came to an end. Since then, Ron became chief of staff for the nonprofit StoryCorps. Most people know StoryCorps from its weekly oral history segment featured on NPR. Ron is overseeing the group’s One Small Step initiative, which facilitates one-on-one conversations between Democrats and Republicans—not to talk politics, but to find common ground and see the humanity in each other. While Ron’s office is in Brooklyn, he mostly works remotely from his home in Annapolis.

1988
Sandi Allen
sandraallen1792@gmail.com

Sandi Allen has been selected as an international scholar by the Canadian government.

1989
Kim Montroll
kimmontroll@gmail.com

Kim Montroll JD’89 accepted the position of catalyst at large with Recovery Café Network, a model for long-term healing in communities with a commitment to serving people who have experienced trauma and the results of trauma, like homelessness, incarceration, addiction, and other mental health challenges. Kim accompanies individuals and groups exploring bringing a Recovery Café to their local community. Currently, there are more than 60 Recovery Cafés across the United States and Vancouver, Canada. The power of this model is that each Recovery Café is launched by a local group, responding to the suffering and injustice in their own community. Kim also serves as chair on the founding board of Recovery Café DC.

1991
Peg Stolfa
margaret.stolfa@gmail.com

Cynthia Argentine MSL’91 is delighted that her children’s book “Night Becomes Day: Changes in Nature” has received national recognition! It was named a “Best Children’s Book of the Year” by Bank Street College of Education in the STEM category for kids ages 0 to 5. It was also a finalist for a Golden Kite Award in the category of nonfiction for younger readers. With poetic language and vivid photos, the book celebrates nature’s power to transform. Visit Cindy’s website if you’d like to contact her or learn more: cynthiaargentine.com

1992
Margaret Olenek
molneke@moultonlaw.com


1993
Lainey Schwartz
gewoman3@aol.com

30th REUNION
JUNE 2024

Lainey Schwartz was highlighted in Skadden’s Winter 2024 Alumni Update. Read the article by clicking here.
William McCausland JD’94 has been serving as a managing director in the risk and investigations practice at FTI Consulting since August 2021.

Merry Stubblefield JD’94 continues to run Fabulous Felines, an Albuerqueque charity for the benefit of cats. She founded the charity in 2006. Information about the organization can be found at fabulousfelines.org. Merry and her husband have published a children’s book titled, “How Mother Rat Invented the World: A Fanciful Tale About Creation, Love, Serendipity, Rats, and Other Ordinary Subjects,” that can be enjoyed by all ages. The book is a loving fantasy about nature, animals, science, and the remarkable world we inhabit. It can be found on Amazon, or it can be ordered through your local bookstore. Additional information is available at wesstubblefield.com.

1996
Scott Fewell
scott.fewell@liquidmeasurement.com
Mereditth Lathbury Giraud JD/MSEL’96 has been serving as the executive director of Shore Legal Access, formerly known as Mid-Shore Pro Bono, since the fall of 2021. The nonprofit supports and assists individuals and families who are unable to afford representation in civil legal matters and provides connections to community services.

1997
Cheryl Deshaies Davis
cdeshaies@deshaieslaw.com
Jonas Kron JD/MSEL’97 was named to Fast Company’s Most Creative People in Business list in 2022. He is the chief advocacy officer for Trillium Asset Management.

Skye MacLeod MS’97, a partner at Rapagale Liggitt in Raleigh, North Carolina, was named to Business North Carolina magazine’s 2022 and 2023 “Legal Elite” edition for her litigation practice.

On October 30, 2019, Vermont Governor Phil Scott swore in Kerry MacIntosh-Cady JD’97 in as a Superior Court Judge after appointing her to the Vermont Judiciary. Kerry’s husband Christopher Cady JD’97, and their children, Jack and Mary, were present with family, friends, legal colleagues, and members of the judiciary at the Snellman courthouse for the ceremony.

1998
Thomas Leary
thomas.f.leary@gmail.com
Michael Formica JD’98 was appointed to the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) Board by Governor Glenn Youngkin in 2022. The DWR is responsible for managing the state’s inland fisheries, wildlife, and recreational boating. The 11-member board is comprised of Virginia citizens who are knowledgeable about wildlife conservation, hunting, fishing, boating, agriculture, forestry, or habitat. Michael was also recognized as a top lobbyist by the National Institute for Lobbying and Ethics and he received the Excellence in Agricultural Law Award from the American Agricultural Law Association. Additionally, Michael had a case argued before the U.S. Supreme Court (National Pork Producers v. Ross, No. 21-458 - he was second chair) and he secured an injunction against Massachusetts’ implementation of a ballot initiative (Massachusetts Restaurant Association v. Hyde).

1999
25th Reunion June 2024
Joy Kanwar
joy.kanwar@gmail.com
The 25th Reunion Class of 1999 got started early with a mini reunion on February 21 at Carlita’s Cocina in South Royalton, Vermont. With Pete Kocpose JD/MSEL’99, Rich Levitt JD’99/MSEL’00, and Liz York JD’99, VLG’s Reunion Weekend was June 28–30. Save the date and make plans to return to campus to reconnect, recharge, and renew old friendships!

Pam Logsdon Sibley JD/MSEL’99 has retired from the practice of law, and has chosen to live a fabulously adventurous retirement exploring South America from her new homebase in southern Ecuador. You can see what she and her husband Matt are up to on Facebook.

2000
Kristy Caron
krystycaroon@gmail.com
Kimberly Bryant MSEL’99 joined the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality’s Central Office in Richmond, Virginia, as the land policy and regulatory coordinator in August 2022. The U.S. Department of Energy selected Agustin Carbo JD’00 to serve as the first-ever director for the Puerto Rico Grid Modernization and Recovery Team. Prior to taking on this role, he served as a director for the Puerto Rico Energy Commission, Puerto Rico Solid Waste Authority, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Kristy Caron JD’00 was elevated to partner at For Roachchild in the spring of 2023. Her practice focuses on...
Karen Domenksi Murray
kmurray965@gmail.com

Jason Brandeis JD/MSEL'01 is now senior counsel at Blue Growth Credit and legally advises on strategic financing and regulatory compliance. He previously was at the University of Arizona Foundation.

Richard Hennessey JD'03 is a partner in the Washington, D.C. office of Morrison Mahoney. He represents some of the nation’s leading insurance carriers in a variety of civil litigation matters involving commercial property policies, professional and general liability policies, homeowners’ policies, and builders risk policies.

Meg Munsey and Kelly Singer
vermontlaw2005@gmail.com

Sarah Mangelsdorf MSEL'04 has been elevated to partner at Goldberg Segalla’s Toxic Tort group in St. Louis, Missouri, in August 2022. She focuses on high-level work in complex civil litigation matters involving pharmaceuticals, construction and design defects, and asbestos.

Matthew Garcia JD'05 was selected as a 2022 recipient of the Vermont Bar Association’s Pro Bono Service Award, which is given annually by the VBA’s Board of Bar Managers to landowners who provide extra-ordinary legal services to indigent and disadvantaged clients in the community. Learn more by clicking here.

Jerry Edwards JD'05 was confirmed as a U.S. District Court Judge by the U.S. Senate. He is the first Black federal judge to serve on Louisiana’s U.S. Western District Court. As a first assistant U.S. attorney for the Western District, he was nominated for the judgeship by President Joe Biden in June 2023.

Matthew Mulholland LLM'05 has been named director of the newly organized Healthy Communities Program at the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy (MCEA). The Healthy Communities Program provides insight to individuals and businesses on corporate, tax, and estate matters.

Ben Geerwe JD'00 was elected to DeWitt LLP’s Executive Committee in 2022. He continues to serve as a partner and chair of the firm’s Environmental Practice Group.

Kat Spitzer’s JD’00 novel, “Florida Girl,” has been released and is available. She also founded a new business, Dream School Counseling, to aid students and families in the college preparation and application process. Visit her author and business sites at katspitzer.com and dreamschoolcounseling.com.

Laurie Beyranevand JD’03—director of the Center for Agriculture and Food Systems at VLS—discussed how to read food labels in a recent interview for Authority Magazine. Check out the insightful discussion at this link.

Shannon Callahan
ssloweyp@gmail.com

Spencer Hanes
spencer.hanes@duke-energy.com

As of February 28, 2022, Heather Bonnet-Hébert JD’04 took over ownership of the firm that she joined in 2018 as part of her law partner’s succession planning in advance of retirement. In conjunction with this transition in ownership, the law firm name changed to Feingold Bonnet-Hébert, PC. It is a small, boutique practice based in historic New Bedford, Massachusetts, with a focus on high level work in complex civil litigation, estate and settlement planning, real estate development and permitting, economic development, and assisting small businesses with issues that arise throughout the business lifecycle. As part of the commitment to providing excellent service to their diverse client base, the team often collaborates with other local and national firms to bring in additional case-specific expertise, as needed.

Sarah Mangelsdorf MSEL’04 joined Goldberg Segalla’s Toxic Tort group in St. Louis, Missouri, in August 2022. She focuses on high-level work in complex civil litigation matters involving pharmaceuticals, construction and design defects, and asbestos.

On March 7, 2024, Representative Joe Campagna JD’05 was appointed to the King County Superior Court in August 2022 by Washington State Governor Jay Inslee. Prior to his appointment, Joe served as a judge in the King County District Court.

The Honorable Jerry Edwards JD’05

Joe Campagna JD’05 was appointed to the King County Superior Court in August 2022 by Washington State Governor Jay Inslee. Prior to his appointment, Joe served as a judge in the King County District Court.

2001
Karen Domenksi Murray
kmurray965@gmail.com

Jason Brandeis JD/MSEL’01 is now senior counsel at Blue Growth Credit and legally advises on strategic financing and regulatory compliance. He previously was at the University of Arizona Foundation.

Mike Humphrey JD’02 was hired by The Trust Company of Tennessee in 2022. He works out of Knoxville as a trust relationship manager. In this role, Mike serves as a point of contact among trust clients, beneficiaries, and advisors.

2002
Paige Bush-Scruggs
pscuggs@bhlaw.net

Anne Barrett JD’02 became senior campaign director and liaison to the Executive Office of the President with the University of Arizona Foundation in 2022. Her husband, John Barrett JD’02, is a professor of practice and director of the Natural Resources Use and Management Clinic at the University of Arizona James E. Rogers College of Law.

2003
Shannon Mahler Biaiaga
vsmaher@yahoo.com

Laurie Beyranevand JD’03—director of the Center for Agriculture and Food Systems at VLS—discussed how to read food labels in a recent interview for Authority Magazine. Check out the insightful discussion at this link.

Risa Borowick Brown MSEL’05 has been elevated to partner at Fox Rothschild LLP. Based in the firm’s Denver office as part of the litigation team, she represents owners, developers, contractors, design professionals, commercial landlords, and other construction and real estate sector clients in a broad range of commercial litigation in state and federal trial courts, in arbitral forums, and on appeal. Her experience includes disputes involving construction and design defects; recovery and subrogation; constructive changes, acceleration and delay; conversion of businesses to employee-owned co-ops. She lives in Orwell with her wife, Sarah, and their two cats.

2004
Shannon Callahan
ssloweyp@gmail.com

Spencer Hanes
spencer.hanes@duke-energy.com

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Meg Munsey and Kelly Singer
vermontlaw2005@gmail.com

Joseph Andreano JD’05 was elected to represent the Addison-Rutland District in the Vermont House of Representatives on November 8, 2022, and he was sworn into the position in January 2023. After VLS, Joe was in private practice; taught law and ethics at Clarkson University; Loyola Marymount University, and Middlebury College; and was a Peace Corps volunteer in Armenia. Joe also owns and operates his own law firm located in Orwell, Vermont, primarily focusing on estate planning and business law, particularly the
formalizes MCEA's commitment to environmental justice. Through the Healthy Communities Program, MCEA attorneys and advocates work in partnership with frontline community groups who bear the burden of concentrated pollution and environmental injustice.

In the fall of 2023, after 18 years of public service, Tim Sullivan JD'05/ MSEL'06 switched jobs, moving from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to Beveridge & Diamond PC.

2006

Ashley Carson Cottingham ashleybrey@gmail.com

Katie Joy Duke JD'06 published her debut memoir, “Still Breathing: My Journey with Love, Loss, and Re-invention.” The book is available wherever books are sold. Katie left law in 2016 when her daughter Poppy died, to become a full-time writer, mindset coach, and motivational speaker. Check out her website for more information. Katie is now a motivational speaker. Check out her website for more information.

2007

Greg Dorrington gregdorrington@gmail.com

Liz Lucente liz.lucente@gmail.com

Maureen Bayer JD/MSEL'07 joined Jordan Ramisz PC, a full-service business law firm in the Pacific Northwest, as a shareholder in the spring of 2022. She is part of the firm’s environmental and natural resources group, working with clients facing environmental issues related to regulatory compliance, site contamination, and business transactions.

After six years on the clinical faculty at Yale Law School and the Yale School of the Environment, Josh Galperin JD'07 moved to the University of Pittsburgh School of Law for a visiting professorship in order to transition to traditional, doctrinal teaching. After three years at Pitt, Josh moved to the Elisabeth Haub School of Law at Pace University, where he is an assistant professor teaching environmental, administrative, and, for the time being, contract law.

2008

Samantha Santiago-Paez santiago.samantha@gmail.com

Jamie Williams willjamie@gmail.com

Bill Eubanks LL.M'08 was selected as the 2023 recipient of the prestigious Perry Rydberg Jack Tishhak Award. The award is presented annually to a lawyer who exemplifies the best in public interest environmental advocacy. Bill was honored at the 41st annual Public Interest Environmental Law Conference.
Dr. Shayla Crenshaw McGey JD’09 earned a doctoral degree in educational leadership from the University of Alabama. “This degree is a continuation of my concerted efforts to open doors for the disenfranchised and provide innovative ideas that can improve the holistic wellbeing of students who are in dire need,” she stated. Shayla also graduated from Alabama’s Superintendent Academy and serves as director of student services for the Bessemer City School System.

Jeff Davis JD’09, and Christal JD’10 and Peter JD’09 Keegan recently enjoyed time with their families at Kailua Beach on Oahu, Hawai’i.

Dr. Shayla Crenshaw McGey, JD’09, will return to the inaugural cohort of the Governor’s Innovation and Opportunity Fellowship through the Open Society Foundations. She, and the eight other fellows, spent 18 months developing new ways of tackling challenges rising from care work, immigration policies, and racial disparity.

Families of Jeff, Davis, JD’09, and Christal JD’10 and Peter JD’09 Keegan.

TORRES COLLINS FORMERLY

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Jeff Davis JD’09, and Christal JD’10 and Peter JD’09 Keegan recently enjoyed time with their families at Kailua Beach on Oahu, Hawai’i.
daughter in their new home among the mountains and rivers of Vermont.

Reed Sirkin JD’12/MELP’09 was named a partner of Benesch Law in January 2023. He oversees a variety of transactional, compliance, and litigation-based environmental, safety, and health matters at the firm.

Renee Staudinger Calabro JD’12 and her husband, Dan, had a baby girl, Ava Lucille Staudinger Calabro, on May 7, 2022.

2013

Brian Durkin
brian.durkin@gmail.com

Rae Kinkead Eschen
rmkinkead@gmail.com

Doug Dagan JD/MELP’13, Suburban Propane Partners’ vice president of strategic initiatives – renewable energy, was named to The Biofuels Digest’s 2013 Projects for Peace Alumni Award. He was a member of the initial group of Projects for Peace grant recipients with his 2007 effort, “Education as a Project for Peace in Sierra Leone: Constructing a Library in Conkay Deo.”

Peter Keays JD’13 was elected shareholder of Hungry Arownick Segal Pudlin & Schiller in January 2022. Based out of the firm’s Philadelphia office, he represents corporate, municipal, and nonprofit clients in a wide range of regulatory, transactional, and litigation matters arising under federal and state environmental laws.

Katie Thomas Carol JD/MELP’13 married Gracey Rhode Carol on September 23, 2023, in San Diego, California. Mary Strus was in attendance to celebrate the day. Guests included Brieuna Fischer JD’13 and her husband Arison Leoni, Mary Clemmensen JD, Cindy Hurt JD/MELP’13, Larry Kuchin, Marissa Knodell JD/MEM’14, Professor Laura Fox JD/MELP’13, Shannon Eckmeyer JD/MELP’11, and Dr. Kyle Fox (Laura’s husband). Not pictured, but also in attendance were Shanna Thompson-Degagne MELP’11 and her husband, Joshua Degagne.

J. Tyler Ward JD/MELP’13 was selected as the 2023 recipient of the Kentucky Bus Association’s Service to Community Award, which is presented by the Young Lawyers Division. Tyler, who leads Ward + Associates, was recognized for playing a crucial role in assisting local community members following extreme flooding throughout eastern Kentucky in 2022. He and his team offered free legal assistance to those who needed to apply for FEMA aid.

Presented by Projects for Peace and the Kathryn Wasserman Davis Collaborative in Conflict Transformation at Middlebury College, Joseph Kafuka JD’13 was selected as the inaugural recipient of the Projects for Peace Alumni Award. He was a member of the initial group of Projects for Peace grant recipients with his 2007 effort, “Education as a Project for Peace in Sierra Leone: Constructing a Library in Conkay Deo.”

Lindsay Bourgoine MELP’15, currently serves as the director of policy and government affairs for the Rockefeller Foundation’s Power and Energy Program, which offers an in-depth look at the growing number of states implementing groundbreaking cannabis adult-use and medical programs. It is authored by public sector attorneys and staff who have been on the front lines in the growing number of states implementing groundbreaking cannabis adult-use and medical programs. Taylor Smith MELP’14 accepted a position as team coordinator on the Rockefeller Foundation’s Power and Energy Team based in New York City. She supports the Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet, which aims to accelerate and scale equitable energy transitions in low- and middle-income countries serving as an on-ramp to opportunity for one million people, while averting carbon emissions, expanding energy access, and creating jobs in the process. She supports project and organizational management for the HQ team, including creating and maintaining effective workflow processes; engaging partners; tracking budget, contracts, and grant payout; as well as coordinating global events.

2015

Crystal Abbey cnabbey88@gmail.com

Lindsay Bourgoine MELP’15 was named a 2023 Community Solar Champion by the Coalition for Community Solar Access (CCSA). She is one of 22 advocates and legislators from six states recognized with this prestigious honor. Lindsay currently serves as the director of policy and government affairs for the Rockefeller Foundation’s Power and Energy Program, which offers an in-depth look at the growing number of states implementing groundbreaking cannabis adult-use and medical programs. Taylor Smith MELP’14 accepted a position as team coordinator on the Rockefeller Foundation’s Power and Energy Team based in New York City. She supports the Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet, which aims to accelerate and scale equitable energy transitions in low- and middle-income countries serving as an on-ramp to opportunity for one million people, while averting carbon emissions, expanding energy access, and creating jobs in the process. She supports project and organizational management for the HQ team, including creating and maintaining effective workflow processes; engaging partners; tracking budget, contracts, and grant payout; as well as coordinating global events.

2014

10TH REUNION JUNE 2024

Cristina Mansfield cristinaelena@hotmail.com

Whitney Standefer whitneystandefer@gmail.com

Katherine Buckley JD’14 made partner at Gale Gale & Hunt, LLC, a boutique law firm in Syracuse, New York, that focuses mainly on medical malpractice defense. Katie also participated in the NYSBA Taskforce on Racism, Social Equity, and the Law for the past three years. The group’s final report was approved by the NYSBA House of Delegates in January 2023.

Emily Migliaccio JD’14 and Andrew Fowler JD’14 welcomed a new Fighting Swan, Rory Joseph, on August 20, 2021.

Lindsay Speer MELP’14 is now the senior energy planner at the Central New York Regional

Presented by Projects for Peace and the Kathryn Wasserman Davis Collaborative in Conflict Transformation at Middlebury College, Joseph Kafuka JD’13 was selected as the inaugural recipient of the Projects for Peace Alumni Award. He was a member of the initial group of Projects for Peace grant recipients with his 2007 effort, “Education as a Project for Peace in Sierra Leone: Constructing a Library in Conkay Deo.”

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ASHLEY JOHNSON (WELSCH) JD/MELP’15 and her husband ANDREW M. HIGLEY were married on June 19, 2021, in Moretown, Vermont. Andrew is an alumnus of New England College of Law, and both practice law in Vermont. Jessica Cain JD 15 also served as a bridesmaid with several other Swans in attendance. The couple resides in the Northeast Kingdom.

Bradley Flynn JD’15 is a partner with the Philadelphia-based firm Montgomery Law. He focuses his practice on all aspects of education law, including special education, civil rights, higher education, Title IX, anti-bullying safety plans, and advocating on behalf of children with disabilities, as well as handling criminal defense and family law matters. He splits his time between Norway, Maine, and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

ReVision Energy, a Certified B Corp with a mission to make life better by building a just and equitable electric future.

Amy E. Davis JD’15 married Andrew M. Higley on June 19, 2021, in Moretown, Vermont. Andrew is an alumnus of New England College of Law, and both practice law in Vermont. Jessica Cain JD 15 also served as a bridesmaid with several other Swans in attendance. The couple resides in the Northeast Kingdom.

David Scott JD’15 was promoted to partner at Greenbaum, Rowe, Smith & Davis LLP. His environmental law practice emphasizes transactions, permitting, and regulatory compliance. David works out of the firm’s Roseland, New Jersey, office.

Meg York JD’15 welcomed her third child, Auden Robert York, on December 12, 2021. Meg, her wife Jocelyn, and their two older children, Ida and Georgia, are completely smitten. In 2023, Meg joined Family Equality as senior policy counsel and director of LGBTQ+ family law and policy.

James LaRock
jamesmlarock@gmail.com

Doug Cortés LLM’16 is the director of the Business Innovations Clinic and a visiting assistant professor of clinical education at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. He also teaches Bankruptcy Law. Doug completed the requirements for his LLM in Energy Law in residence at VLS during the 2015–16 school year. He spent the majority of his time at the Institute for Energy and the Environment, where he was a senior research associate. After graduating with distinction, Doug returned to his native home state of Arkansas.

Melissa Payne JD’16, formerly Kent, is celebrating her third anniversary with husband, Josh, in June and is an attorney with The Cochran Firm.

2016

DOUG CORTES LLM’16

2017

Catie Davis
catedavis.cd@gmail.com

2018

Liz Bower
lbbower88@gmail.com

Published by the Environmental Law Institute, Marcelo Dias LLM’18 has released a book titled, “Principal Trends on Brazilian Environmental Law.” Described as a critical resource for anyone who wants to learn more about Brazil’s environmental governance system, the book features contributions from several of the country’s esteemed environmental lawyers.

Dr. Madhavi Venkatesan MELP’16, distinguished VLSG professor and alumna, was named USA TODAY’s 2024 Massachusetts Woman of the Year. Her influence extends from shaping minds in the classroom to leading the battle against single-use plastics—positioning Cape Cod at the forefront of nationwide plastic reduction efforts. Learn more by clicking here.

Joel West Williams LLM’16 was appointed by the Biden-Harris Administration to join the Department of the Interior as the deputy solicitor for Indian Affairs on April 21, 2022. He is a citizen of the Cherokee Nation and was previously an attorney with the Native American Rights Fund.

Marcelo Dias LLM’18

Dr. John Sutherlin MELP’17 co-authored “Playing with Fire.” This book examines the tale of Marine Shale Processors, the world’s largest hazardous waste company, and the women who fought to protect their children.
CLASS NOTES

2019
5th REUNION
JUNE 2024

Margaret Shugart
marg.shug@gmail.com

Jennifer Byrne MELP’19 reported that between 2015 and 2023 she had been working on the REJOCe Project (Rural Environmental Justice Opportunities Informing by Community Expertise), a coalition of academics, legal experts, and community members who sought to answer the question: What does environmental justice (EJ) look like in Vermont? Their work informed Vermont’s first-ever environmental justice law, signed by the governor on May 31, 2023. As a fellow, Jennifer spearheaded the policy core of the REJOCe Project and co-led several teams of students at VLS’s Environmental Justice Clinic and co-led several teams of students in VLS’s Environmental Justice Clinic to help draft the findings and language included in the law. Jennifer is the climate change and environmental justice advocate and attorney, and a former director for environmental justice public engagement for the White House Council on Environmental Quality.

2020

Evant Antal
eantal@rivercitylawyers.com

Marita Heiling
maritaheiling@gmail.com

Evant Antal JD/20 is working at Mansurettos & Levin Law Group, P.C., in White River Junction, Vermont, where he completed his externship during his final semester at VLS in the fall of 2020. Evant is engaged in both criminal and civil litigation, including civil rights violations, landlord/tenant disputes, and employment disputes. He is in court nearly every day and is taking over as the defense attorney for the Southeast Regional DUI Treatment Docket.

Last spring, Karen Blakehock MELP’20, Megan O’Toole JD/MELP’09, and Allison Rogers JD’20/LLM’21 connected at a climate-focused event in Washington, D.C. Karen is now the climate and energy policy advisor for The Nature Conservancy Maine. Megan is the climate change mitigation coordinator with the Vermont Climate Action Office within the Agency of Natural Resources. Allison is a climate scientist and environmental justice advocate and attorney, and a former director for environmental justice public engagement for the White House Council on Environmental Quality.

2021

Evin Miller
ermiller83@gmail.com

Paige Beyer JD/21 is an associate at Barclay Damon, where she is a member of the project development, environmental, and land use and zoning practice areas. She is based in the firm’s Albany, New York, office and is also admitted to practice law in Colorado.

As an associate at Barclay Damon, Dan Kryckowski JD/21 assists the Regulatory and environmental practice area and environmental team attorneys and clients on a wide range of matters, including infrastructure-siting matters and environmental permitting. Dan works out of the Albany, New York, office.

Mike Rice MELP’21 was elected to the Vermont House of Representatives in 2022 and serves on the leadership team of the Climate Solutions Caucus. He represents Vermont’s Bennington-Rutland House District, including the towns of Danby, Dorset, Landgrove, Mount Tabor, and Peru.

Caleb Sabatka MELP’21 began working in educational justice at Urban College of Boston as a bilingual student success advisor shortly after finishing the MARJ in the spring of 2021. Urban College offers college courses in several different languages, and primarily serves immigrant women working to earn their college degrees in early childhood education and human services while also learning the English language. Caleb is lucky enough to teach restorative justice to Urban College students as an adjunct professor, while continuing to serve as senior academic advisor. Caleb looks forward to making higher education accessible for system-impacted people for many years to come!

Kelsey Schreiner JD/21 has joined DownEast Regional Water District in Dorchester, Maine, as the district’s first-ever environmental permitting manager.

Jasdeep Singh Khaira JD/21/MEEL’20 is an associate at Gentry Locke’s Richmond, Virginia, office. His practice focuses on energy and environmental law. Before joining the firm, Jasdeep was a full-time legal extern for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in Colorado.
The package arrived on the second floor of Deboeuf Hall in April 2022 and its unusual size and heft caused a lot of curiosity amongst administrators, faculty, and staff. Dean Beth McCormack gingerly opened the package as a number of people anxiously watched. What she found inside was a testament to the personal connection between Vermont Law and Graduate School and one of the most impactful legal legacies of the last century: the honorary degree the school awarded Ruth Bader Ginsburg at its 1984 Commencement.

Even before her 1993 ascent to the United States Supreme Court, Justice Ginsburg had made an impression on the school and legal communities. As the former director of the ACLU and at that time a D.C. Court of Appeals Judge, she embodied the school’s motto to great effect—using the power of the law to make a dramatic difference in the community and in the world.

The Douglas Meredith Society consists of forward-thinking supporters who impact the future of Vermont Law and Graduate School via planned giving. Through estate plans or other deferred gifts, you can establish a lasting legacy while enhancing the VLGS experience for the next generation of changemakers.

For more information on planned giving, please contact us at giving@vermontlaw.edu or 802-831-1312.

The Honorable RUTH BADER GINSBURG

Even before her 1993 ascent to the United States Supreme Court, Justice Ginsburg had made an impression on the
**1970s**

**Terry Beckwith JD’76 1944 – 2023**
Terry was a veteran of the U.S. Air Force. He earned degrees from East Carolina University, SUNY Albany, and Vermont Law School (VLS). Terry spent his career working as a librarian in a variety of locations, including at his alma mater, VLS. He leaves behind many loved ones including his son, daughter-in-law, granddaughter, and brother.

**Morris Joseph Fante, Jr., JD’76 1950 – 2021**
Upon earning his bachelor’s degree from the University of Florida, Morris joined the U.S. Navy as a reservist. He was then accepted to, and attended, law school in Vermont. Morris spent more than 20 years working for the Hillsborough County (Florida) Assistant State Attorney’s Office. His legacy will live on through his beloved family and friends, especially his granddaughter.

**Milton George James JD’76 1946 – 2021**
After graduating from Vermont Law School in 1976, Milton began his career in Chicago as a public defender. He later became an arbitrator judge for the State of Illinois. Upon retirement, Milton moved to Arizona—where he spent more than 20 years working for the University of Bridgeport and the Office of Frederick A. Partyka. He leaves behind his wife, his children, brothers, and nieces and nephews.

**Michael Joseph Devanie JD’77 1947 – 2022**
Born in Chicago, Illinois, Michael was the oldest of eight children. After serving in the U.S. Army, he returned home and attended Illinois State University where he met his future wife, Sandra. Shortly following their marriage in 1974, the couple moved to Vermont because Michael was accepted to Vermont Law School. Upon graduating and returning to California, Michael became a district attorney in Rusk, Barron, and La Crose Counties. He then went into private practice as a criminal defense/civil rights attorney and partnered with Keith Belzer until his retirement in 2015. While he earned many professional accomplishments, Michael considered his greatest achievement to be the birth of his two children, Maura and Brendan.

**Owen Jenkins JD’77 1948 – 2023**
Owen graduated from the University of Vermont and went on to play hockey in Europe. Upon his return to Vermont, Owen taught at Essex High School and managed its hockey rink. After earning his JD in 1977, Owen spent his career practicing law in Essex Junction. He was especially passionate about helping those who faced injustice, and he took on cases of those who couldn’t afford to assure their voices were heard. Above all else, Owen was a dad and husband who cherished his family.

**Frederick “Rick” Partyka, II, JD’77 1946 – 2021**
As a self-employed attorney, Rick owned and operated the Law Office of Frederick A. Partyka until his passing. He also served his country honorably as a member of the U.S. Army. Rick was a loving husband, father, and grandfather. He was mourned by his wife, Karen Sarnowski Partyka JD’78, and survived by his daughters, Cassandra Jordan JD/MLLP’12 and Olivia Bartoli, grandchildren, sisters, nieces, nephews, and cousins.

**Virginia Farley MSE’81 1955 – 2022**
Virginia, of Berlin, Vermont, passed away on February 24, 2022. Born September 8, 1955, in New York, New York, she dedicated her life to land conservation and climate change efforts. Virginia’s impactful career spanned roles at the Vermont Land Trust and the National Park Service. Additionally, she taught courses at the University of Vermont and Vermont Law School as an adjunct faculty member, and she consulted with nonprofit conservation organizations in her free time. An avid outdoorswoman and dancer, she connected kindred spirits through her love for the land. Virginia’s legacy of protected natural wonders in Vermont will endure. She is survived by her daughter and sisters.

**Karen Reynolds JD’81 1951 – 2022**
Karen graduated from the University of Bridgeport and Vermont Law School. She served the Greater Bridgeport Bar Association diligently since 1982 and went on to become a member of the board of directors, Community Outreach Committee, and chair of the Family Law Committee. Karen, survived by her sons Daniel and Jason, leaves behind a loving family including five siblings, cherished grandchildren, and several nieces and nephews.

**Karen Reynolds JD’81 1951 – 2022**
Karen graduated from the University of Bridgeport and Vermont Law School. She served the Greater Bridgeport Bar Association diligently since 1982 and went on to become a member of the board of directors, Community Outreach Committee, and chair of the Family Law Committee. Karen, survived by her sons Daniel and Jason, leaves behind a loving family including five siblings, cherished grandchildren, and several nieces and nephews.

**Lawrence “Larry” Meier JD’82 1956 – 2021**
Larry passed away on December 11, 2021. Born and raised in Toledo, Ohio, Larry graduated from Miami University, where he majored in music and engineering. A vibrant soul known for his kindness, Larry excelled as an intellectual property attorney and aviation enthusiast. He cherished his children, Ian and Hannah, and found joy in music, running, and riding his recumbent bike with friends. He co-founded the Warrior Riders, supporting injured veterans. He is survived by his wife, children, brothers, and beloved nieces and nephews.

**Peter Heintzelman JD’83 1959 – 2021**
Peter—who was born in Lake George, New York, and raised in Vermont—was a respected lawyer and boxing enthusiast. Graduating from Vermont Law School, he practiced law in Worcester, Massachusetts. He was an avid boxing fan, covering boxing for Fightnews.com® for 12 years. His charm and wit, honed in the courtroom, shone through in his writing, capturing the essence of the sport. Peter’s love for boxing was rekindled in 2002, after attending the Gatti-Ward rematch, sparking his career at Fightnews.com®. His legacy as
IN MEMORIAM

Gerald “Jerry” Wright
Howe MLS’83
1945 – 2023
Jerry passed away on February 24, 2023, surrounded by loved ones. A U.S. Navy veteran, he earned degrees from the University of Massachusetts and Vermont Law School. Jerry’s legacy as an agricultural agent, professor emeritus at the University of New Hampshire, and community leader reflect his dedication to service. He enriched lives through mentorship and advocacy. A lover of storytelling, Jerry embraced diverse experiences, from fishing to acting. His greatest joy was family, and he is survived by his wife, daughter, grandson, and extended family. Jerry’s impact and vibrant spirit will be cherished forever.

Sheilla Files JD’84
1947 – 2021
After bravely battling cancer, Sheilla touched all who knew her. A talented musician, she exercised her compassion academically and professionally, becoming a respected lawyer and businesswoman. In addition to her legal career, she was active in the Business and Professional Women’s (BPW) group, becoming president of the Windsor chapter. Her warmth and generosity extended beyond her career; she cherished her family above all else. Known for her welcoming nature and culinary skills, Sheilla left a lasting impact on all who knew her. She is survived by her daughters, grandchildren, siblings, and a legacy of love.

Mark Di Stefano JD’84
1956 – 2022
Mark passed away on March 22, 2022, after a battle with cancer. Born in Washington, D.C., he devoted his life to family, law, and music. Mark’s legal career in the Vermont Attorney General’s Office focused on environmental protection. A talented musician, he played old-time fiddle and cherished community jam sessions. He loved Vermont’s natural beauty and skied and hiked across the state. Mark leaves behind his wife, Bridget; children Emma MSL’83, Rachel, and Benjamin; stepmother, Amalia; siblings, nieces and nephews. Mark’s warmth and generosity touched all who knew him, leaving a legacy of kindness and compassion.

Shelby files JD’84
1947 – 2021
After bravely battling cancer, Shelby touched all who knew her. A talented musician, she exercised her compassion academically and professionally, becoming a respected lawyer and businesswoman. In addition to her legal career, she was active in the Business and Professional Women’s (BPW) group, becoming president of the Windsor chapter. Her warmth and generosity extended beyond her career; she cherished her family above all else. Known for her welcoming nature and culinary skills, Sheilla left a lasting impact on all who knew her. She is survived by her daughters, grandchildren, siblings, and a legacy of love.

Erick Edmund Titrud JD’84
1958 – 2021
A devoted father, lawyer, and friend, Erick’s legacy of compassion and dedication touched many. Born in Balston Spa, N.Y., Pamela was a loving wife, mother, sister, and friend, who will be deeply missed by many. She graduated from Vermont Law School in 1986 and embarked on a successful legal career. On August 10, 1988, she was appointed a magistrate by Governor Howard Dean. Christine dedicated herself to upholding the law and ensuring fairness for all. She had an adventurous spirit, and she leaves behind a legacy of love, kindness, and a zest for life that will continue to inspire those who follow in her footsteps.

Paul Lee McKean JD’87
1953 – 2022
Paul, an avowed boxing aficionado who left nothing on the table and he passed away without regrets. Paul is survived by his wife, sister, nieces, and nephews, through whom his spirit of adventure will live on.

Patricia “Pat” Meyer JD’89
1952 – 2022
After an epic, unrelenting 7½ year battle with metastatic cancer, Patricia died peacefully, with her family at her side, in October 2022. She spent the initial 27 years of her life in Wisconsin, before moving to Randolph, Vermont, in 1979 with her husband to be, Gus. Fat earned a bachelor’s degree in nursing from the University of
WINTER 2024                  73

Wisconsin-Milwaukee and worked in a variety of pediatric settings over the course of 10 years. She then went to Vermont Law School, graduating with a juris doctor. Pat went on to practice law in Randolph for 25 years, focusing on real estate and probate law. She was known for her listening skills, practical knowledge, and high ethical standards. By far her greatest love, however, was doing things with her husband and daughters, of whom she was enormously proud.

1990s

David Cormier JD’91
1960 – 2023
David grew up in Connecticut and was a graduate of Newton High School, Providence College, and Vermont Law School. He dedicated his career to Collette Tours, guiding people around the globe for over 30 years. His love of travel inspired a fruitful career, and was extremely passionate about his family and friends, and always put others first.

Virginia Lee Tomicich JD’95
1953 – 2022
Virginia earned her bachelor’s degree from the University of Washington and a juris doctor from Vermont Law School. She spent her career working in contract negotiations for Boeing. In her free time, Virginia enjoyed reading and spending time with her beloved American Eskimo dogs. She was survived by her sister and two brothers.

Carrie Legus JD’96
1964 – 2022
Carrie—an outdoor enthusiast—enjoyed traveling and spoke many languages. She was fluent in Spanish and translated numerous academic documents, particularly focusing on poetry and philosophy into English. After growing up in Minnesota, Carrie moved to Walden, Vermont, in the late 1980s. She received her juris doctor from Vermont Law School in 1996 and went on to practice at the Montpelier-based firm Legus & Bisson. She started studying law while writing the dissertation for her PhD, which she completed in 2000.

2000s

Rose Ann Watson JD’00
1970 – 2021
Prior to earning her juris doctor at Vermont Law School, Rose—a Missouri native—attended the University of Missouri-Columbia for her undergraduate studies. She went on to become an accomplished attorney. Rose started her career at McLane Middleton Professional Assoc., before moving into a corporate career where she used her estate planning skills as an advanced market attorney with Sun Life. She then moved on to serve as the director of advanced planning with Commonwealth Financial Network.

Diana M. Dascalu-Joffe JD’03
1978 – 2023
Born in Bucharest, Romania, Diana was a beloved mother, wife, daughter, friend, and passionate advocate for women’s rights and equitable treatment. She emigrated to the U.S. (Queens, New York) at the age of two, and she went on to earn a bachelor’s degree from Slippery Rock University, and a juris doctor and master’s degree from Vermont Law School. Diana dedicated her life to the betterment of others through her incredible advocacy and amazing work achievements to improve the environment and tackle climate change. She is survived by her husband, Brian Joffe JD’03, children, Noah and Emily; parents, Nicholas and Michele; father and mother-in-law, Leo and Linda; and many other relatives, friends, and colleagues.

Edward Nichols
Wadsworth MSEL’03
1937 – 2023
Edward died peacefully at his Cohasset, Massachusetts, home. He was the beloved husband of Suzanne (Maloney), devoted father of Nathaniel W. Wadsworth (Kate Drost) and the late Peter N. Wadsworth; adored grandfather of Calliope and Clio. His brother, David Wadsworth, predeceased him. Edward was retired at the time of his passing, but he previously served as general counsel of Nevis.

Kristen Hoymann JD’04
1972 – 2022
Following a long battle with an illness, Kristen passed away peacefully in her sleep. As a Vermont native, she possessed a deep love for the environment and its stewardship. Kristen enjoyed hiking, traveling, exploring new places, and listening to music. She was also an advocate for women’s rights and equitable treatment. Kristen was a dedicated mother who served as a role model to her daughters. She graduated from Essex Junction High School, the University of Vermont, and Vermont Law School. Kristen is survived by her husband, daughters, parents, and siblings, as well as several aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces, and nephews.

Hassan Parrish JD’04
1975 – 2022
Hassan Parrish, age 47, of Fort Wayne, Indiana, formerly of Shelby, passed away on October 5, 2022, in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

John Austin “Aussie” Diamond JD’09
1983 – 2022
After a courageous battle with cancer, Aussie passed away at home surrounded by his immediate family on August 23, 2022. He is survived by his wife, Anna, and his son, Liam. Aussie also leaves behind his parents, three siblings, nine nieces and nephews, and many loving aunts, uncles, and cousins. Aussie was extremely accomplished in his professional career, earning numerous awards and accolades. Committed to making the world a better place, Aussie founded his own firm, Diamond Law Practice, and co-founded The Private Patriots Foundation, a non-profit which helps injured military and defense contractors worldwide. In one of his proudest moments, Aussie was sworn in at the Supreme Court of the United States by Chief Justice John Roberts. Above all else, however, Aussie was most proud of the beautiful life he built with Anna and Liam.
The Vermont Law School community was deeply saddened by the unexpected passing of Thomas “Tomi” Fennell JD’23 in a tragic car accident on Nov. 16, 2021. Tomi was a valued member of the school community, and its campus and academic programs were greatly enriched by his presence and many contributions, including his leadership in the Environmental Law Society and Energy Law Institute. Remembered across campus by many for his kindness and compassion, he was a friend to many and a defender of those who needed defending.

His growing passion for energy law was clear, with noticeable interest in international energy law and policy, and a particular curiosity for Latin American energy policy, enhanced by his past summer internship in Córdoba, Argentina. Tomi displayed an ability to see connections between different topics and to unpack the complexities of energy law. His enthusiasm brought him to energy law and his intellect allowed him to succeed. Tomi also built strong relationships with his Institute for Energy and the Environment classmates and his passion for energy law and policy was infectious, even inspiring others to explore this field.

Known for his quiet, steadfast nature, Donald C. Baur tirelessly advocated on behalf of animals, national parks, and the environment. During his many years of service, he received the Marine Wildlife Conservation Award from the Center for Marine Conservation, the 1872 Award for Service to the National Parks from the Coalition of National Park Service Retirees, and the Wings Award for Animal Welfare Advocacy from the Pegasus Foundation.

Don received his BA degree, with highest honors, from Trinity College and his JD degree from the University of Pennsylvania. He worked in the Solicitor’s Office of the Department of the Interior before serving as the general counsel of the U.S. Marine Mammal Commission, and he sat on the boards of the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, the Shenandoah National Park Trust, and the Environmental Leadership Council of the Environmental Law Institute. His publications include the American Bar Association books “Endangered Species Act: Law, Policy and Perspectives” and “Ocean and Coastal Law and Policy.”

In addition, Don was a partner in the Environment, Energy, and Natural Resources (EER) practice at the Washington, D.C., office of Perkins Coie LLP, which recognized him in memoriam for his leadership in “bringing the firm’s EER practice to national prominence and playing a lead role in recruiting and training a generation of environmental lawyers.”

Numerous Vermont Law and Graduate School (VLGS) students gained invaluable experience through internships with Don’s help, and he was a mentor to many more. He was also a champion of VLGS’s new Animal Law and Policy Institute.

Don’s Oceans and Coastal Law class was one of VLGS’s most popular courses. This is no wonder when you look at his incredible pro bono work to help whales, sea otters, and the oceans. One notable case was when he represented Keiko the orca, who was featured in the Disney movie “Free Willy”. With Don’s continued efforts, Keiko was finally freed from the Oregon Coast Aquarium in 1998.

Up until just days before he died, Don also worked tirelessly on behalf of Lolita, the endangered Southern Resident Killer Whale who was held captive at the Miami Seaquarium in the smallest orca tank in the world for more than half a century.

These are only two of the many contributions Don has made to animal rights, ocean conservation, parks, and the environment. Through his demonstration of perseverance and quiet determination, Don Baur has inspired and influenced many generations of environmental and animal lawyers.
Kevin B. Jones, PhD grew up in a very close family in Proctor, VT. He enjoyed spending time with his family in Proctor, where there were many family gatherings throughout the year—indeed, an official holiday of grilling in the yard, as well as many Sunday dinners. He was always surrounded by nature, curiosity, and a loving family.

Kevin and his partner, Rachel Levin, lived in a house they purchased together decades ago in Chittenden, VT, and made their own. There he enjoyed tending the bird feeder, sitting with his coffee and something sweet, with dogs at his feet, and noting a red cardinal or blue-bunting, and all those chickadees. He would not miss a Saturday to take the dogs, go to the farmers market, and enjoy his Saturday favorite routine, which frequently culminated with stopping by to visit his family in Proctor. He enjoyed downhill and cross-country skiing and many other sports; deer-hunting season; music; reading; first hybrid and then electric transportation; energy efficiency at home, to every extent possible; his work; traveling throughout the world with Rachel and, at times, with their two beloved Old English sheepdogs; finding and exploring new places, restaurants, vineyards, coffee producers and people; and experiencing other cultures. Peace, justice, equity and community participation were important to him. Kevin considered his students, fellows, coworkers, other faculty and alum as part of his family. He mentored, guided, enlightened, respected and learned from so many and then assisted with job-hunting, making personal phone calls to current and former colleagues to gain entrance to what was for many their first experience working in the energy sector. He always made himself available and accessible for any reason, had an open-door policy at his office, and was deeply caring and available, whether in his office or elsewhere. VLGS has a special Tributes Page, with information about events and remembrances.

Kevin enjoyed research that had practical uses, as well as learning as the goal for a final product or project. He enjoyed including students, fellows, alum, faculty and colleagues from VLGS, as well as from his previous workplaces. He published two books utilizing that process, “The Electric Battery: Charging Forward to a Low-Carbon Future” and “A Smarter, Greener Grid: Forging Environmental Progress Through Smart Energy Policies and Technologies.” Kevin also published numerous articles and chapters in many publications and participated as a panel member or facilitator at energy-related conferences in the U.S. and throughout the world. He had memberships in national and international associations, which he used to keep in contact with current and former colleagues and to keep current.

Kevin received a PhD from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute’s Lally School of Management and Technology, a master’s from the LIU School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin, and a BS from the University of Vermont.

Some of his previous professional experience includes as the director of power market policy at Long Island Power Authority; associate director of energy practice at Navigant Consulting Inc./Resource Management International; director of energy policy for the City of New York; various positions in rates and planning at Central Vermont Public Service Corporation; and alderman of the City of Rutland, VT. He also assisted and supported many local and Vermont organizations that strengthen the community. One of his proudest associations was serving on the board, then becoming board chair of what was then the Rutland Land Trust, now the Housing Trust of Rutland County.

Kevin Brian Jones died on January 29, 2024, while teaching one of two winter courses at VLGS. He collapsed shortly after the class commenced and immediately died.

Kevin was predeceased by his father and mother, Sidney Hiram Jones and Patricia Jane (Johnson) Jones. He is survived by Rachel Levin, his nearly three-decade partner, and his two Old English sheepdogs — their fourth and fifth — whom he loved and spoiled and who were the light of his life. He has three siblings, Deborah Jones, Mark Jones (and Kathy), and Andrew Jones; a nephew, Jeremy (and Robbi) Jo Jones, with whom he had a very special relationship; two nieces, Megan Jones and Hailey Wood, whom he adored; a great-niece and -nephew, Ruth Jones, a very special aunt, whose 100th birthday he recently celebrated with family from near and far, and many other loved and living relatives. In celebration of Kevin’s life and in memory — or whatever it may be for each of us — please take time for yourself, spend time with your family and loved ones, and enjoy your dogs. A private gathering will be held when he is buried in Proctor in the spring.

Kevin B. Jones
Former president of the VLGS Board of Trustees and Trustee Emeritus R. Allan Paul passed away at home on Jan. 3, 2022.

A key supporter of the school’s founding, Paul served on the Board of Trustees from 1994 to 2004, and as its president from 1995 to 2001. He received an honorary degree from Vermont Law School in 2006.

Paul began his legal career with renowned Burlington lawyer Pearly Feen, and in 1968, he, along with Joseph Frank and Peter Collins, formed Paul Frank and Collins. Allan served as its founding president for the first 26 years of its now 53-year history.

His extensive resume of civic and professional contributions includes service as a member of the boards of Banknorth Group, Inc., the Vermont Business Roundtable, and the Greater Burlington Industrial Corporation. He served as a member of the board of trustees of the University of Vermont from 1976 to 1982 and again from 1984 to 1990, and was chair of the board from 1981 to 1982. He was a member of the Vermont Racing Commission, including as chair from 1977 to 1989, and served as president of the National Association of State Racing Commissioners. He served as a member of the City of Burlington Board of Aldermen and City Council from 1965 to 1969. In 2006, Paul was named the Vermont Chamber of Commerce’s citizen of the year.

Paul received his AB degree from the University of Vermont in 1953, and his JD from the Columbia University School of Law in 1956.

Those who knew him well say that Paul loved his family above all else. He enjoyed his daughters’ countless dance recitals, gymnastic and swim meets, and musical performances, and felt truly blessed to have many grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

He is survived by his wife of 67 years, Elsie, daughters Karen Paul (Mark Saba), Diana (Bret) Kernoff, and Laurie (Eric) Mittenthal, and eight grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

Karen Oelschlaeger JD’16 passed away at her home in Montpelier, VT, on April 19, 2021, nearly three years after she was diagnosed with stomach cancer.

Oelschlaeger earned her juris doctor from Vermont Law School in 2016. During her time as a student, she interned at the South Royalton Legal Clinic, and along with fellow alumna Nessabeth Rooks JD’16, drafted and advocated for an expungement bill that was ultimately signed into law by former Vermont Governor Peter Shumlin in 2015. Both former students in Professor Robert Sand’s Criminal Law class, Oelschlaeger and Rooks envisioned an earned expungement program to encourage ex-offenders to engage in prosocial activities and reconnect with their communities.

Upon graduating from VLS’ Accelerated JD program, cum laude, in 2016, she worked as a deputy state’s attorney for the Windsor County State’s Attorney Office in White River Junction, VT. In that role, she served as the dedicated prosecutor for the Windsor County Special Investigative Unit, which is a multi-disciplinary team that focuses on sex crimes and other serious crimes against children. She also volunteered her time as part of the VLS alumni mentoring program.

Prior to attending VLS, Oelschlaeger received her bachelor’s degree from Wesleyan University and her Master of Social Work from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Even as she was nearing the end of her life, Oelschlaeger was working to help others. She became a proponent of Vermont’s Death With Dignity law, which she would ultimately utilize to end her own life, on her own terms.

Just a week prior to her death she appeared on Vermont Public Radio to advocate for changes to the law that would make it more humane, and easier, for terminally ill patients to comply with its regulations. In her obituary, which she wrote herself, she thanked the legislators and lobbyists who worked to pass the law.

She also left family and friends with poignant words of wisdom and earnest wishes, writing that she’d like “for you to live your best life now—just in case. She’d like you to be kind. She’d like you to take extra care of her parents, Linda and Terry; her most beloved niece; and her dear ones Meghan, Eric, and Jess.”

Karen Oelschlaeger JD’16

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JOIN US FOR REUNION 2024

June 28–30
South Royalton, Vermont

Mark your calendars and plan to attend Reunion 2024! This year’s weekend of festivities will offer opportunities to reconnect with old friends, participate in celebratory activities, get the latest updates from across campus, and engage with beloved members of VLGS's faculty and staff. All alumni are encouraged to attend. Members of class years ending in four and nine will be celebrating special milestones with a group dinner and more.

Find all the latest details at bit.ly/vlgs-reunion-2024.

WE CAN’T WAIT TO SEE YOU IN SORO, SWANS!
STUNNING VIEW FROM KENT'S LEDGE IN SOUTH ROYALTON, VERMONT.
PHOTOGRAPH BY ALYSSA SHEA JD/MELP’24.