

“IF YOU SEE A TURTLE SITTING UP ON A FENCE” AND OTHER THOUGHTS OF THANKS

The annual alumni awards event, in Eckstein Hall on April 26, 2018, was an opportunity for the Marquette University Law School community to honor and thank five outstanding lawyers. But the honorees themselves each saw it as a chance to thank family members, colleagues, friends, and the Law School itself, in a variety of different ways (the remark in the headline above is from Judge James Wynn’s comments). Edited brief excerpts from each award-winner’s remarks appear on this and the following two pages.

William “Bill” McEssy

Lifetime Achievement Award



William H. McEssy

William “Bill” McEssy, L’64, first was a practicing lawyer in Fond du Lac, Wis., and now for more than 35 years has been a business leader in Lake Forest, Ill., as one of the largest McDonald’s franchisees in the country. His civic activities have included longtime leadership of the board of advisors of the University of Saint Mary of the Lake, a leading national seminary in Mundelein, Ill.

Dean Joseph Kearney and I became good friends. I remember once when I met him and he said, “Bill, I think we’re going to build a new law school.” My dad and I had both been in Sensenbrenner Hall. And I said, “Well, I for one will tell you I think it’s about time.” And Joe said, “I think we can get this done in three years.” I said, “Well. . . .”

But this is what Joe and the rest of the faculty and the donors thought. I don’t know if there’s a more beautiful law school in the country. It just is outstanding. So instead of complimenting me, I want to compliment Joe and his team. Putting a building together like this is not easy. Take it from me.

The McDonald’s stores that I own go all the way from Lake Geneva into Illinois. The number of them is slowly getting smaller because the clock keeps going on. But I’m still actively involved in McDonald’s and some other businesses.

When Joe asked me to accept this award, I said, “Joe, I’ll accept the award if I don’t have to retire, because I feel like when you get a lifetime achievement award, you’re trying to tell me to get out of the way and it’s time for somebody else.” But I’m not getting out of the way.

William Griesbach

Alumnus of the Year

William Griesbach, L'79, is chief judge of the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Wisconsin, presiding most often in Green Bay.

I'm particularly honored to share in this award with my classmate and friend Jim Wynn. You know, Jim has contributed a great deal to his adopted "hometown" of Milwaukee and to the Law School. . . . What I can offer is how much my *debt* is to Marquette University and to the Law School.

I am quite certain that if it were not for Marquette University, I wouldn't be here. And I don't just mean that I wouldn't be on this stage receiving this award. I mean, I wouldn't exist. You see, my parents are both Marquette grads. My mother—who is here tonight—came from California. This California girl came across the country in 1942 to study journalism at age 18 because the editor of the paper where she worked during the summer after her senior year said of Marquette, "They have a good journalism school."

My father was from Menasha, about 80 miles to the north of here, and they met at Marquette in the journalism school. World War II broke out. They got married in between V-E Day and what would have been my father going off to the Pacific theater, but the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki while they were on their honeymoon ended the war. My father finished up his degree here at Marquette, and then he went on to get a Ph.D. in philosophy at the University of Toronto.

The chances of this California girl meeting that Wisconsin boy would have been pretty slim but for Marquette University. And so you can see, I wouldn't have existed, nor would my 11 brothers and sisters have existed.

But it didn't end there. My father came back to Marquette, and he was here for 40 years teaching as a philosophy professor. It made it possible for me to attend Marquette, to gain an appreciation of what an education is, to begin learning the things that matter most in life. That education has continued right up until this day.

I'm left with the sense of the debt I owe to Marquette. But the debt doesn't stop with my existence or my education, because it also involves my own marriage. I met my wife here. She came from El Paso, Texas, to study theology, and that is perhaps the greatest gift I have received from my attendance at Marquette.



The Honorable
William C. Griesbach

James Wynn

Alumnus of the Year

James Wynn, L'79, is a judge of the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit, based in Richmond, Va., with his own chambers in Raleigh, N.C.

Something reminded me today as I was standing here: An old Southern politician said, "If you see a turtle sitting up on a fence, you know one thing—he didn't put himself up there." And that's pretty much my story.

I have so many people to whom to be thankful for the life that I've been able to enjoy, the career that I've been able to exercise, the kind of independence and hopefully judicial courage that I seek as a judge.

I want the students and others to hear this. When you're asked, "Why in the world?," know that I asked that my first year here. "Why in the world am I in Wisconsin from North Carolina, especially when it snowed on October the 12th?" But God has been good to me, and I will tell you it has been solely by grace. And to have classmates like the class of 1979 who are so supportive, so continually trying to move to the next level, connecting even more so as we grow older. . . .

I enjoy working with this university. [Wynn is on the board of trustees of Marquette University.] We have a leadership team. The board here is just tremendous. The president is awesome. We are forging ahead. To have a dean of the law school here moving us into the next century and to this future that's before us. . . . I love this university, not only for the scholarship, not only for the leadership, but the spirituality. I just love the Jesuit background.

An important part of this institution is the fact that we are not just out trying to bring in students who will get a good education, but to make them good people and to make them God-fearing people, if I might add that, and I think that's politically quite correct at Marquette.



The Honorable
James A. Wynn, Jr.

Julie Darnieder

Howard B. Eisenberg Service Award

Julie Darnieder, L'78, practiced in Milwaukee in the area of workers' compensation, before focusing her efforts on the foundation and development of the Marquette Volunteer Legal Clinic—in the process, in the words of Dean Joseph D. Kearney upon presenting this award, accomplishing nothing less than “redefining . . . the term ‘Marquette lawyer’ for this generation.”



Julie Johnson Darnieder

The last time I was on this stage for this event was in 2002 when I was president of the Law Alumni Association Board. I was with Dean Howard Eisenberg. It was one of the last times I was with him. He died shortly after that. I was truly fortunate to have worked with him. We launched our efforts for the Milwaukee Volunteer Legal Clinic with his blessings. To be receiving this award in his name means so very much to me.

All along the way, the clinic has been a group effort, a village if you will—from the initial group who invented this wheel (and that's what it felt like much of the time), many of whom are still engaged, including the support of Acting Dean Janine Geske and now Dean Kearney, to our community partners who have embraced us, to the volunteer lawyers who never had to be recruited and who have stepped up always, to the clients who trusted us with some of their great challenges, and finally to our truly awesome students who have embraced this project for the past 16 years—many of whom are now on our attorney roster and continuing to serve. I would like to think that in some way we have contributed to their making as Marquette lawyers.

I am so proud of what this has become, thanks in large part to Dean Kearney's strategic vision in fully embracing the clinic, and of our law school staff: Angela Schultz, Katie Mertz, Mindy Schroeder, and others have advanced our efforts in just amazing ways.

Jessica Kumke

Charles W. Mentkowski Sports Law Alumna of the Year Award

Jessica Kumke, L'08, is associate athletic director for compliance and enrollment services, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee.



Jessica A. Kumke

I want to thank the awards committee for recognizing me with this honor. And, specifically, I want to recognize Professor Paul Anderson, director of the National Sports Law Institute. I wouldn't be up here without him. He pushed me a lot in law school and encouraged me to do the things I didn't think I really could do. His support meant everything to me and is part of the reason that I give back to the program now. It's kind of nice now to be able to give that assistance to other students in any way I can, so I want to thank him for that.

And I want to thank my family who are here tonight: my mom and dad, brother and sister-in-law, my niece and nephew, and my Aunt Virginia who made the 11-hour drive from Nebraska with a six-year-old and a four-year-old to be here. You guys have also always supported me with everything, even if it meant moving me from a town of 400 people in rural Nebraska to the big city of Milwaukee. I appreciate everything that you guys have done. And, yes, you moved me two times up here, once for law school, and then back again for the job at UWM.