

New ventures, new experiences await 'irreplaceable' Beryl

By Susanna Eayrs

Beryl Theobald gives a hearty laugh as she recalls the start of her career at Western University's Faculty of Law 33 years ago.

"I was first hired as the assistant to Richard McLaren, who was Associate Dean at the time. He told me 'I don't think you're going to stay in this job, because you'll get bored' and he was right!"

So Beryl took on increasingly challenging administrative positions including working with alumni development and creating continuing education programs. She was promoted several times, eventually landing what she calls her "dream job" Director of Admissions at Western Law, a role she's been passionate about for the past 17 years.

"I've *never* been bored in this job," says Beryl. "There's always a challenge, you meet extraordinarily smart and interesting people and every day I learn something new."

Beryl has witnessed numerous changes in her more than three decades at the school; among those is the changing ratio between male and female students.

"It used to be a predominantly male student population," she says. "It was a slow change, but it's wonderful now to see us at a nearly 50/50 split."

And she's taken a proactive role in the evolution of the admission process. "When I began enrolling students 17 years ago it was solely based on grades and LSAT scores; now the approach is to look more at the whole individual.

"The students bring diverse life and work experiences into the law school which makes it very dynamic." she says.

Beryl maintains a strong connection with people from their time as applicant to alumni.

"I get tremendous satisfaction meeting people entering law school and then watching them flourish in their various careers," she says. "It's nice to know I've played a small role in their success."

Mitch Frazer '99, former president of the Western Law Alumni Association, recalls the strong connection Beryl has with students.

“For me as for so many, Beryl was the constant throughout one’s school career and the first person you want to visit when you come back,” he says.

“She represents everything that is great about Western Law. She has excitement for every student who gets in and appreciates the hard work it takes to get there.

“Her compassion, calmness and generosity of spirit are all things I will remember fondly,” he says. “She is irreplaceable.”

“I hope I’ve made a difference to the environment here,” Beryl reflects. “I’ve always been an advocate for the law school and I think I’ve earned the trust of my colleagues as well as students.”

A believer in lifelong learning, she received her Bachelor of Arts degree in English and Women’s Studies in 1992 while working full time at the law school.

Beryl chaired the Ontario Law Schools Application Service Working Group and helped established online applications for Ontario law schools.

And she was an active member of the Canadian Law Schools Admissions Network and served as its Chair for four years.

“She brought her wit, charm, passion, leadership and wealth of knowledge to these positions and words cannot describe how much she will be missed,” says Elaine Lenki Borthwick, Director of Admissions at UBC Law School.

As for the future, she’s taking her cue from the generation she knows best.

“I’m going to be open to new ventures and experiences,” she says. “I want to stay connected with young people because I’m so energized and inspired by them. They are willing to take risks and that’s how I would like to be.”

"Beryl will be remembered for the recruitment and admission of generations of highly qualified students," says longtime colleague Professor Craig Brown.

"She brought to that difficult role the highest standards of professionalism and the most genuine humanity. It's very hard to imagine the school without her."