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Roger Williams University School of Law

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Newsroom

RWU Law Celebrates Commencement 2015

RWU Law honors 115 graduates in a ceremony keynoted by pioneering jurist, the Honorable Roderick L. Ireland; also recognizing noted R.I. defense attorney Robert Mann.



BRISTOL, R.I., May 15, 2015 – A cool, sunny and breezy day on Mt. Hope Bay provided the perfect backdrop as the Honorable Roderick L. Ireland – recently retired as Massachusetts Supreme Court chief justice, and the first African-American to serve on the court in its 305-year history – addressed the 115 graduates of the Class of 2015 during Commencement exercises Friday.

Judge Ireland notably voted in favor of same-sex marriage as his state became the first in the nation to legalize it in 2003. Just a few months before his retirement in 2014, he found it unconstitutional to sentence teenagers convicted of murder to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

“There is no more noble or rewarding profession than being a lawyer,” Judge Ireland told the assembled graduates, urging them to “temper your future success with humility, and its byproduct, kindness. Treating people with respect, dignity and kindness is often just as important as providing sound legal advice.”

“In my experience,” he added, “preparation and integrity trump prestige, entitlement and even raw intelligence.” Judge Ireland urged graduates to “make a difference” through pro bono legal work and by advocating for organizations, issues and individual they believe in. “It is your duty to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves.”

During the ceremony, the School of Law also presented an honorary degree to acclaimed Providence-based defense attorney Robert B. Mann of Mann & Mitchell.

Chosen by the graduating class, Professor John Chung was honored as Best Full-Time Professor, and Distinguished Jurist in Residence Judge Judith Savage as Best Adjunct Professor. As Best Staff Members, the class selected Jodi Haley, Assistant Director of Career Development and Financial Aid Counselor Rachelle Abbruzzi.

Dean Michael J. Yelnosky – a founding faculty member at the law school, now completing his first year as its dean – paid tribute to Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Law Robert B. Kent '01H, who passed away earlier this year; and conferred the Dean's distinguished Service Award upon Kathleen A. Massa, Assistant Dean of Business Affairs, calling her “our chief operating officer, chief financial officer, chief of staff and chief *consigliere*, all rolled into one.”

Nicole Marie Manzo, delivering the valedictory address, said she remembered being told that law school would be “the best years of your life, and you will spend them being miserable.” Having now completed law school, she suggested that in fact “the last three years of our lives have been the best *because* we were miserable.”

“You cannot have success without growth, and you cannot have growth without discomfort,” she explained, adding “if this [Commencement] is what misery feels like, I am definitely signing up again!”