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Law School News: Among The Trailblazers 12/02/2019

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December 2, 2019

Law School News

Among the Trailblazers

Cybersecurity lawyer Linn Foster Freedman, a longtime RWU Law board member and philanthropist, is honored with a classroom in her name.



Linn Foster Freedman, Esq., at the classroom dedication ceremony.
Image Credit: Julie Brigidi

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In a small, late-afternoon ceremony in November, Roger Williams University School of Law dedicated Seminar Room 279 in Bristol as the Linn Foster Freedman Esq. Classroom.

“I am thrilled that we were able to name this classroom in Linn’s honor,” said Dean Michael J. Yelnosky. “I hope that our students will draw some inspiration from her work and appreciate all that she has done for our law school.”

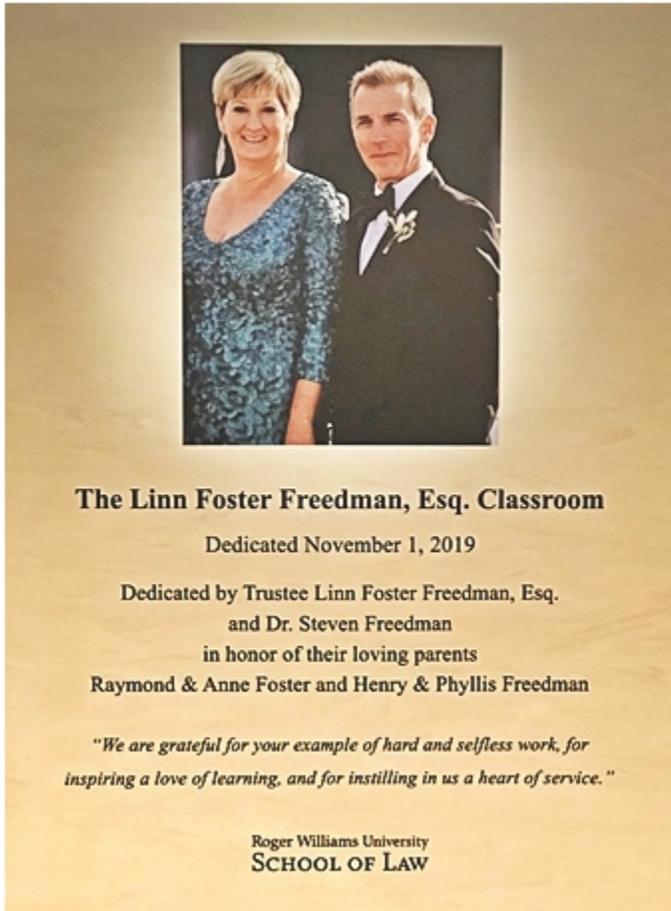
Freedman herself called the honor “huge” and “hard to believe,” citing the elevated company in which she now found herself among the named rooms on RWU Law’s second floor.

In 2014, the David A. Logan Conference Room was dedicated to the school’s longest-serving dean; in 2017, the Professor Anthony J. Santoro Classroom, for the school’s founding dean; also in 2017, the Honorable Bruce M. Selya Appellate Courtroom, for the renowned First Circuit jurist, a longtime friend and champion of the law school; and earlier this year, the Dorothy R. Crockett Classroom, for the state’s first African-American woman lawyer, admitted to the bar in 1932.

“To even be mentioned in the same sentence with such pillars of the community is a bit beyond comprehension,” Freedman said. “These are trailblazers, and their contributions were so outstanding and significant for our community. It may sound strange to say, but it’s not often that, while you’re still alive, people say such nice things about you – usually that sort of thing is reserved for someone’s eulogy.”

Still, Freedman said, the dedication sent a positive message for changing times.

“I think it’s nice to have two women in the mix now,” she said. “That feels really great, because it reflects the growing diversity not only of the legal profession, but of the law school itself.”



The Freedman Classroom plaque.

Former Rhode Island Attorney General Arlene Violet agreed.

"Linn has the perfect plaque," she said. "Not only does it recognize a competent, ethical lawyer who is a credit to her profession, but it also remembers her roots with parents who were the essence of philanthropy. What a great reminder to the future lawyers walking into class to reflect on how they got here."

Freedman also stressed the deeply personal meaning the dedication had for her and her husband, Dr. Steven Freedman.

"Our parents, all four of them, were extremely philanthropic, and they instilled in us the notion that giving back to your community is very important," she said. "So to have my mother-in-law present

for the dedication was obviously super-special; that was really feel-good. The entire experience was very special and touching and lovely.”

An Influential Supporter

Linn Freedman has been a member of the [RWU Law Board of Directors](#) since 2008 (she'll be terming off next spring).

“I first got involved with RWU Law maybe 10 or 15 years ago, through [Dean David Logan](#), when he and I were serving on the [Touro Foundation](#) board together,” she recalled. “He got me interested in the law school and eventually nominated me to be on the board. From that point on, of course, I learned a tremendous amount about what the law school is doing – what really makes it special and why it has such widespread support on the judiciary and the bar.”

For the last five years, Freeman has served as chair of the board's Development and Advancement Committee. In that capacity, she's worked closely with the law school administration and the University Advancement office to (successfully) increase fundraising. Freedman is also a member of the University's Board of Trustees, where she has emerged as an influential supporter of the law school.

In addition, Freedman serves on the Pro Bono Collaborative Advisory Board, and was instrumental in helping the law school reach its goal of establishing a \$500,000 endowment for the PBC. For years, she was the primary architect of the annual PBC cocktail reception, and one year she led the crowdfunding segment of [the annual Champions for Justice event](#). (In fact, Freedman was the inaugural recipient of the law school's Champion for Justice Award in 2015, in recognition of her community service and philanthropy.)

“Linn and her husband Steve have been major contributors to RWU Law,” Dean Yelnosky noted. But, he added, “her work on fundraising for us has not been limited to her own giving and her work as a leader on our Board of Directors.”

Freedman also serves as a member of the board of the [Rhode Island Center for Justice](#), the civil legal services organization that RWU Law helped get off the ground and continues to support by providing it with office space at One Empire Street in Providence. (RWU Law Assistant Dean for Experiential Education, [Professor Andrew Horwitz](#); and Director of Pro Bono & Community Partnerships [Eliza Vorenberg](#) are also on that board.) The Center is also home to [RWU Law’s first Skadden Fellow, Michaela Bland ’19](#), who will be working there for two years on a school-to-prison pipeline interruption project.

Nimbleness and Flexibility

[Freedman is a partner at Robinson+Cole](#), where her practice focuses on data privacy and security. In that capacity, and in her previous role as a partner at [Nixon Peabody LLP](#), she has encouraged the hiring of RWU Law alumni. She has also volunteered her time [teaching Privacy Law as an adjunct](#) for several years.

Freedman notes that the story of how she came to fill those shoes says a lot about what makes RWU Law different.

“My area of expertise is privacy and cybersecurity,” she explained. “So when I realized six years ago that very few law schools were offering any courses on privacy law, I went to the dean and said, ‘Look, this is one of the fastest growing areas of law and we’re not offering it. Only 25 percent of all law schools in the country offer it. We need to be on the cusp. We need to offer this. This is an area where students can focus and know that they’ll get a job.’”

The dean replied, “Okay, sure. If you teach it.”

Freedman marveled at the speed of the decision.

“There aren’t a lot of other law schools where you wouldn’t have layer after layer of bureaucracy to get something like that done – something that makes a lot of sense and that is going to be of immediate benefit to students,” she said. “That is responding, in real time, to the needs of the legal community.”

Such responsiveness, Freedman said, helps make RWU Law the valuable legal resource it is in the community.

“This is just one example,” she said. “I think part of the reason that RWU Law has the full support of the legal community is precisely this sort of nimbleness and flexibility.”

Yelnosky notes that it is also those qualities that have made Freedman such an extraordinary fit for the school.

“What I really admire about Linn is that she rightfully takes her place among the leaders of the bench and bar who populate our Board of Directors,” Yelnosky said. “However, she is just as willing to spend a fall Saturday with her husband and friends participating in the law alumni golf tournament, which raises money for scholarships for rising 2Ls. She not only pays to play but she usually goes home with a bunch of stuff she does not need – because she buys so many raffle tickets the odds are stacked in her favor. There she is, on a Saturday in September, after having spent almost five hours playing golf, hanging out at the dinner trying to increase the amount of money we can raise in our raffle and silent auction. She is truly a great friend of the law school.”