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November 16, 2020

Law School News

Yelnosky Patio Dedicated

RWU Law recognizes former Dean Michael J. Yelnosky's contributions by dedicating the law school's popular patio with a plaque in his honor.

November 16, 2020 | Michael M. Bowden



Professor Michael J. Yelnosky sits on "his" patio on the day of its dedication, Nov. 4, 2020.

In a quiet ceremony on November 4, RWU Law recognized Professor Michael J. Yelnosky – a founding faculty member of this institution and its Dean from 2014 to 2020 – by dedicating the law school's popular patio with a plaque in his honor.

“It is a small but much-deserved gesture for a man who has dedicated an extraordinary amount of time, energy and passion to RWU Law and its continued success,” noted Yelnosky's successor, Dean Gregory W. Bowman.

Due to safety and social distancing concerns, only Dean Bowman, Professor Yelnosky and RWU President Ioannis N. Miaoulis were physically present at the dedication.

Yelnosky had earlier spoken fondly of his experiences heading the law school.

“I am grateful to so many for supporting and working with me as dean,” he said. “Whether I was working on new programming, fundraising, diversity and inclusion, board engagement, or attracting and retaining an excellent faculty and staff, I tried to keep the needs of our students and alumni front of mind.”

Yelnosky's deanship marked an important period of growth for the school. At a time when many law schools were retrenching in the wake of the Great Recession, Yelnosky focused on positioning RWU Law to remain “aggressively relevant.”

Under his leadership, the school developed new and [innovative academic programming](#), while opening an experiential learning campus in Providence, [reducing tuition](#), and taking significant steps toward making the school [more diverse and inclusive](#). In the process, Roger Williams became the most affordable private ABA-accredited law school in the Northeast.

“Instead of being back on our heels, we started to declare the ways in which we were not like other law schools,” Yelnosky said. “It gave us, I think, the sense that we could be more than just passive observers of our market.”

His approach did much to solidify and grow confidence in and support for the school among students and alumni, as well as the broader bench and bar.

“A respected scholar, beloved teacher, and skilled ambassador to the Rhode Island bar and judiciary, Michael Yelnosky has set us on the course we will follow for decades to come.”

~ Judge William E. Smith, U.S. District Court for the District of Rhode Island

When Yelnosky stepped down as dean on June 30, voices from across the University community and throughout the state’s bench and bar were [united in their praise for his contributions](#).

“With his deep commitment to public interest law and social justice issues, Michael Yelnosky has provided transformational leadership in guiding RWU Law,” said Judge William E. Smith of the U.S. District Court for the District of Rhode Island, chair of the law school’s Board of Directors. “He is a respected scholar, beloved teacher, and skilled ambassador to the Rhode Island bar and judiciary, who has strengthened the law school’s reputation and relationships throughout the legal field. He has set us on the course we will follow for decades to come.”

A widely recognized expert on employment and labor law, as well as dispute resolution and judicial selection, Yelnosky took a sabbatical for the fall 2020 semester, and will return as a full-time professor in spring 2021.

Yelnosky earned his B.S. degree from the University of Vermont and his J.D. from the University of Pennsylvania.