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EDWIN M. SCHROEDER

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EDWIN M. SCHROEDER

Every law school has one or two faculty members who serve as institutional cornerstones. They remain at the center of things as a reference point while the institution around them evolves. Other faculty members come and go, the strengths and weaknesses in the institution ebb and flow, and generations of students pass on to professional success and positions of prominence in the community, but these cornerstones remain. Other members of the law school community at some point begin to take this core of the faculty for granted, as solid and permanent as the bricks and mortar that give the law school its corporeal presence.

This year, the Florida State University College of Law is losing one of its cornerstones. Edwin M. Schroeder, known to everyone on the faculty simply as “Ed,” will retire at the end of the spring 2004 semester. Ed has served on the faculty of the College of Law for thirty-five years. When I arrived at the law school almost twenty years ago, he was already viewed as an eminence grise, and although he may have developed a bit more grise in the ensuing years, he has lost none of his eminence.

Ed has had input into many of the central operations of the College of Law. First and foremost, he has served as the director of the library, and has guided that part of the College into a smoothly run and efficient machine for legal research. Law faculties are notoriously fractious, and faculty members often can’t even agree on routine matters, such as where to have lunch. Law faculty members also tend to be a negative and whining bunch, happy to find fault in others and make noise about it. In such an atmosphere, it tells the uninitiated observer everything he or she needs to know about Ed Schroeder’s talents that the College of Law faculty unanimously

views the library favorably, and probably sees it as the one part of the operation that consistently works as it should. Every faculty member here has multiple stories of library staff members unearthing obscure pieces of information, finding long-lost sources, and compiling data that no one has any reason to know. The staff is uniformly helpful and unfailingly cheerful, even in the face of unusually unreasonable demands. The library operates as a well-oiled machine, and for more than three decades the chief oiler has been Ed Schroeder.

The library has not been Ed's only success. He has also been responsible for the creation, organization, and maintenance of the longest running (and only self-financing) study-abroad program at the College of Law. Ed has taken the summer program at Oxford to levels of ever-greater success, even as other study abroad programs have been quietly (or not so quietly) dropped. Because of his efforts, the College of Law extended family now includes faculty members from Jesus, Wadham and All Souls Colleges, and generations of law students have learned the mixed culinary delights of meat pies and other esteemed (or is that just steamed?) British cuisine.

Ed's final primary institutional responsibility is the Law Review. For many years the Law Review faculty adviser duties have been divided into the broad categories of content and finances. The running joke has always been that the adviser assignments have been handed out based on an assessment of general tidiness. In legal academia (and maybe the world at large) there are only two types of people: sloppy desk people and neat desk people. Sloppy desk people have traditionally been given responsibility for helping the students with the content of the Review. Maybe that is because we have certain creative talents that can contribute to the general quality of the Review, and maybe that is because the students just feel at home in our offices. Only clean desk people, however, are allowed to sign the checks. It is not difficult to see where the true responsibility lies. Many of us have served as the first type of adviser, but for as long as anyone can remember, only one person has served as the Law Review's financial adviser: Ed Schroeder. He has not needed help in this role because there has never been any doubt about his prowess in protecting the financial wherewithal of the Review. Ed has guarded the books assiduously, which means that the rest of us do not have to worry about concerns that seem all too close to those of the real world.

Ed's solidity and competence are his most valuable contribution to the College of Law. But it should not be forgotten that Ed is still a member of a law faculty. This means that Ed has all the idiosyncrasies—which we like to think of as “charm”—that define the breed. There is, for example, the rare document collection that Ed has assembled on behalf of the school. He has placed these items in a secure room preserved by bottles of lethal gas imported from the at-

mosphere of the planet Neptune, complete with large warning signs that pretty much guarantee that no one without suicidal tendencies would ever enter the rare book room and attempt to steal a single document. Another one of Ed's odd defining characteristics is his interest in and seemingly inexhaustible knowledge about railroads. This hobby also gives Ed an excuse to assemble a collection of funny hats, which is a key ingredient to any successful career in legal academia. Then there is his strange affinity for the Red Sox, but then again everyone has to have at least one significant character flaw.

In sum and substance, Ed has been a wonderful colleague and a major contributor to the law school's recent growth and success. It should also be said that Ed has accomplished all this while suffering from a range of health woes that would have felled (or at least slowed down) a lesser person. It is a mark of Ed's character and strength that he rarely if ever acknowledges the pain and physical trauma that we all know he has suffered in recent years. If these matters have weakened him, he has done a masterful job at hiding the effects. If they have affected his spirit, he has not let it show. And they certainly have not affected his work product. He has truly gone above and beyond the call of duty in recent years, and he should at least know that we all recognize this and admire him for it.

Ed has, of course, undoubtedly been weighed down by other matters during the last few years. These are not happy times for public education. Public education is taking it on the chin lately, and public universities are being hit especially hard. For some reason the Jeffersonian ideal of educational excellence for the masses has lost its appeal to many. At the College of Law, budget cuts have hit the library—Ed's pride and joy—especially hard. Knowledge for the sake of knowledge is the librarian's stock-in-trade, and the cost-benefit equations that drive much of public policy nowadays apparently have not yet incorporated a calculus for assessing the value of knowledge. This means that in some ways the fates are being kind in allowing Ed to retire now. In an era defined by those who know the price of everything but the value of nothing, it will become increasingly difficult to protect the things that Ed has always most jealously guarded.

Ed's legacy, however, is that he has left us something to fight for. He has spent most of his adult life investing his very soul in a part of this institution that will enrich the lives of students and faculty members for decades. He can be very proud of his accomplishments, and should now accept our thanks and enjoy his retirement. He's earned it.

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