

Joe Zilber— Another Historic Gift



he previous pages relate the story of Ray and Kay Eckstein and their extraordinary commitment to support the construction of a new law school facility. A little more than three months after their announcement, Joseph J. Zilber, L'41, announced his own historic gift to the Law School. Specifically, on August 21, 2007, at an event on the site of the future law school, Mr. Zilber announced a philanthropic program that he called "New Potential for Milwaukee."

The primary part of Mr. Zilber's initiative is a \$30 million gift to Marquette University Law School. Five-sixths of the funds will be used for a massive expansion of the Zilber Scholars program, which has provided scholarship funds to law students for the past several decades. The remaining \$5 million will support the construction of the new building and, in particular, the effort of the Law School to serve as the center for discussion, debate, and, in instances, resolution of public policy issues affecting Milwaukee, the region, and places beyond.

We reproduce here Mr. Zilber's remarks, together with those of the president, Rev. Robert A. Wild, S.J., in introducing him, and the dean, Joseph D. Kearney, in response.

Introductory Remarks of Rev. Robert A. Wild, S.J., President of Marquette University

Welcome. It is especially appropriate that among our guests today to share this auspicious announcement are many of our first-year law students, who are in their second day of orientation. I am sure that Dean Kearney, the entire faculty and staff of the Law School, and your orientation leaders are working hard to make you feel welcome here at Marquette. I add my own good wishes for your success as you embark on your extraordinary journey—a challenging and rigorous time, admittedly, but one I expect you will find both intellectually and personally satisfying.



I also want to thank some of our community leaders for joining us today: our own alderman, Bob Baumann; our common council president, Willie Hines; state senator, Jeff Plale; our county executive, Scott Walker; the commissioner in charge of city development, Rocky Marcoux; and our mayor, Tom Barrett. This is definitely a community event as well as a Marquette event.

We are here today to talk about our city and the important role that higher education and our Law School play in this place we call home. Study after study emphasizes the importance of education—in creating opportunity, in spurring economic development, in addressing social issues, in helping to make a difference in our world.

Marquette University and our Law School fulfill those expectations for higher education—for our students as individuals, for our community, for our nation. Last fall and again this fall, for example, about a quarter of our freshman undergraduate class is composed of first-generation college students. In application after application, our admission officers

read stories of family sacrifice and commitment to make higher education a possibility for these promising students, because they understand that with a Marquette degree they could fulfill their dreams. I fully anticipate that some of these students will go on to law school, if that proves financially possible. Others will become entrepreneurs. Some will enter the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, the AmeriCorps, the Peace Corps, or some other service organization and so find a way to give back immediately to our larger human family. Really, that's the expectation we have for all of our graduates—that they find some way to make the world a better place by what they accomplish in their personal and professional lives.

Seated here with me on stage today is an exemplar of that sense of mission. Joe Zilber graduated from Marquette's Law School in 1941, after doing his undergraduate studies here in business administration. The son of Russian immigrants, Joe worked several jobs to put himself through Marquette and, thereafter, went into real estate and real estate development, where he achieved extraordinary success. At the same time he quietly made



Father Wild introduces Joe Zilber as Dean Kearney and others look on.

sure that others shared in that success. For example, for the past 30 years he has been helping Marquette students make ends meet through the Zilber Scholars program he established in the Law School. In fact, several of the orientation leaders present today are the beneficiaries of Mr. Zilber's generosity.

For his entire career, Joe Zilber has worked to make Milwaukee a better place—building homes, creating jobs, fostering economic development. Although his business operations have extended to seven other states, his corporate headquarters—and his heart—remain here in Milwaukee.

From the time I first met Joe, he has shared with me stories of his days at Marquette, most importantly meeting his beloved wife Vera here. Although he never was a practicing lawyer, Joe values the legal education he received at Marquette. He says that his classes taught him how to think and his legal background helped him immensely in business.

I am proud and grateful that Joe continues to see Marquette University so closely tied to the future success of our city. And now I will let him tell you more about his vision for Milwaukee's future.

Remarks of Joseph J. Zilber, L'41: New Potential for Milwaukee

For almost 90 years, I have been proud to call Milwaukee home. When I was a young boy growing up in the 2100 block of North 9th Street, Milwaukee was a booming industrial city. The giants of industry were running the machines that were helping America grow, 24 hours a day.

During my formative years, the strength of that industrial base grew many times over. When I came back from service after World War II, opportunity existed everywhere I looked. I was fortunate to take advantage of one of those opportunities and began building homes for returning GI's. Milwaukee was at the height of its expansion period. In the years that followed, competitive forces in America and later the impact of the global economy changed our city. We lost our industrial strength. In many respects, we fell behind other cities. We lost our way.

Today prospects for our city's future are brightening. Today there is more than a glimmer of hope. Each new development in the downtown area, like our Pabst project, is bringing people back as they realize the impact that new growth, opportunity, and innovation are having on young and old. We are finding renewed appreciation for the great natural resources we have in Lake Michigan and the Milwaukee River. Our city is reaching out, trying to find its new potential. We are no longer the city we once were. Today we need to look forward and concentrate on the city we can be. We need more. We need more jobs. We need more funding and a broader commitment to improving the quality of the education of our young men and women. We need to stop the brain drain caused when our best students go elsewhere in pursuit of financial and personal success.

We need to improve the commitment to efficiency at all levels of government and bipartisan public policy. We need an approach that is committed to getting things done, instead of one that points fingers. Our new potential rests in our basic core values. The strength of our ethnic heritage must converge for one purpose—to make life in Milwaukee better, richer, fuller. Our government, and those who work for it, must be efficient and responsive. That's their job. Most important of all, we need to make a singular commitment to our city. We must not be afraid to take on the difficult challenge of fixing what is wrong, including funding and improving our educational system, providing adequate health care services to all, investing in expanding the jobs that are here, and bringing new jobs to our community. We must be willing to stand up for Milwaukee and its neighbors and say we can and we will do better. Our citizens deserve no less.

I was recently blessed with two great-grandchildren. My sincere hope is that when they become young adults, they will look upon a Milwaukee that pushes the boundaries of its potential, a city that offers good paying jobs for its citizens, in a full and rich cultural mosaic. I hope they will see a city committed to enhancing its youth with great educational programs, one that respects and meets the needs of its poorest, the oldest, and the least fortunate among its citizens. It is time for us to rebuild Milwaukee.

In the time I have left, with all the energy and resources that I possess I will do what I can.

My parents came here with a dream. For me, their dream came true. What will the potential be for my new great-grandsons? When they come to see the town of my birth ten years from now, will they see that Milwaukee has achieved its new potential? I hope so—I truly hope so.

Toward that end, I have begun to make financial commitments designed to help achieve the goals that I have just outlined. The city of Milwaukee has been very good to me, my company, and my employees. These commitments are my attempt to return to the community of my birth the investment that it made in me. Our city is at a critical juncture in its history. I'm trying to do what I can to make sure that we move forward on the path to success. Each of us in our own way and with our own resources, large or small, can make a difference. Today I am announcing an initial commitment of \$50 million to charities, organizations, and institutions in our city that I believe can lead us on the path to achieving a new potential for Milwaukee. These groups can have a huge impact on the health, social, and educational well-being of our community.

I am here at my alma mater, Marquette University, to announce a \$30 million gift to the Law School, to be used to endow a permanent scholarship fund and to establish within the Law School a forum for debate on pressing public policy issues that require the immediate attention of our elected and appointed officials at every level.

The gift is part of my commitment to Marquette and to the city of Milwaukee. I will be making other announcements in the next few weeks. My goal is to stimulate other actions, both personal and monetary, large and small, to push our great city to reach its new potential. Today's gift to my alma mater is a great start to that new potential.

Finally, to you first-year law students, thank you for being here today. May you have the same success I have had. Remember, in all these years, I have never lost a case.

Of course, I've never argued one either! Thank you.



Remarks of Dean Joseph D. Kearney

Joe, this is an extraordinary gift, and Father Wild has asked me to say some words in gratitude. I am pleased to do so, especially here, on the site of the new law school.

Joe Zilber, the son of immigrants, is a Marquette lawyer and a Milwaukee legend. He became the former when he graduated as a member of our Class of 1941. He has become the latter over the decades since, particularly as he has built Towne Realty and other Zilber companies into national leaders in residential and commercial real estate.

Joe Zilber would have been entitled during this, his 90th year, to focus on the past, on a job well done. But that is not his style. Still today (and maybe even literally today), Joe engages in hours-long conference calls and meetings concerning his businesses. I know this from

my conversations with Jerry Stein, Marquette Law School Class of 1962, and Jim Janz, Marquette Law School Class of 1964 and Marquette University Trustee, who have worked with Joe for, combined, just under 90 years.

This brings me, then, to Marquette University Law School—Milwaukee's law school. Our name, in fact, was Milwaukee Law School before we had the great good fortune of being adopted in 1908 by Marquette University. In our early days as a law school, we were the place to which all of Milwaukee would come for legal education. Over the years, our reach and our ambitions have grown still further. But throughout, we have never lost sight of our mission of preparing skilled and ethical lawyers to counsel and advocate for clients or, as Milwaukee's native son Joe Zilber exemplifies, to take their legal education with them into the world of commerce and contribute to the betterment of others' lives in that way.

It is to help us support our future students that Mr. Zilber has directed the bulk of his remarkable \$30 million gift. Joe, we are deeply humbled by your investment in the future of our community.

We are inspired as well to be Milwaukee's law school in a larger sense today than in the past. I refer to our developing effort to serve as a—no, *the*—intellectual commons for this region. We seek for Marquette Law School to be the place where students, lawyers, business leaders, judges, academics, policymakers—all engaged citizens, really—come to explore and discuss public policy problems and find, perhaps, some common ground and even some solutions. We want people to say about the Law School, "That's where you take the hard problems, the ones that affect us all."

Joe Zilber's gift directly advances this goal. Eckstein Hall, our planned new building on this site, in its exterior aspect, will be noble, bold, harmonious, dramatic, confident, slightly willful, and, in a word, great. The public knows this already from the rendering that was published in May. Today I can tell you that the interior of the building will be just as extraordinary. It will inspire and convey a sense of community, for both inhabitants and visitors. Its dominant interior feature will be the Zilber Forum, a gathering and meeting space which will be the heart of the building. All aspects of the program will revolve around the Zilber Forum—research, teaching, dining, conferencing—all of the vibrant life that defines a great law school. With Father Wild's support, we are on the cusp of constructing the best law school building

in the country—*the best law school building in the country*. That, not coincidentally, is the standard that Trustee Jim Janz suggested to us before a single sketch was drawn.

Let me note in closing how fitting it is that this building will rise here, on Tory Hill, which many immigrants in decades past called home and from which they sent forth their children. How fitting then that Joe Zilber should play a key role in helping the new Marquette Law School rise on this site. Father Wild and I have both mentioned that he is the child of immigrants. It was thus perhaps not merely fortuitous but providential that, in the computer rendering of the proposed Zilber Forum which we showed Joe a few weeks ago, the architect had placed on a screen in the forum an image of the Statue of Liberty. It has a universal appeal, the architect reasoned. That is true, but he had no idea that it would particularly appeal to Joe Zilber, whom

he did not know. The episode reminded me of the phrase in Emma Lazarus's poem, not the lines inscribed on the Statue of Liberty about the huddled masses, but a phrase preceding those lines, referring to the United States as the "mother of exiles." It is the rule of law in America that has particularly helped make us a destination for immigrants, and by helping to promote it over the decades and by educating the children and grandchildren of immigrants, Marquette Law School is, like many of our sister schools, *America's* law school. But how fortunate for us that Joe Zilber's parents selected *Milwaukee* as their new home; that Joe Zilber selected Marquette University and its law school for his education; and that he has forgotten neither his parents nor his alma mater nor the community to which they belong.

Joe, on behalf of all of us at Marquette University and, indeed, if I may, all Milwaukee, thank you. •



Thank you.