

# smart classrooms

## in a class of his own



*On August 18, 2003, we dedicated the Law School's second "smart" classroom, which was made possible by a generous gift from Ralph Huiras, L'41, (center) who previously had funded a similar renovation of Room 204. The dedication was attended by faculty, staff, alumni, and students. We reprint here the remarks of Dean Kearney (left) and Mr. Huiras at the dedication ceremony, as well as excerpts of the remarks of Prof. McChrystal, L'75 (right).*

"It is imperative that those who are able contribute of their time, talent, and abundances, for this is the cornerstone not only for better educational facilities but for the betterment of all people in need."

—Ralph J. Huiras,  
L'41

Joseph D. Kearney

We are assembled today to unveil the new Room 325 and to thank our alumnus, Ralph Huiras, for the generosity that has made the room possible. Our focus in circumstances such as these is largely prospective, as we anticipate the classes and the learning that will take place in this room. But it is natural as well to be reminded of the past, and that certainly has been the case for me in today's instance—both my own past and Ralph Huiras's past.

Before coming to Marquette Law School, my previous direct experience with a Jesuit educational institution was in attending St. Ignatius for high school on the near west side of Chicago. The school had two essential buildings. One was constructed in 1870 and barely survived the Chicago fire the next year. The other was built in 1895 and even in 1978 when I started high school was still referred to routinely as "the new wing."

To say that the physical plant was not the school's calling card would be an understatement. During my freshman year, parents were invited to attend an evening in which they would sit in their children's classrooms and learn about the curriculum. During one of these sessions, one mother

inquired of the teacher something to the effect of, "How can you expect our children to learn in a building that is damp and where the windows rattle in the wind?" When the novice teacher appeared lost for a response, my father was quick to interject. He himself had taught briefly at Ignatius three decades previously, in the late 1940s. He turned to the woman in question and said something along the lines of, "My friend, it is part of the atmosphere."

And so it was. Part of the atmosphere at St. Ignatius then, part of the atmosphere at Loyola University where both of my parents received degrees, and part of the atmosphere, I am sure, at many other Jesuit institutions is a certain indifference to physical surroundings. The calling card for these schools is neither the buildings nor the neighborhoods in which they are located, but of course the type and caliber of the education that they offer.

But there are several things that stop me from maintaining that Marquette Law School can be unconcerned with its physical environment. The first is that, as much as I may have just implied that I am indifferent to my physical surroundings, that is at bottom simply not true. None of us prefers to labor in surroundings that are subpar or even unattractive. For example, I had occasion last week to tour the new Raynor Library at Marquette. It is a striking place and one that, I have no doubt, those who work or study there will enjoy.

A second reason that we cannot be indifferent to our physical surroundings is that some people care very much about them. I am told repeatedly by those involved in admissions that prospective students often remark on

Marquette Law School's physical environs relative to those of other schools. To be frank, this makes some basic sense. What do prospective students of any law school have to look at? They can, it is true, look at the rankings that *U.S. News & World Report* publishes (and at least this year we would encourage them to do so). But, beyond that, information-gathering is time-consuming and difficult, and gathering *good* information about the quality of a law faculty or a curriculum requires a greater degree of sophistication than one without any law school experience is likely to have. And so, for intensely practical reasons having to do with attracting students, we must care about the state of our building.

The third and final reason is the most important. At a certain point, a facility can become sufficiently outmoded that it becomes a hindrance to effective instruction and learning. I believe that this had become the case with the old Room 325. Because I expect that my colleague Professor Michael McChrystal will speak further to the general topic of the importance of technology in today's learning environment, I will give just one specific and essential example. Today, a large classroom without enough outlets for students to plug in their laptop computers is inadequate. This was not true just six years ago when I started teaching at Marquette, but now is an undeniable fact of educational life.

For all of these reasons, then, we are grateful to our alumnus, Ralph Huiras, for his generosity in making possible not just a renovation of Room 325 but its conversion to being, in the modern parlance, a "smart classroom." Permit me to tell you something about Ralph

**Rooms 204 and 325 are now the law school's "smart classrooms," complete with**

- **ceiling-mounted projectors**
- **electric drop-down screens**
- **computer podium**
- **flat-screen-monitor podium**
- **VCR**
- **DVD (325 only)**
- **document cameras**

**The podiums are controlled by touch-panel screens**

**Both rooms have electrical outlets at each seat**

**Room 204 has data jacks, and both rooms have wireless capability**

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Huiras, Marquette Law School Class of '41. It will not be a sketch of his career since his graduation, although it could be, because the career has been impressive. Ralph served in the Federal Bureau of Investigation for seven years after graduation and then returned to Wisconsin to practice law. This latter he did for some three decades before a bank on whose board Ralph served found itself in sudden need of a "temporary" president. His fellow board members importuned Ralph to take on the assignment, and Ralph spent the next decade devoting his primary energies not to caretaking the bank but to expanding its operations in a very successful manner.

Thereafter Ralph returned to his law practice, which he had never entirely left and which he continues. Even though I have made clear that I am not discussing his career, I will share with you this: On my first day in the deanship, on July 1st, I followed a suggestion and came in and made numerous phone calls, trying to renew acquaintances with supportive alumni whom I knew or to begin to forge relationships with some I had never met. After a number of these phone calls found none of their intended recipients, I began to wonder if I had arrived too early in the morning or whether in fact some communication had gone out rescinding my appointment. And so, I asked myself, "Who would be working in his office at this hour?" I went down my list, saw Ralph's name, called him, and found him in his office, whereupon we had an enjoyable conversation.

No, I do not want to tell you about Ralph's career or even his current work habits. I want to tell you about why Ralph has invested in Marquette Law School, funding not only our work on this classroom but also on our first "smart classroom" several years ago, Room 204. Justice Cardozo may be correct that "the springs of conduct are subtle and varied," but I know from Ralph that the following played at least a part in his decision. As I mentioned, Ralph made a sort of application to the FBI in 1941, but he had not conclusively determined, even should an offer be forthcoming, that he would accept it. What he got was not an interview but something akin to a summons from J. Edgar Hoover to report for duty in Washington, D.C.

Uncertain as to what to do, Ralph sought out the advice of

Francis Swietlik, one of my predecessors as Dean of the Marquette Law School. I do not know what advice he obtained, but what I do know is that Ralph appreciated and remembered that, in the circumstances where he needed access to and counsel of the Dean of the Law School, it was available to him. Ralph told me this story in the context of our discussing my immediate predecessor as Dean, the late Howard Eisenberg, and Ralph made clear in a succinct and understated way that such accessibility at necessary moments in students' lives is an important role of the Dean of Marquette Law School.

And so for me this room is several things. One is tangible evidence of the willingness and ability of those on the administrative side of the University to work with those of us on the academic side to improve the Law School. I wish publicly

*"Ralph*

*made clear in a succinct and understated way that such accessibility at necessary moments in students' lives is an important role of the Dean of Marquette Law School."*

to acknowledge not only our own Carol Dufek, who is charge of facilities here at the Law School, but also Tom Ganey and Kathy Kugi-Tom, names less familiar to all of you. Both Tom and Kathy play important roles in the Facilities Services department here at the University, and on behalf of all of us at the Law

School I wish to thank them for their work in getting this project completed in a timely and first-rate manner.

A second thing that this room is is a means whereby we can improve the education that we offer our students. I am always asking how we can improve, and the reality is that improvements frequently require the financial support of our alumni. And so, Ralph, I thank you for the support that you have given your future fellow alumni of Marquette Law School and for your confidence in those of us who have elected to remain within the Law School and not to depart at the end of three years.

But I thank for you for one other thing as well, and it is the third thing that this room is and for me will always be. To the extent that I have it right that one of your lasting impressions of Marquette Law School and one of the things that you most valued was your brief conversation in 1941 with Dean Swietlik when you needed his counsel, this room is a reminder to me as dean and faculty member of the significant role that we can play in our students' lives if we make ourselves available to them. Thank you, Ralph, for the room and the reminder. •

In my wildest dreams, I never envisioned making a presentation to the Dean and his fellow professors of Marquette University Law School. What Dean Kearney did not share with you is that, in that conversation in 1941, Dean Swietlik not only told me that mine was a happy problem, because I had a job, but also excused me from my last two exams at the Law School, because they were on dates when I was already to have reported to Washington, D.C.

As I have anticipated today's event, what I have reflected upon is that to be blessed by a Creator who has given innumerable abundances carries with it certain responsibilities.

My first abundance was to be born of humble Christian parents—interestingly enough, during the week that my father himself graduated from Marquette Law School and at the moment that he and my mother were at a relative's home in Milwaukee participating in graduation festivities.

My father's allegiance to Marquette led to my somewhat reluctant attendance here, as my high school friends were all going to the University of Wisconsin. As usual, my father's insistence was to my great benefit, for it laid the groundwork for my entire life.

A few of my other abundances have included my wife, Marianne, without whom I would not be here today, my colleague attorneys, who have constantly surrounded me with unbelievable expertise and friendship, and my family, which has been loyally supportive.

It is imperative that those who are able contribute of their time, talent, and abundances, for this is the cornerstone not only for better educational facilities but for the betterment of all people in need. I thank Marquette from the bottom of my heart for what it has done for me and am grateful that I can repay this debt in small measure by providing the classroom in which we stand today. •



An event such as this inspires reminiscences, and mine go back to the days before I began law school. In those days, whenever I read about what law school would be like, a single phrase stood out—Socratic dialogue. As I understood it, Socratic dialogue involved one-on-one exchanges between a teacher and a student, and these dialogues formed the heart of law school instruction. Such dialogues, as I understood them, could happen anywhere, even on a street corner, which in Milwaukee suggests a corner tavern. . . .

In preparing my remarks for today, I decided to revisit Plato's *Republic* to test whether my sense of the Socratic dialogue and its requirements still held true. . . .

One of the dialogues of the *Republic* involves an exchange between Socrates and Glaucon concerning the best methods of instruction. Socrates begins, "Well then, the study of calculation and geometry, and all the preparatory education required for dialectic must be put before them as children, and the instruction must not be given the aspect of a compulsion to learn." "Why not?" Glaucon asked. "Because," Socrates responded, "the free man ought not to learn any study slavishly. Forced

labors performed by the body don't make the body any worse, but no forced study abides in the soul." "True," Glaucon said. "Therefore, you best of men," Socrates continued, "don't use force in training the children in the subjects, but rather play. In that way you can better discern what each is naturally directed toward."

What you have given us, Ralph, is a playground, in which we can do the happy work of studying the law and discovering justice. . . .

Your gift of this smart classroom stunningly enhances at least one aspect the Socratic tradition—fully engaging students in the process of discovering what is just.

For Dean Kearney, this room is a reminder of the significant role that we as faculty can play in our students' lives if we make ourselves available to them. And so it is. This room is also a challenge. It challenges the faculty to be excellent in our teaching. This room is about excellence in learning law and seeking justice. We plan to work hard (and play hard) to meet that challenge. •