

# STARFISH ENTERPRISE

## Launch of the Andrew Center for Restorative Justice will build on decades of Janine Geske's work to reduce harm and increase hope

By Alan J. Borsuk

There's a theme to the art objects in Janine Geske's office in Eckstein Hall: starfish.

They're lovely, but that's a secondary reason for their presence. The primary reason lies in the starfish story, which goes like this: *The tide is going out, and thousands of starfish are being stranded on the beach, where they will die. A boy is picking up starfish one by one and throwing them into the water. A man comes along and asks the boy why he's bothering to do this—there are so many starfish, and there's no way the boy can save them all. The boy responds by picking one up and throwing it in the water. "I saved that one," he says.*

To Geske, L'75, the starfish story says you can look at a problem and say it's overwhelming, or you can say, "Each one that I touch and change is a success." She said she sometimes gives students gifts of glass starfish "so that you can remember that you can make a difference to this one."

She said when lawyers start working, especially on criminal cases, they encounter frustrations, particularly with juveniles. "The hope is that we're transforming everybody. I tell them, 'Life doesn't work like that,'" Geske said. Sometimes you think you have reached someone, only to have the person go out and do something horrible. "Don't get overwhelmed by failure," Geske tells the students. She said she sometimes has to tell herself the same thing. Over the past two decades,

Geske has developed and led efforts to advocate for "saving this one" through restorative justice. Restorative justice work often involves bringing together as many parties as possible who were involved in a harmful situation, having them sit together in a circle, and, through their sharing of stories and deep reflections, helping them make progress toward healing. It is often work done on a small scale—starfish by starfish—but with big goals of making communities healthier.

Thanks to a \$5 million gift from Louis Andrew, L'66, and his wife, Suzanne Bouquet Andrew, Sp'66, Marquette Law School will be the home of the Andrew Center for Restorative Justice, and the work of Geske as an internationally prominent advocate of restorative justice will become a permanent effort. (See page 8 for a story profiling the Andrews and giving more of the backstory to the creation of the Andrew Center.)

To launch the Andrew Center, Geske

Photos by Gary Porter

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has come back to work at Marquette Law School. She had retired at the end of 2014, after almost 17 years as distinguished professor of law (which itself followed 17 years as a judge and state supreme court justice), and joined the Marquette University Board of Trustees. She has stepped aside from her trustee duties while she resumes her service on the faculty and helps launch the Andrew Center.

## Envisioning the Efforts of the Andrew Center

“I’m really excited about the center,” Geske said. “I think we’re going to do some really cool things.”

Geske’s vision for the Andrew Center begins with a law school course on restorative justice, to be offered beginning in the Fall 2022 semester. She also is aiming to launch a restorative justice clinic soon, to be offered both semesters of the year, in which law students will take part in bringing together and leading the circles frequently at the heart of restorative justice. These efforts will be resumptions and broadenings of the work she previously led at the Law School, and their continuation is now ensured.

Geske also is planning to relaunch the restorative justice conferences that have been hosted by the Law School since 2004. Each conference had a theme involving major issues that divide and harm people, with a focus on what steps could address the harm. The conferences continued under Geske’s leadership even after her retirement but have been in a hiatus more recently, in part because of the COVID pandemic.

Geske and others are aiming, under the primary auspices of the Andrew Center, to hold a conference in the 2022–2023 school year that will focus on Native American healing work. Native American practices underlie some of the dynamics of restorative justice efforts, including the use of a “talking piece” that is passed around among members of a circle, with only the person holding the piece permitted to speak. Geske would like the conference to concern the multigenerational harm that is a legacy of forced boarding school programs decades ago, leading to deaths and abuses of large numbers of Native American children.

Furthermore, Geske has ambitious ideas for ways in which restorative justice efforts could help meet needs in Milwaukee and beyond. High on the



Janine P. Geske

list: Getting involved with the Milwaukee Police Department, including using restorative justice in dealing with community problems, as well as relying on restorative justice to help officers deal with the impact of what they encounter in their work. Geske said she has met with Milwaukee Police Chief Jeffrey Norman, L'02, and he is very interested in the possibilities. Indeed, in a recent appearance at the Milwaukee Rotary Club, Norman included restorative justice work as one of the initiatives he is supporting.

Geske said that the best thing would be if a restorative justice program were connected to a specific police district station. That could lead to sessions involving law enforcement, members of the surrounding communities, and others, focused on how to reduce violence.

“Let’s do some small things to get started” in involvement with policing and responding to violence, Geske said.

And there are other good ideas for restorative justice efforts. A colleague from the Minneapolis area is involved in using problem-solving approaches such as restorative justice to address the needs of military veterans, particularly those who have become involved in court proceedings. Geske said that as a part of such efforts in Milwaukee, a local attorney, Stephen DeGuire, L’19, a veteran himself, has begun to collaborate with her with respect to a problem-solving court in Milwaukee County focused on veterans. “I think it’s really important that there be attention paid to vets,” Geske said.

And beyond these areas? “I’m really excited about the different avenues that we can go down and be a presence, especially areas that are not being addressed now,” she said. And there are always issues that come up unexpectedly and lend themselves to restorative justice.

### The Past as a Guide to What Is Ahead

For a sense of the range of issues that might be addressed, look at the themes of past restorative justice conferences. In the 18 years since the first Marquette Law School restorative justice conference, some of the thorniest and most sensitive issues dividing people around the world have been the focus of the school’s conferences. Consider several examples (not in chronological order):

- *Harm, Hope, and Healing: International Dialogue on the Clergy Abuse Scandal*. In 2011, that was the theme of a two-day conference

that brought together a wide variety of people, including Catholic leaders and abuse victims, from around the world. The Archbishop of Dublin, Ireland, the Most Reverend Diarmuid Martin, received international attention for his description at the conference of how church leaders in Ireland had allowed abuse to fester. “The children on the street knew, but those in charge seemed not to notice,” he said. “The Archdiocese of Dublin got it spectacularly wrong.”

Marie Donahue, a retired deputy superintendent of the Boston Police Department and herself a survivor of abuse, urged everyone who can to “do something.” Stop being sorry for the priests who are perpetrators, she said, and “stop being so gentle with them.”

- *The Death Penalty Versus Life Without Parole: Comparing the Healing Impact on Victims’ Families and the Community*. That was the subject of a conference in 2013 that brought together people from around the United States to focus on the lives of family members in the aftermath of a loved one’s murder.

Paula Kurland, whose daughter was murdered in Texas, said, “I was a walking dead person for 12 years” after the murder. But two weeks before the murderer was executed, she took part in a five-hour session with him. That “was life-saving for me,” she said. “It gave me back my life. I was able to put Jonathan [the murderer] where he needed to be [in my mind],” she said. “I walked out of there a different person, a free person.”

- *The Power of Restorative Justice in Healing Trauma in Our Community*. The 2018 conference included a one-hour documentary film of a restorative justice circle involving law enforcement members, crime victims, and members of victims’ families. In that film and in panel discussions that followed, the impact of trauma, stress, and violence on law enforcement officers was described in candid terms, with an emphasis on the need for all who are part of dealing with violence and crime to find ways to cope and heal.
- *Bullying in Schools: Teaching Respect and Compassion Through Restorative Practices*. The 2009 conference included candid descriptions from three Milwaukee high school students who described incidents of bullying they had been involved in. They gave their thoughts on

what motivated bullies. One said he had been on both sides: “When I get bullied, I usually go bully someone else, take my anger out on someone else.”

In a keynote address, Brenda Morrison of the Centre for Restorative Justice at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia, Canada, praised efforts such as the Violence Free Zone program in Milwaukee Public Schools, which aims to help teens deal with personal issues constructively. She offered the three *R*'s of restorative justice work: respect for people, responsibility for behavior, and repair for harm done.

- *Restoring Faith in Government.* Reflecting the tenor of the emerging times, perhaps even in an early way, the 2012 restorative justice conference focused on efforts to increase civility and cooperation in government. News commentator John Avlon, in a keynote address, called for moderates “to play offense from the center,” emphasizing what unites Americans and not what divides them.
- *Restorative Justice and Human Trafficking—From Wisconsin to the World.* The 2015 conference dealt with the global crisis of human trafficking and ways restorative justice practices could help repair the harm done to victims. “I want to believe that this can end,” Sharmere McKenzie, a former victim who became an advocate for victims, told a capacity audience in Eckstein Hall’s largest room. “Let’s do this together,” she said. “Are you with me?” The audience clearly was.
- *Making It Personal.* Amid the pandemic in 2020, an in-person conference was not possible. Instead, four moving and thoughtful sessions were hosted, and then posted on the Law School’s website, in which leaders of restorative justice efforts and participants in prior conferences described their work and what it meant to them.

In one of the sessions, Geske said that she had found that there could be great healing from restorative justice circles, even among people who had committed major crimes. She said circles are almost “a sacred process,” and added, “To me, the lack of listening in our culture is the foundation of many of our troubles. It is only by listening to people’s experiences—not their opinions, but their experiences—that you learn to walk in their shoes.”

In addition to her work at Marquette, Geske has become a prominent figure internationally in advocating for restorative justice. She has given keynote addresses and played leading roles in conferences and similar events in countries around the world, including Ireland, Germany, and Turkey. She engages each year with the University of Amsterdam in the Netherlands. After a keynote address in 2018 in Germany, she wrote, “Regardless of one’s language, restorative justice translates as hope.”

All of the conferences and other aspects of the Restorative Justice Initiative (as it was called before the establishment of the Andrew Center) involved major issues straining, if not tearing, the fabric of lives and communities. In all of the work, the emphasis was on what can be done to make things better. The Andrew Center will deal with issues such as these and many more—and the theme of making things better will be a constant.

### **Geske’s Path to Restorative Justice**

The roots of restorative justice work at Marquette Law School go back particularly to the early 1990s, when Geske was a judge of the Milwaukee County Circuit Court. In 1993, Tommy Thompson, the governor of Wisconsin, appointed her to the Wisconsin Supreme Court, and the next year she was elected to a 10-year term.

But a different path was unfolding for her, if not altogether evident at the time. Around 1990, a woman who was teaching classes to prisoners at the Wisconsin state prison in Green Bay persistently asked Geske to visit her class. Geske agreed, saying she would make only one visit. The woman and an attorney/minister were using restorative justice approaches to help prisoners. It turned into what Geske calls “a transformational experience.” She returned to the prison frequently to conduct circles, and she brought others with her.

In late 1996, after several years on the state supreme court, Geske went on a trip with Catholic lawyers (and Marquette Law School’s Dean Howard B. Eisenberg) to the Dominican Republic. It became a time that accelerated a process of reflecting on what she should do. After a year of continuing discernment, she concluded that she should take a path focused on restorative justice, peace building, and mediation. “I felt I could give more in that field than in judicial decision-making,” she said.

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She left the court in 1998 and soon joined the faculty of the Law School. After Eisenberg's death in 2002, Geske became interim dean, as a service to her alma mater, until a national search could be conducted, leading to the appointment of Joseph D. Kearney, a faculty member, as dean the next year.

At that point, Geske asked Kearney if she could launch what would be called the Restorative Justice Initiative. He agreed, opening the door to both the conferences described above and the essential ways in which students engaged with the program. In addition to a course introducing students to the history, philosophy, and techniques of the restorative justice movement, the curriculum included opportunities for a number of students to be involved in victim-offender conferencing and juvenile justice circles. Other courses have touched upon restorative justice more or less directly, according to their primary subject matter.

The Andrew Center is intended to enable the Law School not merely to relaunch its restorative justice work, both public-facing and curricular, but also to make it last—indeed, as Geske said with relish, in perpetuity.

Kearney says that helping identify an eventual successor for Geske is now among his most important duties. “We launched the initiative all those years ago in substantial part because of our confidence in Professor Geske,” he recalled. “This is someone whose credibility with respect to the sanctions of the justice system is hard-earned as a trial judge. In the wrong hands, restorative justice efforts might revictimize people. In the right ones, they can help remake lives and communities.”

Geske said she loves the metaphor in the starfish story. When she gives glass starfish to people, “I really do hope that they put it on their desk or their bookshelf. It's a nice reminder that you have to celebrate the successes.”

One has to take on faith, or at any rate one must hope, that the boy in the story continued on to help other starfish, as many as he could. It's good to say, “I saved that one.” But, as is the goal of the Andrew Center for Restorative Justice, it's even better to go forward, saying, “And that one. And that one. And that one. . . .”

## A QUIET APPROACH, RESOUNDING ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Experts in rising to the occasion—that's Louis J. Andrew, Jr., and Suzanne Bouquet Andrew.

Louie and Sue (as everyone calls them) have stepped up to do good things so many times. Stepped up to build good lives, a good family, a successful law practice and other businesses. They stepped up to leading roles in charitable work that has benefited many others.

Opportunity knocked many times; not only did they answer, but they did so warmly, intelligently, constructively, and generously. Their style has been low-key; their accomplishments major. Or as Joseph D. Kearney, dean of Marquette Law School, put it, “Louie and Sue are a wonderful mix of ambition and humility.”

We will not seek to capture a lifetime here, but permit us to give some important examples involving Marquette University Law School.

Louie graduated from Marquette Law School in 1966 and returned to his hometown, Fond du Lac, Wis., about 65 miles north of Milwaukee. He began a law career focusing on estate planning, probate, and general business law. As an alumnus, he had a good relationship with the Law School in the following 30 years or so, but, by his own description, he wasn't very involved.

In the mid-1990s, Louie and Sue, a Minneapolis–St. Paul native who herself had graduated from Marquette in 1966 with a degree in speech, attended a Marquette Law School event where an unlikely new dean, Howard B. Eisenberg, spoke, describing his vision for pursuing the school's Ignatian mission. Louie and Sue were impressed. Sue said, “Howard was the best person I ever heard speak about Catholic education.” (Eisenberg, we might note, was Jewish, although he had a whole, well, litany of reasons that he enjoyed reciting to show the unlikelihood of his deanship.)

Eisenberg did one other important thing at that event: He asked people to help him develop the vision for the Law School. The Andrews stepped up, literally, approaching Eisenberg after the event to tell him that they wanted to help.

In the following years, Louie became the first chair of the newly created Law School Advisory Board and then of the board's executive committee. He later would become deeply involved in developing plans for a new Law School building. He was one of eight people who served on the committee steering the design and development of Eckstein Hall, which became the Law School's home in 2010.

The Andrews were interested not just in Marquette Law School's structural or physical development but its substantive growth—initially so, as often, for a personal reason: Through Eisenberg, the Andrews had met and developed a friendship with Janine Geske, a former member of the Wisconsin Supreme Court who had joined the faculty of Marquette Law School,