

Alumni Awards Ceremony Brings Tears, Gratitude, and Calls to Service

How important is an alumni achievement award? Some might think of it as just a nice part of the annual life of an institution such as Marquette University.

Don't tell that to any of the four Marquette lawyers honored at a ceremony at Eckstein Hall on April 24, 2025. The meaningful and emotional moments that occurred during the program underscored what the awards meant to them.

"Thank you for this honor, which means more than I can ever tell you, but you can tell that from the crying," said Mary L. Ferwerda, L'11, who received the Howard B. Eisenberg Service Award.

Christian Bray, L'14, who received the Charles W. Mentkowski Sports Law Alumnus of the Year Award, said, "This award means more than anybody could really know."

Joseph E. Tierney III, L'66, receiving the Lifetime Achievement Award, said the honor "validates probably the second most important decision I ever made, and that is to be a lawyer." His extended family, across several generations, has been deeply engaged with Marquette Law School. "That makes this honor extremely important to me, and I hope to live up to it," Tierney said.

And Mark A. Cameli, L'85, recipient of the Alumnus of the Year Award, recounted with emotion the roles in his life of his immigrant parents and of his wife, Sharon, as well as a long-ago mentor who opened his eyes to possibilities for his life. "You cannot want something you cannot see, you cannot aspire to be something you do not know," Cameli said, urging people to bring vision and hope to others.

Marquette University President Kimo Ah Yun praised the four lawyers for careers and lives showing Marquette's mission—succinctly stated as excellence, faith, leadership, and service—in action.

Mark Cameli, Alumnus of the Year

Presenting the awards, Dean Joseph D. Kearney said Cameli represents clients "with civility and respect, not just toward those on his side and the courts, but for his opponents, both parties and their lawyers." This can be a challenge, given the context: In the words of one of his former partners, Cameli's work as a lawyer "is to help individuals and businesses in times of great crisis."

A native of Chicago Heights, Ill., Cameli is a former federal prosecutor and now longtime criminal defense and civil litigator in Wisconsin. For the past 27 years, he has been with the Reinhart Boerner Van Deuren firm, based in Milwaukee. In the context of challenging cases and situations, in the words of a partner, Cameli "is an unfailing voice for calm, for fairness, for doing the right thing."

Cameli's broader effectiveness as a lawyer and civic leader, Kearney said, offering examples, "often has to do with putting other people— younger colleagues, in particular—in a position for accomplishment and success."

In accepting the award, Cameli said of his late parents, who immigrated from Italy, "I'm the son of a machinist and a brilliant, self-educated mother." He said, "They struggled but persevered and gave what they were capable of giving. . . . My four siblings and I have no journey without their journey, no grit without their grit, no dreams without their dreams." And he praised his wife: "No Sharon, no Mark as alumnus of the year."

He especially praised a mentor whom he named only as "Tom." The mentor encouraged him to go to college, guided him in getting there, and opened Cameli's eyes to what kind of life he could lead. "I wanted to be like him," Cameli said. He has aimed to play that role for others. "We are indeed our brothers' and sisters' keepers," he said. "Everyone in this room—everyone in this room—can do this for others." Cameli said that if his story causes one person to take such a role with someone, "this evening could not have been more important to me."

Joseph E. Tierney, III

"I've not done a lot of job hopping," Tierney said. Indeed. He joined the law firm known now as Meissner Tierney Fisher & Nichols in 1967 and has worked there ever since, except for a period of leave during military service. Kearney praised Tierney's expertise as a tax lawyer—as a threshold matter. "Suffice it to say that a tax lawyer with a practice such as Joe's cannot succeed at a high level or across a sustained period of time without rather exceptional 'soft skills,'" Kearney said. He described Tierney as "intensely interested in people and in serving them."

For more than 10 years, Tierney has been an

adjunct professor at the Law School, teaching a course on sports industry taxation issues. Tierney and others in his family have been longtime valuable supporters of the sports law program at the Law School, and Tierney has been a supporter of youth sports programs in Milwaukee—soccer, in particular.

In presenting the award, Kearney described generations of involvement of Tierney family members in Marquette Law School, going back to Joseph E. Tierney, L'11 (that's 1911). "Yet there is only one Joseph E. Tierney III, and we at Marquette University Law School—like your clients, your fellow lawyers in your firm, and others in the profession—have learned, directly and uniquely, from you," Kearney said. "For you do not just reflect Marquette University's mission of excellence, faith, leadership, and service, but you help teach it. I consider myself among your students."

Tierney said, "It's a privilege to be a lawyer and to practice law." He said his time at the Law School "was tremendously enlightening." He said he learned that practicing law "was demanding in the way that would affect people's lives."

Mary L. Ferwerda

Ferwerda grew up in South Dakota, earned bachelor's and master's degrees from Creighton University, and came to Marquette University in 2001, to work in student affairs. Soon thereupon, "while working at Marquette," Kearney said, "Mary demonstrated her characteristic tenacity by pursuing a law degree in our part-time evening program." Even all of that was not enough: Ferwerda soon started volunteering as a student at the Marquette Volunteer Legal Clinic, an experience she characterized as "life-changing."

After graduation, she became the first director of the Mobile Legal Clinic, a project of Marquette Law School and the Milwaukee Bar Association, and subsequently became executive director of the Milwaukee Justice Center (MJC). A partnership among Marquette Law School, the Milwaukee Bar Association, and the Milwaukee County Clerk of Court, the MJC serves people involved pro se in legal proceedings in Milwaukee County. Kearney quoted one person who nominated Ferwerda for the Law School's Howard B. Eisenberg Service Award by praising how her "servant's heart" was paired with tenacity and a fighting spirit. Ferwerda was recently named chief deputy clerk of the Milwaukee County Circuit Court.

Ferwerda said, "I stand here truly full of



gratitude for Dean Eisenberg's legacy, for becoming a Marquette lawyer, for everyone who has been part of my journey and that of the Milwaukee Justice Center. . . . This work has been the honor of my life."

Christian Bray

Bray graduated with a degree in sports management from Texas A&M University and was attracted to Marquette Law School by the sports law program. Kearney recounted Bray's career path since graduating from the Law School in 2014: "Her first stop was in New Haven, at Yale University, where she soon became assistant athletic director for compliance and, shortly thereafter, the university's senior woman administrator in athletics, an important position required by the NCAA Constitution." She went on to Harvard University, where she oversees compliance and is responsible for supervision of sports, including women's rugby, men's fencing, women's fencing, women's volleyball, men's and women's cross-country, and men's and women's track and field.

"Christian has excelled in bringing her legal education and her relational skills to bear on her work with students, coaches, fellow administrators, and others to support Harvard's student-athletes in their education, development, and growth," Kearney said. He described how Bray also has remained an active participant in Marquette sports law program.

In her remarks, Bray said, "There are so many people from Marquette and from Marquette Law specifically who have impacted my life in big ways and small. . . . I could truly fill this entire program with 'thank you's' to all those who have impacted me." She particularly noted four individuals at the Law School: Stephanie Nikolay, director of admissions and recruitment, and Professors Paul Anderson, Vada Lindsey, and Matt Mitten.

"I'm overwhelmed with gratitude," Bray said. ■

Left to right:
Marquette University
President Kimo
Ah Yun joins Mark
Cameli, Joseph E.
Tierney III, Mary
Ferwerda, Christian
Bray, and Law
Alumni Association
Board President
Jonathan Ingrisano
at the alumni awards
ceremony on
April 24, 2025.