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IN MEMORIAM: PROFESSOR JEFFREY WITTENBERG

Remembering a Renowned Teacher, Inspirational Human Being, and Cherished Friend

Professor William T. Corbett, '75*

On April 12, 2018, with the passing of Professor Jeffrey Wittenberg, Suffolk University Law School lost one of the finest and most beloved and revered professors to have graced its classrooms since its founding in 1906. Professor Wittenberg began his teaching career at Suffolk in 1986. He taught Contracts, Commercial Law, Products Liability, International Sales Law, Gaming Law, and Sports Law. His courses in Contracts and Commercial Law were particularly legendary. The thousands of students Jeff taught during his thirty two years at Suffolk Law understood and appreciated how committed he was to their success as law students. They loved and respected him, as did his colleagues. Students repeatedly selected Jeff to receive the annual Outstanding Professor award. At a memorial service held on October 1, 2018, the law school took the unprecedented step of permanently placing a beautiful commemorative plaque and picture of Professor Wittenberg at the entrance to his office suite in recognition of the esteem in which he is held and as a perpetual reminder of all that he brought to the law school, its students, and legal education over the course of his career.

Jeff's initial career aspirations were not centered on law. In the mid 1960's, Jeff and his newly married wife, Diane, to whom he was married for more than fifty years, left Ohio and headed west for California so that he might realize his dream of screenwriting. Jeff was 21 and Diane 19 and, although neither had yet completed college, their youthful optimism and energy as well as their commitment to and belief in one another propelled them forward on their exciting journey.

* A.B., Providence College, M.B.A., Boston College, J.D., Suffolk University, LL.M., Boston University. Professor Corbett has been a member of the Suffolk University Law School faculty since 1976. He is a former Acting Dean and Associate Dean. He created the law school's J.D./LL.M. (Taxation) program and currently serves as its academic director.

Jeff completed his undergraduate work at San Francisco State College in 1968. In 1972, he graduated 3rd in his class from the University Of California Hastings College Of Law, having been a member of the Order of the Coif and having served on the Hastings Law Journal. Upon graduation from Hastings, Jeff, Diane, and their now three children headed east so that Jeff could begin his yearlong clerkship with the Minnesota Supreme Court which was then followed by an associateship with the Chicago law firm, *Mayer, Brown & Platt*. It was in Chicago that Jeff discovered his true professional passion, law school teaching. For three years Jeff taught Contracts and Sales and Negotiable Instruments at John Marshall Law School. During those years Jeff collaborated with two co-authors on the textbook, *Contract Law: Contemporary Cases, Comments and Problems*. Jeff was then recruited to join the faculty at the University of Mississippi Law Center where he taught for six years. While in Mississippi, with Jeff's encouragement and assistance and with a fourth child now a part of their family, Diane completed both her undergraduate work as well as law school. Prior to leaving the University of Mississippi Law Center, Jeff took a visiting professorship at University of Pittsburgh. Jeff's longtime friend and co-author, Richard Perlmutter, urged him to consider accepting a position on the Suffolk University Law School Faculty. Jeff took the suggestion and for the next thirty two years, he called Suffolk Law School his professional home. Jeff truly loved teaching at Suffolk and, indeed, two of his children eventually enrolled in and graduated from the law school.

It was in the classroom where Jeff was truly in a league of his own. In fact, a former student, who only recently learned of Jeff's passing, sent a note to Richard Perlmutter describing how Jeff's commitment to his students' learning had been a source of inspiration to him that he had never forgotten. That inspiring message was long lasting. The student had been in Jeff's Contracts class forty years earlier when Jeff first began his law teaching career in Chicago. Students often would comment that on the first day of his Contracts or Commercial Law class they might feel trepidation or anxiety, but very quickly understood how fortunate they were to be in his class and how much they adored him and learned from him. Colleagues enjoyed joking with Jeff about stopping by his office five or six hours before the start of a class that he had previously taught more than fifty times only to find him deep in preparation for that next class. Jeff's perfection in the classroom was the result of this work ethic and his dedication to his students. He took great pride in all that he did at Suffolk and constantly examined his own presentations with the goal of always improving. He firmly believed that students paid for and deserved his very best.

Jeff's sense of humor was one of his most endearing traits. He was famously funny, but never mean spirited. Many loved to recount the story of the student who came to one of Jeff's first classes at the start of a new semester not having previously read an assigned case. When called upon by Jeff to present the case to the class, the student confessed to his lack of preparation. Jeff very kindly

told the student not to worry and that he and the other students would not mind sitting there and waiting while the student read and then presented the case. After a minute or two, Jeff asked the student, “Wouldn’t it have been easier if you did your class preparation last night?” Jeff’s students quickly learned the importance of thorough preparation and enjoyed the spirited classroom discussions that invariably resulted.

Jeff’s humor was not confined to the classroom. Occasionally, he enjoyed poking a bit of fun at those in authority, including law school administration. At Jeff’s memorial service in October, Dean Perlman recalled how Jeff and he often would see one another on their daily train commute. On one of those occasions, many months after Dean Perlman had been appointed dean, Jeff walked up to him and said, “I want you to know that I think you are doing a really terrific job as dean.” Dean Perlman thanked Jeff for his very kind remark, to which Jeff replied, “Yeah, but just so you know, I still hate you.” They both shared a good laugh. That was vintage Jeff.

Jeff brought much goodness to the world and particularly to those whose lives he touched. His students loved the enthusiasm, humor, thoughtfulness, and knowledge he brought to every class. His colleagues uniformly admired his dedication to all aspects of his work and recognized his remarkable communication skills that helped him be so effective, instructive, and entertaining. His friends recognized that, with Jeff, they had a loyal and very special friend. They often mentioned how uplifted and positive they felt after having a conversation with him and they dearly appreciated that special gift and understood how fortunate they were to have had Jeff as their friend.

Jeff’s family clearly is what meant everything to him, and he to them. He often spoke of his deep love for them and of his enormous pride in them personally, as well as their many accomplishments. Jeff’s untimely passing leaves an emptiness in the hearts of many that can only partially be filled with the passing of time and by cherishing the memory of his graciousness, goodwill, and caring smile. All those who knew Jeff are grateful for the treasure of having had him grace their lives.