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JOSEPH W. BELLACOSA, OUR MAN FOR ALL SEASONS

ANDREW J. SIMONS†

Joseph W. Bellacosa was a student at St. John's University School of Law from January 1959 to June 1961, and he has served as Dean of that same institution of higher learning from July 2000 to August 2004. In between those two stopovers at St. John's he has celebrated a legal career that has included the practice of law; a multi-year judicial clerkship to his mentor, patron and friend, the Honorable Marcus G. Christ; an additional layover at St. John's Law School for several years as a young professor of Criminal Law and Civil Procedure; stints as Chief Clerk and Counsel to the New York Court of Appeals; Chief Administrative Judge of the State of New York; and ultimately Associate Judge of the New York State Court of Appeals, the State's highest court. What a career to be jammed into an apparently brief 43 years!

Friends and colleagues from several of these varied aspects of Dean Bellacosa's career are contributing their own words of tribute to him in this issue of the *St. John's Law Review*. Please allow this tribute to focus upon his four years at the helm of our beloved law school, four years in which the law school has gone from an institution with an unsettled vision of itself to one in which all of the constituent units—faculty, students, administration, staff and alumni—are working collaboratively and collegially to move St. John's into the top echelon of law schools in the country. The paramount reason for this palpable progress is, of course, Joseph Bellacosa.

When Judge Bellacosa retired from the Court of Appeals in the year 2000 to become Dean of the School of Law, he brought instant stature and stability to his *Alma Mater*. What has

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happened at the law school during his leadership tenure? The list of accomplishments is staggering:

- The entering credentials of the students are the highest ever.
- Development contributions and the percentage of donors have increased by multiples.
- Many scholars have been added to the faculty, especially women and persons of color.
- The financial relationship between the School of Law and the University, previously based on a financial formula unduly burdensome to the law school, is now embodied in a five-year plan which provides for strategic growth and maximum utilization of resources.
- The scholarly contributions of the law school faculty have increased markedly and received international recognition.
- The bar passage rate has continually increased (to 85%) and we expect it to go higher.
- The academic curriculum has been substantially revised to provide for greater rigor and flexibility.
- Clinical opportunities for the students have been dramatically increased.

That this list of accomplishments under Dean Bellacosa's leadership is so impressive should not be surprising. Demonstrating the leadership qualities for which his role model, St. Thomas More, was well known, Joseph Bellacosa, when he was Chief Clerk of the Court of Appeals, presided over the total revision of the Court of Appeals procedures (it went from a "cold" bench to a "hot" bench), and assisted Chief Judge Brietel in accomplishing the passage and implementation of a totally new method for selecting Court of Appeals judges (requiring a constitutional amendment to change the elective system to an appointive one). When he later became Chief Administrative Judge, he presided over the implementation in New York State of the Individual Assignment System in 1986, perhaps the most far-reaching change in the New York system of justice in the last 200 years. And he recently received from the Court nine volumes of his erudite and well-crafted judicial opinions (many,

it is true, in dissent, showing his independence as well as his scholarship!). We have been blessed to have this man of such ability and accomplishment at the helm of the law school during all the seasons of the last four years.

And it has been my distinct privilege and pleasure to serve with him during this period of time as the Associate Academic Dean. Four years ago, when I asked him what the duties of Academic Dean were, he replied simply, "To implement the program of legal education at the law school." A daunting task, but of course I had a gifted, experienced, and dedicated ally in carrying out this charge. To my knowledge, no one in the last four years at the law school has worked harder, put in more hours, with greater results, than Dean Bellacosa. He is an inspiring leader. He is professional in every regard. He engenders respect, not because he commands it, but because it is unavoidable given his persona. He is a man of great compassion and wisdom and is in every aspect devoted to the mission of St. Vincent De Paul and the example of St. Thomas More. He and his sweet wife are now deserving of some relaxation, and I wish them much good health and happiness in all the seasons to come. I have a most gratifying premonition that St. John's has not seen the last of the Honorable Joseph W. Bellacosa. *Ad multos annos.*

