

Clearing the way

New board chair looks forward to representing Alumni

ASU Alumni News Association

By Liz Massey

Brian LaCorte '85 B.S., incoming chair of the ASU Alumni Association board of directors, predicts that Arizona State University will see its prominence as a major public research institution increase in the next five years - if it can succeed in resolving one significant challenge.

"The challenge for this magnificent New American University will be to make a college education accessible and affordable," said LaCorte, who is a partner with the Phoenix law firm Ballard Spahr. "To put it simply, higher education must be accessible to students with limited funds for college ... the future depends on that, period."

LaCorte knows what he's talking about. Raised by parents of modest means, he was able to attend ASU and receive his justice studies degree in 1985 because of a full-ride scholarship offered by the university's Leadership Scholarship Program. He said that LSP offered a "life-changing" opportunity for him.

"I interacted with great fellow student leaders and national leaders," he said. "I learned every conceivable aspect of leadership. It was, and is, an amazing program."

The groundwork for his law degree from George Washington University was laid at ASU, he says, where he learned the basics of clear thinking- and clear explaining.

"My undergraduate experience at ASU taught me about life," he said. "It was the fundamental basis for my professional career in law. Successful trial attorneys must find the ability to relate to everyday people. They must explain complex principles to folks from all walks of life. The professors at ASU taught me how to learn, and in turn, how to teach, how to explain, and how to persuade-whether to judges, jurors, or clients. Thirty years after my ASU graduation, I still use those skills each and every day."

During his student days, LaCorte was involved with the Devils' Advocates, the campus tour guide student organization, and he said he was honored to be an ambassador for the university as a student. It was that same spirit of service that helped Dr. Christine K. Wilkinson, president and CEO of the Alumni Association, tap LaCorte nearly 30 years after graduation to serve on the organization's board.

"When I discussed the possibility of getting involved with the association with Dr. Wilkinson a few years ago, I experienced a refresh of applying for the Leadership Scholarship some 30 years earlier," he said. "She said come back and make a difference at Arizona State. I couldn't resist the chance to do so."

One of the main duties LaCorte will oversee during his term in office, which will run through June 30, 2017, is the Alumni Association's transition from a dues-based membership model to one that is centered on philanthropy.

"I am excited that we are restructuring the membership of the Alumni Association to bring more benefits to members, to expand our base, and to engage more ASU alums," he said. "I am looking to help shepherd that new structure through to successful implementation It's an exciting time to be a Sun Devil."

Beyond managing the membership model transition, LaCorte said he's interested also in educating alumni about the broad range of programs and services that the Alumni Association offers to Sun Devils.

"From discounts to career help, from unique alumni travel to member appreciation events, from Sparky plates and the related Legacy Scholarships to networking and the MyASU Online community, we are providing more programs and benefits than many alumni associations," he said.

This full-service approach to alumni engagement is important, he asserted, because alumni achievement ultimately forms a large part of university achievement.

"Alumni are a key component to the success of the university," he said. "Our alumni personify the importance of the degree conferred. They are more than a source for giving, they are an extension of the university's success."

***Brian W. LaCorte** is a partner in Ballard Spahr's Phoenix office with a nationwide practice that focuses on patent litigation before federal district courts and before the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit. He has vast experience in trademark infringement and trademark anti-counterfeiting matters, including representation of high-profile intellectual property owners involved in national events and programs.*