WHAT'S IN A NAME?
FOR UF LAW — A VISION OF GREATNESS

The largest cash gift in University of Florida history — creating a $20 million endowment — will enable the college to compete with the very finest public law schools in America.

In 1993, Pensacola trial lawyer Fredric G. Levin conceived the idea of amending the Florida Medicaid Recovery Act to allow the state to sue the tobacco industry for related healthcare expenses. He shared the idea with Florida statesman W.D. Childers, dean of the Florida Senate. Childers liked it well enough to insist they share it with then-Governor Lawton Chiles the next morning. Chiles not only embraced the idea, but proceeded to usher it through both houses of the Florida Legislature.

"Governor Chiles said it was the most significant act in his almost 50 years of politics," Levin said in a January interview with the Florida Lawyer in his Pensacola office. "The governor said, 'This is payback time if we can get it done.'" Levin added that law Professor Richard Daynard of Northeastern University called the act the most significant piece of healthcare legislation ever passed in this country.

Governor Chiles [JD 1955] then asked Levin to pick a "dream team" of lawyers to represent the state in its suit against Big Tobacco. He selected lawyers from 11 law firms, who, along with lawyers representing the states of Mississippi and Texas, generated a settlement in excess of $200 billion. The money will reimburse the three states for healthcare expenses and provide funds for educational efforts to reduce youth...
smoking. This past April, one year after Florida began a statewide educational campaign against the use of tobacco products, the Florida Department of Health reported significant declines in smoking among middle and high school students.

"I told Governor Chiles that if we ever got this money, which is a pretty good payback — it’s going to end up being about a trillion dollars — for causing us to start smoking, then I was going to make every effort to get all the tobacco lawyers to give back to the young people of Florida. The fees were announced late on a Friday afternoon; Governor Chiles died the next morning." Lawyers’ fees for the Florida case will amount to approximately $3.5 billion over a 10- to 25-year period.

In January, as has been widely publicized throughout Florida and the nation, Levin kept his promise to the late Governor Chiles by giving his first $10 million in attorney’s fees to the University of Florida College of Law. He gave another $2 million to his family foundation for youth in Northwest Florida. The gift to the law school led university officials to name the college in Levin’s honor.

Those closest to the law school’s financial affairs say the gift is the long-awaited, much needed prescription for major advancement in the nation’s legal academy. It will increase the college’s endowment by $20 million when matched with state funds, tripling the private dollars available each year to support students, faculty, programs and new initiatives.

The college becomes the fourth UF college or school named for a major benefactor, joining a growing number of colleges nationwide being named for donors who enable them to advance in quality and stature. The Levin gift is the second-largest ever to a public law school when matched with state funds, and more than three times larger than any gift in the college’s 90-year history.

Combined with annual donations from alumni, law firms, friends, corporations and foundations, plus annual income generated by more than 70 endowed funds (professorships, scholarships, lectureships and competitions), the total law school endowment now ranks among the top six public law schools in America (see table). The Levin endowment alone will generate in excess of $1 million annually in unrestricted funds for students, faculty and programs. For the past 10 years, the college has operated with approximately $500,000 annually in unrestricted private funds.

A transforming event

"This truly is the transforming event for this law school," said Associate Dean for Academic Affairs George Dawson, former president of the national Law School Admission Council. "Not only does this gift transform us financially, but it enables us to think differently about our potential and our place in American legal education. It allows us to take a step up in the hierarchy."

UF JOINS THE TOP SIX

Following are public U.S. law schools with the largest private endowments. Figures provided by individual schools, July 1999.

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<tr>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
<th>TOTAL ENDOWMENT &amp; RESERVES</th>
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<tr>
<td>University of Michigan</td>
<td>$155,182,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>University of California-Berkeley</td>
<td>152,704,218</td>
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<tr>
<td>University of Texas</td>
<td>145,900,000</td>
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<td>University of Virginia</td>
<td>117,030,392</td>
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<td>University of Minnesota</td>
<td>60,996,173</td>
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<td>University of Florida (with Levin gift)</td>
<td>42,162,033 (with State Match expected 1999-2000)</td>
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More than 150 family members and friends attended the Levin gift announcement in January. From left, Campaign Chairman Warren Cason (J.D. 1950), President John Lombardi, Levin, Dean Matasar, and former Gov. Reubin Askew (J.D. 1956), who served as master of ceremonies. President Lombardi said Levin’s gift was an extraordinary example of the commitment needed to build great institutions of higher education.
“THIS TRULY IS THE TRANSFORMING EVENT FOR THIS LAW SCHOOL. NOT ONLY DOES THIS GIFT TRANSFORM US FINANCIALLY, BUT IT ENABLES US TO THINK DIFFERENTLY ABOUT OUR POTENTIAL AND OUR PLACE IN AMERICAN LEGAL EDUCATION.”
— GEORGE DAWSON, ASSOCIATE DEAN FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

The Fredric G. and Marilyn Kapner Levin Endowment Fund arrived at a critical point in the development of the college. Levin’s gift is “the big one” the college has been waiting for in the quest to provide the finest legal education in America.

“This gift will allow us to do things that other law schools only dream about,” said Dean Richard A. Matasar. “It is an investment in quality people and programs, which ties in beautifully with our emphasis on professionalism and quality. It also will serve as a fulcrum for efforts to raise funds for our new academic building, which is the next milestone in our advancement, and one that will allow our students to study and work alongside practicing lawyers, judges and teachers.” Plans call for the new building to be erected adjacent to Holland and Bruton-Geer Halls on the Holland Law Center campus.

The gift will advance numerous initiatives launched since Matasar’s arrival three years ago. The college has been developing a variety of academic centers, giving UF law students the opportunity to obtain both the broad knowledge required of a legal professional plus a head start on the expertise needed to excel in today’s highly specialized world of practice. With existing and proposed centers, institutes and programs, focused on professionalism, tax law, intellectual property law, international and comparative law, alternative dispute resolution, race relations, environmental and land use law, and estates and trusts practice, the college is poised to take its curriculum to the next level.

Besides supporting those efforts and other new initiatives, the Levin gift will allow the college to add faculty, staff and specialized equipment where needed, and will assist in the recruitment of renowned teachers through the “David Levin Professorship,” Fred Levin’s gift to the brother who encouraged him to pursue a career in law.

Tampa lawyer Warren Cason, who chairs the college’s capital campaign, said at the gift announcement in January, “It’s almost unimaginable what the $500,000 a year in annual alumni giving combined with the $1 million generated by this gift will do for this law school. It gives us money that’s just unavailable otherwise. We’re so proud of the fact that you did this Fred.

“We started this campaign off in 1995 with a target of $17 million. When Rick Matasar got on board, the goal went up to $27 million; it’s now at $29 million. With state matches, that will mean $39 million for the College of Law. By the time the campaign is over, we will have endowed funds in excess of $50 million. Very few law schools in the country can say that.”

UF President John Lombardi said the Levin gift was an extraordinary example of the commitment needed to build great institutions of higher education. “No one in American higher education can expect the taxpayers alone to provide the resources to build high quality institutions of higher education. If what you’re about is creating an education good enough to compete with the very best anywhere in America, then we have to look to the private sector for people with a commitment to that kind of quality. We have to find heroes like Fred Levin who will help us invent that quality on top of the baseline that the people of the state of Florida provide.”

Levin acknowledged that his gift and the naming are not without controversy. “I can understand the concern and the pain some feel about naming the College of Law for Fredric G. Levin or any other name. I would have felt the same way if they had named it for someone else. I can only say ‘Wait until this money makes it so that when a University of Florida graduate goes to Atlanta or New York to apply, they will consistently be given the same consideration as a University of Virginia graduate or a University of Michigan graduate.”

Levin said he had been reading newspaper stories covering the controversy over the naming when he received a call late one afternoon that meant “an awful lot to me.” The call was from E. Dixie Begg, 91, the first president of The Florida Bar and a 1931 UF law graduate. [Mr. Begg recently created a bequest that will provide the college building campaign with nearly $100,000.] “He said how proud he was of me and how proud he thought my father would be,” Levin recalled. “He said he had followed my career and he just wanted to thank me. He wanted me to know how proud he was that our law school was going to make that next step — and it’s a giant step — to greatness.”

The rest is history in the making for the Fredric G. Levin College of Law.
FOR FREDRIC G. LEVIN, SUCCESS IS SPelled

Fredric G. Levin’s successful strategy for representing clients — a strategy that has earned him national records for jury awards in lawsuits involving wrongful death and personal injury — can be summarized in a word: Preparation.

“A very well prepared, reasonable lawyer is going to win over a great lawyer who’s not prepared,” he said. “I have never been surprised in a courtroom. I always overprepare, working on a case five or six months before it goes to trial.”

As trial dates approach, Levin rarely sleeps, partly due to a longstanding fear of public speaking.

Yet, he would rather be in the courtroom representing Pensacola clients than almost anywhere else. Even though his firm handles mostly national, mass tort cases such as those dealing with breast implants and asbestos poisoning, which typically settle out of court, Levin himself prefers to work on local cases that allow him to present facts before a judge and jury.

That wasn’t always the case. As a law student at the University of Florida, Levin said his “mortal fear of speaking in front of anybody” was so intense that he never considered a career as a trial lawyer. After graduation, he planned to pursue a graduate tax law degree as a stepping stone to a career in academia. But while spending the summer at his brother’s law firm, he experienced the unexpected sweet taste of a courtroom victory and was hooked. In the next 20 years, he never lost a case.

As an undergraduate, Levin was more interested in the social — rather than academic — aspects of college life. His resulting grade point average prompted the dean of the law school at the time to discourage him from pursuing a law degree. But Levin’s older brother, David, who had graduated from UF’s College of Law a few years earlier, recognized the potential in his sibling and insisted that he give law school his best shot. Once enrolled, Levin listened uncomfortably as Dean Henry Fenn gave the familiar warning: “Look to your left and look to your right because one of you won’t be here next year.”

“I got into law school, and having been a joke for four years, all of a sudden I got scared and started working 14 and 16 hours a day, and I fell in love with the law and the logic and the beauty of the law,” the younger Levin said. “Law school changed my whole life. It was there that I found a sense of purpose, and found that I could be good at something.” Three years later, he graduated third in his class in 1961 with academic honors including serving as an editor of the Florida Law Review, induction into the prestigious Order of the Coif, and receipt of the Gertrude Brick Legal Writing Award.

In the nearly 40 years since, Levin has been a remarkably successful trial lawyer and a loyal Gator. His gratitude and loyalty to the university have been demonstrated time and again through annual financial contributions and major gifts. He and brother David and their law partner, the late Jefferts L. Mable Jr., created an endowment to fund law professorships through a gift of land valued in excess of $1 million.

Levin’s philanthropy also extends to a number of charitable and other educational beneficiaries. He endowed a $1 million professorship at the University of West Florida in Pensacola in honor of his father, and he recently gave $2 million to support a family foundation that assists children in Northwest Florida.

In December, Levin learned of the College of Law’s need for a major gift to enable it to move to the next level of academic excellence and prestige in American legal education. He responded with an unprecedented cash gift of $10 million, prompting UF officials to name the school in his honor.

“I want to thank my university,” Levin said after the gift was announced by UF President John Lombardi at a luncheon in Pensacola with more than 150 well-wishers. “This gift is in some way a repayment for what the University of Florida did for me. You’ve got to realize there
were five Levin brothers and all of us graduated from the University of Florida. It was the best seven years of my life. Other than family, the law school was the most significant thing in my life. It was there that I met my wife, and this June will be our 40th anniversary. All four of my children got degrees at the University of Florida, and three earned advanced degrees.”

Levin’s son, Martin [JD 1988], now serves as president of the Levin Middlebrooks firm. His daughter, Marci Levin Goodman [JD 1985], is an assistant state attorney in Pensacola who serves on the UF Law Center Association Inc. Board of Trustees.

A big heart

At 62, Levin is chairman of one of the nation’s largest personal injury law firms, Levin, Middlebrooks, Thomas, Mitchell, Green, Echsnner, Proctor & Papantonio, P.A. The firm of 24 lawyers, two medical doctors, consultants, seven investigators, and 18 paralegals, has represented more than 90,000 clients since 1955.

Levin helped develop the concept of structured settlements, an innovative instrument for resolving disputes. He is certified as a Civil Trial Advocate by the National Board of Trial Advocacy, is a member of the prestigious Inner Circle of Advocates, and was the 1994 recipient of the prestigious Perry Nichols Award from the Academy of Florida Trial Lawyers. He is listed in every edition of Best Lawyers in America. He is the author of more than 20 articles and one book, and has lectured to the legal community on several national circuit tours.

“To say he’s been a successful lawyer would be somewhat of an understatement,” said former Florida Gov. Reubin Askew, a 1956 UF law graduate and former law partner with the Levins. Askew emceed at the gift announcement in January. “He’s certainly had an outstanding law practice, but besides being bright, he has a big heart. One of the things I remember about Fred is his befriending the first African-American student admitted to the University of Florida law school. And what isn’t publicized much is that Fred got the first $1 million verdict for a child in the United States — an African-American child. Almost with tears in his eyes, Fred told me how much that meant to him and the statement it made about the worth of a life.” The case involved a wrongful death resulting from an automobile accident.

The late Chief Judge M.C. Blanchard in Escambia County said of Levin: “He is the best we have in the First Judicial Circuit and probably in the State of Florida. He has and deserves a reputation for being one of the best trial attorneys in the nation.”

In recent years, Levin’s time has been split between family, the practice of law, and the sport of boxing. He is attorney and manager for some of the greatest boxers in the world, including Roy Jones Jr., said to be the best pound-for-pound boxer in history, and former World Welterweight Champion Ike “Bazooka” Quartey. He was voted “Manager of the Year” by the Boxing Writers of America in 1993.

His relationship with Quartey, a native of the nation of Ghana, led to Levin being awarded the Akuapem Award for a lifetime of dedication to justice for people of all races, and installed as a chief in the Akuapem Traditional Area during an installation ceremony at the United Nations in January. He is only the third non-Ghanian ever so honored.

Pondering his gift to the law school, Levin said that despite the controversy over the naming, he hopes alumni, students and others will focus on the impact the additional resources will have on the school. “I hope I’m around in 10 or 15 years when the U.S. News ranking has this law school in the top 10,” he said. “It is my hope, and Dean Matasar assured me, that this gift would help bring the University of Florida into a leadership position among law schools in the South and nationally.”