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## In Memoriam: James W. Colliton Recipient of the Spirit of DePaul Award, 2009

Glen Weissenberger

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## IN MEMORIAM

### JAMES W. COLLITON RECIPIENT OF THE *SPIRIT OF DEPAUL AWARD, 2009*



The following pages are printed in memory of Professor James W. Colliton. In addition to a brief description of Professor Colliton's life and his contributions to DePaul, these pages honor Professor Colliton as the recipient of the 2009 *Spirit of DePaul Award*. Following a letter from Rev. Dennis H. Holtschneider granting the University's *Spirit of DePaul Award* to Professor Colliton are letters from DePaul faculty and staff written in support of Professor Colliton's nomination. Professor Colliton died on January 17, 2009, during the nomination process for the *Spirit of DePaul Award*, and the following letters were written both before and after Professor Colliton's death.

## PROFESSOR JAMES W. COLLITON

Jim Colliton was born in Grand Junction, Colorado, on September 9, 1944. He attended Stanford University in 1966 and received a B.A. in History. During his time at Stanford, he worked on the grounds crew, and during the summer and fall of 1964, he worked as a waiter at a restaurant at the New York World's Fair.

Following graduation, Jim attended Officer Candidate School, becoming a first lieutenant in the Quartermaster Corps and serving in Vietnam. He was discharged in 1969. He attended the University of California Hastings College of Law in San Francisco from 1970 to 1973, working summers at Colorado National Monument. He and his wife Jan moved to Washington, D.C., in 1974, where he worked for the IRS. In 1977, he received an LL.M. degree in taxation from Georgetown University law school and was hired as a professor at the DePaul University College of Law.

With his family, Jim moved to Chicago in the summer of 1977 to begin his teaching career at the DePaul University College of Law. Jim originally had planned to be an attorney in Grand Junction, but he discovered that he loved teaching and mentoring students. During his tenure at DePaul, he served as director of estate planning in the university's development office, associate dean of the law school, and director of the law school's graduate tax program. Jim was a tax expert who was anything but boring—he flew a French flag outside his Oak Park home on Bastille Day; baked his wife an apple pie each year on her birthday; hiked; briefly took up blacksmithing; made soap, jams, and jellies; and was, as his family joked, on a never-ending quest to perfectly insulate their home.

In January of 2007, Jim was diagnosed with Sinonasal Melanoma and went through radiation and chemotherapy treatment which resulted in unexpected blindness. In 2008, he attended Hines VA Blind Rehabilitation Center, where he found that “The problem with being blind is that you can't see.” With that thought, he mastered the skills that allowed him to continue to teach and do the other things that he loved to do. Jim died in his home, surrounded by family, on January 17, 2009.

For years, Professor Colliton kept a list of names containing two or more words, which he organized into imaginary law firms for the amusement of his students, as well as everyone else at DePaul. At last count, he had 2000 such names. Using his list, those who new Jim best compiled a few of their favorites.

Treadwell, Notebloom, Woodburn & Opensky

Hatfill, Stoneback & Artlip

Schoolcraft & Penrose

Hailstork, Motherwell & Laughinghouse

Poundstone, Scatterwood, Rakestraw & Brightnose

Mantooth, Fishburn & Sugarbaker

Loveday, Grinspoon, Shortsleeve & Gardenhour

## THE SPIRIT OF DEPAUL AWARD

With the passing of our colleague Jim Colliton, the Law School and indeed the entire university community has suffered a great loss. Jim's exemplary contributions as a Law faculty member and administrator, his commitment to his scholarship, students, colleagues, and the larger university community only just begin to tell the story of this extraordinary man and his impact on those around him.

The university's *Spirit of DePaul Award* highlights the university's Vincentian values and their relation to the achievement of DePaul's distinctive education mission. It is awarded to honor and recognize diverse members of the DePaul community for their leadership and service in the spirit of Saint Vincent de Paul. Recipients must be judged by their colleagues to personally exemplify the mission of values of DePaul University.

In the numerous nomination letters that I have received, colleague after colleague spoke eloquently about Jim in very personal terms. What each of these moving testimonials had in common was the belief that Jim, in the words of one colleague, "was the perfect example of our Vincentian purpose—willing to listen to all views; understanding people's desires, goals and beliefs; always being a voice of reason and hope . . . every step he has taken has been for the benefit of DePaul University, its staff and its students." Another colleague recognized that the Spirit of DePaul Award would be a fitting recognition of what Jim gave to others and that he "was a man of many qualities embodied in St. Vincent—his firm commitment to the people and the institutions he served, his respect for the personal dignity of all individuals and his warmth and genuine love of life."

I am pleased to be able to award the Spirit of DePaul Award posthumously to Professor Jim Colliton. I join his many colleagues, friends, and student at the university in honoring his memory with great affection and gratitude.

*Rev. Dennis H. Holtschneider, C.M.*  
President

## LETTERS OF SUPPORT FOR JIM COLLITON

I join with my colleagues at the College of Law in supporting the nomination of Jim Colliton for a Spirit of DePaul Award. As Associate Dean in 2002, he was part of the team that interviewed me for a faculty position. When he resumed his regular faculty duties and moved into an office down the hall from mine, I noticed immediately that he would periodically stop by just to see how I was doing. As the new kid on the block, it meant the world to have a wise “old-timer” become my mentor and friend. I had left a 19-year career in litigation to enter teaching, and Jim played a big role in my conclusion that DePaul truly would be my new home.

Jim always took the time to offer guidance, wisdom, encouragement, and humor. A few of the things he would tell me: “You should consider applying for this position,” “Go to this reception and be charming for two hours, and you’ll really help the law school,” “Here’s someone you should get to know,” or (his most frequent advice to me) “Don’t worry about that.” Jim’s compassion, humility, and concern for my professional and personal welfare—even after he became ill—remind me of many Vincentians and Daughters of Charity I have befriended during my seven years at DePaul and a lifetime of involvement at St. Vincent de Paul Parish. In dealing with colleagues and students, I aspire to model what he has done for me.

When I walked him onto the stage at last year’s commencement and spent the afternoon helping him navigate the Civic Opera House, I thought I was giving him a gift. What I didn’t realize then was that our time together was his gift to me.

*Ben Alba*  
Senior Legal Writing Instructor  
Director, Bar Passage Program

Nominating Professor Jim Colliton for a Spirit of DePaul award is perhaps the easiest and most sensible job I've done as a staff member of the College of Law for 17 years.

Being on staff for this long, I've learned two lessons. First, knowing much of what goes on behind the scenes at a university, you'll sometimes find that good intentions and goals are interrupted by clashes of egos, misunderstandings, or acts of self-interest. And second, it is always better to carry yourself with dignity, grace and understanding.

Jim Colliton has been one of the best examples of the second lesson. I have watched Jim during inspiring, demanding, challenging and divisive times here at the College of Law. He has been the perfect example of our Vincentian purpose—willing to listen to all views; understanding people's desires, goals and beliefs; always being a voice of reason and hope.

When there has been misunderstanding, he has strived for unity of purpose. When there has been division, he has always tried to walk a straight path. When there have been achievements, he likely has been the most dedicated and vocal supporter. Every step he has taken has been for the benefit of DePaul University, its staff and its students.

I am reminded of Psalm 133:1, "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!" Jim Colliton has always worked and lived toward that goal at DePaul. I strongly recommend him for a Spirit of DePaul Award.

*Lawrence Arendt*  
College of Law

James Colliton absolutely embodies the Spirit of DePaul. I've known Professor Colliton both as his student and, for the last 25 years, as his colleague. There are few, if any, other faculty members in the College of Law, who have done more to serve DePaul University. Jim has served willingly and admirably on numerous University Committees and Faculty Committees. He always considers the best interest of the University and the College of Law to be more important than his own personal interest. He is supportive of colleagues and never refuses to serve when asked and volunteers when there is a need for assistance. He is an excellent teacher and mentor to students. He takes his teaching responsibilities seriously and maintains relationships with alumni. I suspect he has never missed attending the annual College of Law Commencement, and despite his failing health, attended the most recent Commencement. Jim Colliton, through his words, deeds and actions epitomizes the Spirit of DePaul.

*Barbara B. Bressler*  
Professor of Law



I would like to take this opportunity to nominate my colleague and friend Jim Colliton for a Spirit of DePaul award. Jim passed away in January, 2009 after 31 years on the DePaul College of Law faculty. Jim was a dear friend of mine for all of my 26 years here. I will miss him more than I can express.

We each have our separate view of exactly what the Spirit of St. Vincent de DePaul is. Jim had a set of values that conformed perfectly with what he understood to be Vincentianism. He believed that all people were to be treated decently, with dignity and respect. He felt that all people were entitled to equal opportunity to succeed. He endeavored to highlight the absolute best in people and to validate their efforts to “do the right thing.” He rejected privilege as a value that separated us. He abhorred conflict when that conflict became *ad hominem*. He avoided criticizing if there was a way to make his point without criticism of another. He made strong value judgments but found a very humane and inclusive way in which to express them.

When I think of Jim as a teacher, I think of a person who starts the sentence by saying: “You’re a smart person, what do you think of X?” Or, he would say “You’re good at X, why don’t you find a way to do it again?” With Jim, one always felt appreciated and validated. He worked hard to see the good and the valuable in everyone—colleagues, students, friends. How many students have sat in his office and heard Jim say: “You’re going to be a great lawyer.” How many students have sat in his office and told Jim about their personal or family situations, to hear him say “it’s going to work out just fine. You’ve got the tools to do it.”

For me, personally, he was a great friend. I continue, after his passing, to “tell” him things that happen in my life. He was always a great listener, particularly to complaints, and always had just the line you needed to hear, like “the trouble with work is that it interferes with your life.” Or “the nice thing about having kids is that, eventually, they grow up.” Jim was a great communicator without feeling compelled to make the pithiest comment. You always knew that he was seeking the common ground and trying to advise on how to get there.

In addition, he was most accomplished—as a teacher, scholar, and administrator. But, most importantly, he tried to be a friend to everyone, particularly those who looked like they needed a friend. If Jim didn’t live in the Spirit of DePaul, then I certainly don’t know who did.

Leonard L. Cavise  
Professor of Law

I take great pleasure in nominating Professor James Colliton for the 2009 Spirit of DePaul Award. In my opinion, you could not have selected a worthier candidate.

Professor Colliton embodies the best of the DePaul spirit with his special brand of professionalism, personalism and humor that touches everyone he meets.

From the very first time I met Prof. Colliton, 25 years ago, he embraced me and made me feel very welcome and valued as a new support staff member at DePaul. Since that time, I have had numerous interactions with him. As a professor, he always greeted me with kindness and respect, and was always very honest with me. As an associate dean, he listened to my concerns, was very sympathetic, and gave me positive direction and guidance with a humorous twist. As a compassionate person, he was always very considerate, kind and sensitive to the needs of others. He demonstrated his compassion toward me in an act of kindness that I will never forget. When I was pregnant with my first child in 1985, he gave me a baby bed, child seat, and other items. It was a blessing to receive these items at a time when I truly needed them.

I am so delighted and overjoyed that you have chosen Prof. Colliton to be nominated for this award. He truly cares deeply about the school, professors, staff members and students. His integrity, dedication, conscientious and outstanding service has tremendously made a significant difference at the College of Law. Prof. Colliton embodies the characteristics of our founder, St. Vincent DePaul, and represents the best of DePaul. He is definitely worthy to be a recipient of this award.

*Glennis Jones-Marshall*  
College of Law

The Spirit of St. Vincent DePaul Award is an award that Jim Col-liton should have received much earlier than now. That is because it is not an award for what he's accomplished, although he's accomplished much, but for who he was; it is not a reward for the accolades that he garnered for himself, but rather for what he gave to others. Jim was a man of many qualities embodied in St. Vincent—his firm commitment to the people and the institutions he served, his respect for the personal dignity of all individuals and his warmth and genuine love of life.

Most remarkable to me about Jim was his unceasing positivism. He was an easy mark as a peer evaluator because he would always look for and point out what was good about the colleagues he reviewed. He was willing and able to help his students make the most of the talents they had, helping them to realize their potential and shape their careers. He nurtured them, he encouraged them and mentored so many who owe him a great debt—a debt he would never look to cash in on. He rarely, if ever, said no when asked to take on additional responsibilities, be they new classes to teach, administrative responsibilities, college committee assignments or University service positions. While I was Associate and Acting Dean, I always knew that Jim was one of those people I could always count on to fill a need and he did it, not grudgingly, but instead with a smile on his face. He did not ask for anything in return—he saw it as a part of his job. He truly understood how lucky we are to be in this profession and at this University. The pay is good, the hours are great and we get the extraordinary opportunity to shape the lives, values and minds of young people who look to us for knowledge, for guidance and for personal and professional development.

Jim was a friendly guy who roamed the halls constantly looking for people to talk to. His office was located such that you could not get away with picking up your mail without exchanging pleasantries with him. There was a folksy charm about him that was 100% genuine. He was a guy who asked how you were and cared about your answer. It is not surprising that the letters of nomination for this award come from faculty and staff alike, because he valued everyone's contribution and he always let them know it.

In the past few years of his life in the face of overwhelming adversity that would have broken any man's spirit, Jim showed incredible grace, a relentless positivism and extraordinary strength of character and courage that provided an inspiration for all of us. I am told by his

loving wife Jan that he died with dignity and with an optimistic curiosity about what might lie ahead for him. It was the same way that he lived his life.

*Wayne Lewis*  
Professor of Law

I am writing in support of the nomination of Professor James W. Colliton for the Spirit of DePaul Award. Professor Colliton, as you may know, died recently after a long battle with cancer.

I have known Professor Colliton for over thirty years. In fact, he and I started together as junior faculty at the College of Law in the late 1970s. In every facet of his professional life, Jim exemplified to the highest degree the values of St. Vincent de Paul and the principles of the Vincentian mission. He was devoted to his students, often going out of his way to assist them in their studies and their efforts to find employment after graduation. He was an excellent colleague, always willing to serve on committees and to take on extra assignments to further the goals of the law school. He served as Associate Dean for a number of years and discharged his duties faithfully and skillfully.

In every respect, he was an ideal faculty member, mentor, teacher, and scholar. He undertook his professional obligations with grace, compassion, insight, dedication, and intelligence. He was the voice of reason and sanity in an often irrational and insane world. Words truly cannot describe his excellence as a law professor and as a human being. He greatly influenced my life and my professional career, and I believe that he unquestionably merits the Spirit of DePaul Award.

*Margit Livingston*  
Professor of Law

I can think of no one who exemplified the mission and values of DePaul more than my former colleague James Colliton. I have known him since he began teaching at DePaul in the late 1970s. Because we had neighboring offices for many years, I had the opportunity to talk with him often and to observe the manner in which he went about his responsibilities at DePaul. I gradually formed the opinion that he was quite an extraordinary person.

The word that comes to my mind to describe Jim is “character.” He conducted his professional life in manner that was consistently humane, principled, rational, and free from the egoistic needs that beset so many of us. Seemingly he had an inner compass that did not fail him

He expertly performed his responsibilities as a faculty member without seeking attention or recognition. His office was always open to students; they knew this and consulted him frequently. He worked with them tirelessly, and was more active than anyone else I knew in helping them to find employment. In addition, despite the fact that he had more than his fair share of faculty responsibilities, he was always willing to take on more—often the tasks that the rest of us saw as too time consuming and unlikely to contribute to our career goals.

My respect for him was also enhanced by the manner in which he approached difficult faculty decisions. Occasionally we disagreed, but I always admired him for his ability to make these decisions in a calm, principled manner, based on his view of the best interests of the University. Amid rancorous discord, he was calm and reasonable. He treated all with respect and courtesy, and did not harbor resentment toward those who disagreed with him.

Given what I knew of him, I suppose it should not have surprised me that he handled his illness with such dignity and strength. Nevertheless, the trials of his illness were so severe that I cannot help but marvel.

Jim was an exemplar in so many ways; I think very few will come close to his standard. However, even as we fall short, he has helped us to see what a human being can be—that is a precious gift to all who knew him. For that alone he deserves the Spirit of DePaul Award, and so much more.

*Marlene Nicholson*  
Professor of Law Emeritus

A lot of people in the College of Law who took a chance on living out their promise did so with some private remark from Jim Colliton ringing in their hearts. He had that effect on people time and again throughout his many years at DePaul. In guiding a great many students, faculty and support staff on journeys toward fulfillment, he vibrantly enacted the Vincentian commitment to personalism.

A couple of the most insightful and affirming observations that anybody has ever made about me were made by Jim Colliton, placing me in the broad yet fortunate category of people whose lives were transformed for the better by Jim and his remarkable powers of judgment. His capacity for serving as a guide to others was more than matched by his own vision of where he stood in the world. It may well be that he was so good at helping others find themselves because he had so successfully found himself long ago. He was unfailingly modest and kind and good-humored and discerning.

Among the many accomplishments of his civilized heart is that every single day, his behavior underscored the value of consistency, bringing this virtue to a luster rarely witnessed in this culture, in this era. He was absolutely dependable in his dealing with students and with his faculty colleagues—and with support staff like myself. Yet it was the depth and freshness of his insights, generally shared off the cuff, that possessed the gravity to spur important decisions. He had a transcendent gift for paying attention to people, and for sharing his insights in terms that were comfortable yet inspiring. No wonder he was such a masterful teacher and scholar and friend.

But there was a paradox about Jim. He was exceptionally adept about putting people at ease. He was certainly a reassuring presence; and it was tempting to regard everything about him as familiar. Yet there was nobody like him in these ways. I think at the core of Jim's capacity to reach out to others was a deep sense of reserve; a confidence in his own personal strength; and amazing will power. He was always alive in the moments when his friends needed a careful word because he was always on top of his game. The example he set conveys a power that will always stay with those who knew him.

*Dan Ursini*  
College of Law

Jim Colliton exemplified the mission and values of DePaul. Over a DePaul career of thirty-one years, Jim made a huge contribution to the University.

Jim embodied the ideal of a faculty member truly committed to the educational development of his students. He taught many classes, quite a number of them large-enrollment and all intellectually demanding. He strove to make the class material accessible to students, always providing them with examples and practical applications of theoretical material. In observing his classes, I could detect the careful structures that he put into place to assist students in mastering concepts and gaining their own insights on how the law ought to work. Moreover, Jim always made himself available to students out of class, welcoming them into his office and never failing to make time for one additional student question.

Jim was also a model faculty member in assisting his colleagues. He was constantly available to bounce an idea off of, or to give advice on a how to teach a difficult part of a course. Although his primary interest was in taxation, he frequently taught other courses to meet student demand. Some of these overlapped with my teaching assignments. Thus I was able to benefit from his guidance on how to approach tough concepts of Torts or Remedies. He consistently offered cheerful advice, and never considered any question beneath him. His ready willingness to assist also characterized his work on administrative matters. He served as associate dean more than once, and he was a member of committees on which I served or chaired. I can attest that he unfailingly exercised good judgment, made wise decisions, and gave constructive guidance on administrative and curricular matters large and small. His service on Faculty Council and on various university committees, including the extremely demanding SRAC [Strategic Resource Allocation Committee] assignment, was exemplary in every way. He was also a notable scholar, writing on tax subjects and also on issues as diverse as racial discrimination and legislative development.

Counting Jim's contributions is itself a monumental task. He informally mentored a whole generation of law teachers, including me. He taught high-demand, fundamental courses of the law curriculum with aplomb. He kept the law school going in the right direction with his service as associate dean and in his other governance activities, and he



gave generously of his time and good counsel to the university in his service on Faculty Council, SRAC, and in other University roles.

But if I had to select one contribution to stress the most, it would be the constant, quiet, and, in my view, unsurpassed service he provided for students. He was always available, not just physically present, but welcoming to all students who needed any amount of time and thought from him. To me, this exemplifies the best of DePaul faculty: superb teaching, not just in the classroom. He was a great teacher to the core, in the classroom and outside.

*Mark C. Weber*  
Professor of Law

I write to express my very strong support for the posthumous conferral of the Spirit of DePaul Award on the late Jim Colliton.

Jim was a superb teacher in every respect. In fact, as he occasionally reminded me, he was the only person on the faculty who could teach every course in the curriculum. This was no boast. He actually had the capability of teaching every course in the curriculum, and whatever course he would teach, he would teach it extremely well. Student evaluations revealed that he was not only well liked, but highly respected as a teacher.

As a faculty member, it is unimaginable that any one could have hoped for a better colleague. Jim was supportive of the young faculty, and he was also a great friend to his peers. He was universally liked and admired. Jim was the type of person who would always show up for a faculty function, whether it was a reception with the students or the alumni. Jim obviously loved DePaul.

Jim was also a fine scholar, and his works will be consulted long into the future. Most important, Jim was a remarkable human being and a model of morality. In fact, I can think of no one who better personifies the Vincentian values of this University than Jim Colliton.

*Glen Weissenberger*  
Dean and Professor of Law

