



PARTNERS IN LEADERSHIP

Benjamin Civiletti has long been a Baltimore leader in the field of law with a career highlighted by selfless service to his state and country. Now the School of Law is honoring his years of service with an endowed scholarship bearing his name.

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BY BETTY LYNNE LEARY
PHOTOGRAPHY BY VINCE LUPO

Benjamin Civiletti was bone tired. At thirty-eight years of age, he was heading up the litigation department at one of Baltimore's most prestigious law firms. The hours were long and the work challenging, yet Civiletti yearned for a change of pace.

"I had been at Venable for thirteen years and I was starting to repeat myself," Civiletti says. "I had always appreciated public service, and I thought it was a good time to go in a different direction."

That direction led Civiletti to the nation's capital, where President Jimmy Carter appointed him assistant attorney general of the United States. Civiletti earned this coveted Justice Department appointment as a result of experience trying cases with colleagues of Attorney General Griffin B. Bell. It was 1977, and Civiletti embarked on a four-year journey of public service to the country that saw him rise to deputy attorney general and ultimately to the top job of attorney general of the United States in 1979. He argued before the Supreme Court for the right of the government to denaturalize Nazi war criminals, and was the first attorney general to appear before the International Court of Justice at The Hague.

"I thought it would be fun," Civiletti recalls of his decision to leave his practice and join the ranks of public servants. Looking back on his time in the Justice Department, he notes that the thrill of having access to the White House was tempered by the enormous responsibility of making decisions that affected the entire country.

"You have to be extremely careful, because your decisions could affect every citizen," he explains. Each day, in spite of careful planning and attention to major issues, Civiletti remembers facing half a dozen crises that would usurp his time.

"Your judgment is honed in that type of environment," he says. "But it is pretty heady dealing with cabinet officers and the president and to be in the White House on a daily basis." Civiletti confronted major events such as the Mariel boatlift and the hostage crisis in Iran. It was during the Iranian crisis that Civiletti became the first attorney general to appear before the World Court.

"It was a remarkable experience," he says, "and I thoroughly enjoyed it."

THE FIRST CIVILETTI SCHOLAR

REENA SHAH



As a self-described bleeding heart with a passion for public service, Reena Shah is a natural choice as the first Benjamin Civiletti scholar. She describes the award, announced last May, as especially thrilling because it's a new scholarship and one associated with such a dedicated public servant as Benjamin Civiletti.

"He's a Maryland graduate and a former attorney general of the United States," she says with enthusiasm. "It's an amazing opportunity and I'm very excited. This solidified my decision to go to Maryland."

Shah arrived at the steps of the law school after a worldwide journey that has included both formal learning and practical experience. She received a bachelor's degree from George Washington University in environmental studies, then began a three-year stint in the Peace Corps, working in Nepal to promote environmental awareness, education, and community development. Back in the States, Shah continued her formal education at the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton University, earning a master's degree in public affairs. Her studies focused on international development and international relations, which she put into practice working in Sen. Barbara Mikulski's office last year. Additionally, Shah has been the recipient of many academic honors and accolades. She served as a Congressional Fellow, a Presidential Academic Scholar, as well as a member of honor societies Alpha Epsilon Delta and Theta Alpha Kappa.



The Civiletti scholar is a student with high academic achievement, financial need, and a commitment to leadership in public service. While the financial support of a full scholarship is an obvious bonus, Shah admits that she is most excited at the prospect of having a professional like Benjamin Civiletti serve as a mentor.

"I would certainly like to develop a relationship with him," she says, "to give me a broader view of the law degree and the power of that position." Civiletti, too, is eager to share his wealth of experiences with the next generation of lawyers. "My impression is that Reena is bright, articulate, charming, and eager to learn the law and apply it for the public good," he says.

Shah's interest in serving and learning about others began early in life. Born in India, Shah came to this country at age nine, and traveled extensively after that. She has been eager to experience other cultures and says that one of the lessons she learned is that most cultures don't come close to the sense of fairness and justice Americans often take for granted.

"Our justice system may be flawed, but we are so much better off than everyone else," she says. "In most countries, people walk around with no sense of their rights or whom to go to for help. I want to work on behalf of people who don't have this."

Although Shah has a strong interest in international law, women's rights, and environmental law, she plans to keep an open mind going into law school.

"I am open to a lot of opportunities," she says. "But for the future and in the long-term, I will definitely work in the public interest. That's my passion." —*B.L.L.*



Reena's childhood in India, experience in the Peace Corps in Nepal, and extensive travel inspired her to work for public justice.

UP THROUGH THE RANKS

Benjamin Civiletti was born and raised in the Hudson River Valley, and journeyed to Baltimore at the age of seventeen to enter Johns Hopkins on a scholarship to study psychology. He cites the dual appeal of helping people and the challenge of a contest as reasons for going to law school.

"I wanted to be a trial lawyer from a disposition toward disputes," he says. He graduated from the School of Law in 1961, and clerked for Maryland U.S. District Judge W. Calvin Chesnut for a year before serving as an assistant U.S. attorney in Maryland. Civiletti joined the firm of Venable, Baetjer, and Howard in 1964, made partner in 1969, and is currently the firm's chairman. Through the years, his practice has focused on commercial litigation, banking, white-collar crime, government regulation, and corporate governance. He serves as both a trial and appellate advocate and, as such, has successfully prosecuted and defended a variety of common law, statutory, and constitutional claims.

"I enjoy civil jury trials and corporate investigations the most," he says. "They're challenging, and they represent a combination of close evidentiary work and creative intellectual work." He has more recently developed a practice in alternative dispute resolution, and works as a mediator, facilitator, and arbitrator to achieve faster and more cost-efficient justice.

"Arbitration involves an aspect of judging, though I never had a desire to be a judge," Civiletti admits. "That's a bit too confining for me, but to do three or four arbitration cases a year is interesting."

Building a successful practice takes years of dedication, yet Benjamin Civiletti always found time and energy to serve the public. In addition to his years at the Justice Department, Civiletti also served as chair or member on a number of task forces under several Maryland governors, including Funding of Public Education, Drug Abuse, and Funding of the Arts. He served as a member of the National Research Council Committee to Study National Cryptography Policy, and as chair of the Maryland Governor's Commission on Welfare Policy. Further, Civiletti was chair of the litigation section of the ABA in 1987-88. With his extensive knowledge and experience in the law, coupled with a keen enthusiasm and commitment to serve, Civiletti moves in and out of government positions with ease.

"He is a very fine lawyer who has contributed significantly to the public good," says James L. Shea, managing partner at Venable. "He not only left private practice to become attorney general, but he's been on countless task forces

and committees in the pro bono service arena.” Shea has been instrumental in working with the School of Law to recognize and honor Civiletti’s contributions. He is spearheading the fundraising campaign for the Benjamin Civiletti Scholarship. Students demonstrating leadership potential and a strong desire to enter public service will receive scholarship support.

“Fundraising has never been so gratifying,” Shea says. “It’s very rewarding to see so many of his friends and colleagues who are very eager to step up and honor him.” A program on October 12 will celebrate the establishment of the scholarship program and honor both Civiletti and Reena Shah, the first Civiletti scholar. (See sidebar.)

“I hope it’s a support for those young people who not only have outstanding ability, but who have a devotion to the value of servicing the public,” Civiletti says. “The idealism they will bring to the administration of justice from the governmental side is extremely valuable to the well-being of our systems of justice.”

Through this scholarship program, Ben-

jamin Civiletti leaves a lasting legacy to the School of Law.

“Ben Civiletti represents everything this law school stands for,” says Dean Karen Rothenberg. “He remains committed to public service, maintains the highest level of professionalism, serves as a mentor to the next generation, and is investing in the future of the law school. I can’t think of a better way to honor him.”

The overwhelming response to the scholarship humbles Civiletti, who says he is terribly appreciative of all those who have contributed and especially of the generosity reflected in their giving.

“There’s an expression ‘You’re known by your enemies,’ and if you pick the right enemies, your status is assured,” he says. “But this proves the other side. You’re known by your friends. I’m very pleased and very grateful.” JD

Betty Lynne Leary is a freelance writer and publications designer living in Maine.



Civiletti, being sworn in by Chief Justice Burger with his wife at his side, followed his friend Griffin Bell (left) as attorney general under President Jimmy Carter.



The first Civiletti Scholar, Reena Shah, is especially gratified for the opportunity to have such an accomplished mentor, one who’s at ease with international movers and shakers, present *and* future.

Support through scholarships

The Civiletti Scholarship is the latest addition to the growing list of named, full scholarships aimed at bringing the best and brightest to the School of Law. The school’s named full scholarships include two scholarships for Andrew D. Levy (’81), one a general scholarship established in 1979, another set up four years later to support students with disabilities; the Christine A. Edwards (’83) Scholarship, established in 1999 to support outstanding female students; the Comcast Scholars Program, established in 2003, to provide support for out-

standing law students; the Paul Bekman (’71) Scholarship, established in 2004 to support outstanding students with an interest in trial work; and the Catherine S. Edwards (’80) Memorial Scholarship, established in 2004 to support outstanding students. Additionally, there are more than forty other partial scholarships awarded each year. For more information on the Maryland Scholarship program, please contact the Assistant Dean for Development & Alumni Relations, Chris Molloy, at (410) 706-0526.—*B.L.L.*