

GIVING THEIR ALL

UB law alumni make a difference in Baltimore

Baltimore is more than the city the nation saw through the media's lens this spring, when disturbances broke out after Freddie Gray's death. UB law alumni who live and work here have a deep appreciation for this dynamic town, which is not known as Charm City for nothing.

And they are devoted to helping shape its future.

This commitment to Baltimore is central to the UB School of Law's mission and is a hallmark of how UB law alumni engage with their city.

Our alums contribute to the vitality of Baltimore in many ways: by taking pro-bono cases; by mentoring students and by raising money for students' access to college; by helping just-released inmates learn to navigate the outside world; by investing in homes in city neighborhoods; by unleashing the power of artistic expression. What they all have in common is a core belief that the city will flourish when all its citizens have a chance to succeed.





Kate Wolfson, J.D. '12, and Ebony Thompson, J.D. '13



Judge Mark Scurti, J.D. '91



David J. Shuster, J.D. '94

“CollegeBound has a long success record of people going through the program and becoming doctors, lawyers, politicians. It’s exactly the kind of organization that’s needed in Baltimore post-Freddie Gray.”
—David Shuster

Here are the stories of nine UB law alums who give back to Baltimore through their jobs and volunteer work. We’re proud of them and we’re proud to be Baltimore’s law school.

RANDI PUPKIN, J.D. '87, is the executive director of Art With a Heart, a Baltimore-based group that enhances the lives of people in need through visual art.

On a mid-July morning, several young people sit outside in the shade decorating furniture at Art With a Heart’s HeARTwares retail outlet in Hampden. A young man paints Dr. Seuss’s Thing One and Thing Two on a tabletop. Nearby, a teenage girl covers a chair seat in glimmering shades. Staff members and volunteers stop and talk to the artists, while inside more teenagers and young zosomethings paint in an airy room lined with artwork for sale.

During the unrest, Pupkin opened HeARTwares as a “safe space” for young Baltimoreans.

“People came in and out all day,” she said.

Pupkin, a Baltimore native, remembers the riots here in 1968. She also recalls

seeing white people protesting the integration of the Milford Mills Swim Club that year.

She was only 6, but it was a turning point in her life.

“That defining day in front of the swim club was the day I decided to change the world,” Pupkin said.

By the time she was in high school, Pupkin had chosen law as the way to make a difference.

Fast forward two decades to 2001. After working as a lawyer for 14 years, Pupkin felt she hadn’t lived up to her vow to herself.

She decided to marry her legal knowledge and love of art with her goal of helping Baltimore. It was a jump into the unknown, but Pupkin went to her law office, incorporated Art With a Heart and began making cold calls. Her first clients were two group homes for emotionally troubled adolescent boys, the House of Ruth Maryland and an Alzheimer’s facility.

The legwork paid off. The group, which started on a \$6,000 shoestring, last year reported an annual budget of \$1 million. From four classes a week, Art With a Heart now offers 10,000 classes a year to

organizations throughout the Baltimore area.

Today she’s making a difference as “a lawyer who runs an art organization,” said Pupkin, whose daughter, Jessica, began law school at UB in August.

Art offers young people a respite from the harshness of life in Baltimore’s roughest neighborhoods, Pupkin says: “I think art can help because it lets people dream. It gives them space that they don’t otherwise have in their life.”

And, she adds, it’s not just the art that helps: “It’s everything that happens around creating the art. The young people are cared for by people who want to elevate.”

KATE WOLFSON, J.D. '12, the director of the Public Safety Compact at Baltimore’s Safe & Sound Campaign, credits her UB law education with teaching her the importance of helping others.

“The overall philosophy of the school was about giving back,” said Wolfson, who worked as the volunteer coordinator for the Homeless Persons Representation Project while she was a student, training nearly 200 other students to do intake interviews.

She is vocal about the hardships suffered by many in Baltimore.

“The barriers that people face in this city are insane and often insurmountable,” Wolfson said. “Many people wind up in the criminal justice system because they’re desperate and they’ve given up.”

Wolfson is out to change that through her work with Public Safety Compact, or PSC, an agreement between nonprofit groups — led by Safe & Sound — and the Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services. The goal is to improve the lives of participants through drug treatment and other therapies, while saving tax dollars by shortening prison sentences and lowering recidivism rates.

Since 2010, nearly 300 PSC inmates have graduated from the program. PSC graduates’ recidivism rate is 9 percent after three years out, compared to the

state rate of 40.5 percent for those released in 2009, Safe & Sound data show.

“I love waking up in the morning knowing that I get to help people every day,” Wolfson said.

EBONY THOMPSON, J.D. '13, an associate at Venable who specializes in complex litigation, gives back by investing in the city — literally. She owns property in the Hanlon Park/Garwyn Oaks area of the city, where her parents still live in the house she grew up in and where she has her own house.

“I’m excited about Baltimore,” Thompson said. “If you’re paying property taxes, you start caring about what goes on in your neighborhood. As people become more invested in the city, they have a stronger commitment to the community.”

After earning an undergraduate degree in economics from Brown University in 2000, Thompson worked in New York for UBS Global Asset Management, providing wealth-management services to international clients. Returning to Baltimore in 2006, she started her own real-estate firm, which she ran until beginning law school in 2010.

Thompson is also on the board of

Stocks in the Future, which teaches financial literacy to middle school students in Baltimore.

“It teaches them how to invest, how to build a portfolio, how to read a prospectus,” Thompson said. “They earn dollars through attendance and by being on time.”

At the end of the program, the students receive stocks in which their money has been invested.

In addition, Thompson is active in the Baltimore chapter of the Delta Sigma Theta sorority, working on its economic development committee and taking part in workshops that teach prospective homebuyers how to purchase property in the city and how to find grants to help with down payments and closing costs.

She also serves on the advisory board of the UB School of Law’s Fannie Angelos Program for Academic Excellence, which prepares students from Maryland’s historically black colleges and universities for law school and legal careers.

Said Thompson: “When you receive, you give back.”

DAVID J. SHUSTER, J.D. '94, managing principal at Kramon & Graham, says that at UB, “giving back was part of

the expectation.”

Today, Shuster serves on the executive committee of the Lawyers’ Campaign for CollegeBound, which helps Baltimore City public school students apply to and attend college. In 2013, roughly 1,900 students were accepted to two- and four-year colleges and universities with the help of CollegeBound.

“It’s one of the most effective organizations in Baltimore that makes an immediate, tangible difference to high school students,” Shuster said. “It identifies students who can succeed in college but don’t have either the financial resources or home support to go to college.”

CollegeBound — which UB President **KURT L. SCHMOKE** helped found in 1988, when he was the mayor of Baltimore — also pitches in when scholarships aren’t quite enough.

“Typically there’s still a financial gap, so the program provides last-minute grants to fill the gaps,” Shuster said. “It has a long success record of people going through the program and becoming doctors, lawyers, politicians. It’s exactly the kind of organization that’s needed in Baltimore post-Freddie Gray.”

Shuster pointed to a recent College-



Randi Pupkin, J.D. '87 (right), and Jasmine Jackson work on an art project at HeARTwares.



Becky Kling Feldman, J.D. '02, and Myshala Middleton, J.D. '10

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—Becky Kling Feldman

Bound success story: **AMBER NOLLEY, J.D. '14**, graduated from Carver Vocational-Technical High School in 2007 and went on to Stevenson University before enrolling at the UB School of Law.

“Amber just finished clerking for Judge Robert Kershaw on the Circuit Court for Baltimore City,” Shuster said.

STUART KAPLOW, J.D. '84, also works with Baltimore City students, through Building STEPS, a nonprofit that exposes young people to science-based careers.

Kaplow, a solo practitioner whose firm specializes in real estate law, is proud of Building STEPS.

“Eighty-four percent of [participants] earn a college degree,” Kaplow said. “Almost all of them were the first person in their family to earn one.”

Today, more than 100 students are taking part in the program and 350 graduates attend colleges around the

country, Kaplow added.

Recently Kaplow had a chance to help a former Building STEPS student close on a house in Baltimore.

“She had been a single mother in high school,” he said. “Now she has a master’s degree and works for the federal government. Nothing made me happier than helping her close on that house.”

CHRISTOPHER R. RAHL, J.D. '96, a member of Gordon Feinblatt’s financial services practice, also helps young people pursue their education.

“I heard UB President Kurt Schmoke give a speech saying that education was the most important thing that can help a community,” said Rahl, who served as a mentor at Saint Ignatius Loyola Academy, an independent Baltimore middle school for boys with academic promise but difficult home lives, and

with Operation HOPE, which teaches financial literacy to young people.

And, for nearly two decades, Rahl has taken from six to 10 pro-bono cases a year through the Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service, on whose board he serves. For his longtime commitment, Rahl received the Distinguished Pro Bono Volunteer Award from the Pro Bono Resource Center of Maryland at this year’s Maryland State Bar Association annual meeting.

Said Rahl: “Every single client was someone who was really stuck.”

BECKY KLING FELDMAN, J.D. '02, helps Baltimoreans through her job as the division chief of the Post Conviction Defenders Division (formerly the Collateral Review Division) at the Maryland Office of the Public Defender. Feldman works primarily with lifers, mostly men who were sentenced to

prison before 1980.

“After someone is convicted of a crime and sentenced, they have a right to a review of the entire trial through Maryland’s Post Conviction Act,” Feldman said. “With 20,000 inmates in Maryland, we have a huge caseload. One of the biggest issues we see is ineffective assistance of counsel.”

Hundreds of elderly men languish in Maryland prisons, Feldman said. In the last two years her office has freed more than 100 people convicted in the 1960s and ’70s. Roughly 70 percent were from Baltimore City.

Feldman didn’t set out to become a public defender. In her first year of law school, her 22-year-old brother, Leonard “Lenny” Kling Jr., was shot and killed during a robbery in Baltimore City. Two young men, 17 and 20, were arrested and convicted of murder.

Not surprisingly, Feldman set her sights on becoming a prosecutor. But her legal career took a different direction.

“I decided to be a public defender,” Feldman said. “I saw that public defenders help people at the worst time of their lives and I wanted to be the one to help them. I was not able to save my brother. But I like to think that I help bring other people’s brothers back home.”

A 2014 op-ed that Feldman co-wrote for *The Washington Post* emphasizes that prisoners — people — change: “That a person committed a serious crime as a teenager or young adult does not tell

us what he or she will be like at age 50 or 60. Admittedly, some people who are dangerous when they are 17 are still dangerous when they are 70. But this is the exception, not the rule.”

Feldman says she is as much a social worker as a lawyer.

“I just don’t go to court,” she said. “I ensure my client has a release plan, drug rehabilitation, anything to make sure that when they come home they succeed.”

Dean Julius Isaacson Professor of Law **STEVEN GROSSMAN** played a key role in changing her mind about what kind of legal work she would pursue, Feldman said.

“He really challenged the way I thought about prosecution, the justice system and plea bargaining,” she said. “That’s when I found out I was defense-oriented.”

M**YSHALA MIDDLETON, J.D. ’10**, a prosecutor for the Baltimore State’s Attorney Office, says she is frequently asked by schoolchildren why she isn’t a defense attorney.

“I tell them it’s just as important to be a prosecutor,” she said. “There are some people who should go to prison for the rest of their lives because of the heinous acts they commit.”

But, she says, not everyone should be incarcerated. Some people who run into trouble with the law simply need help, whether for drug addiction or for mental-health problems.

“You don’t throw the book at them,” Middleton said. “You have to be fair.”

Outside of work, Middleton volunteers at My Sister’s Place Women’s Center and Our Daily Bread, both shelters run by Catholic Charities.

She also serves on the board of the Samaritan Community in Bolton Hill.

“It’s a program that helps people in crisis,” whether they’re facing eviction or are in need of food or transportation, she said. “If you need help [we] will help you, and you don’t need to be from Bolton Hill.”

Also, as part of a spring service project by the MSBA’s Leadership Academy, Middleton took part in a pro-bono business “boot camp” in the Waverly area of the city.

“The goal was to educate small-business owners or people thinking about starting a small business,” Middleton said. “After the riots we added insurance as a topic, since so many small businesses were damaged and didn’t have sufficient coverage. Our project was really key.”

J**UDGE MARK SCURTI, J.D. ’91** states his career goal simply: “I went to law school because I wanted to help people.”

“I was attracted to law because of my sense of helplessness as an activist trying to make change,” said Scurti, who attended UB as a night student while working in hotel sales and marketing. As a student he helped create OUTLaw, the LGBT student organization.

Scurti, who is involved in numerous extracurricular projects, was honored in 2005 by the Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service for his 10-year commitment to pro-bono representation and again in 2011, when he won the group’s Volunteer of the Year award.

On the bench since 2013, Scurti can no longer do pro-bono legal work. Today he serves on the court’s Access to Justice Commission.

“That’s been personally for me one of the most significant ways of giving back,” he said. “It’s crucial that people have access to the system.”

Stuart Kaplow, J.D. ’84



Christopher R. Rahl, J.D. '96

