

DEAN TONI M. MASSARO—A TRIBUTE

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By luck alone, I am in a unique position to know how much people love Dean Toni Massaro. Folks often assume we are related, but—though I wish we were—I dutifully deny any relation. At our first meeting, we compared our family heritages and determined that we are not related; our families hail from different regions in Italy. Nevertheless, I believe that my last name makes people think about Dean Massaro and compels them to share with me their feelings about her. Based on these interactions, and my experiences as her student and as a student leader, I can safely say that Dean Massaro is universally respected and revered. Her reputation is one of the many reasons that I take great pride in having attended the James E. Rogers College of Law.

Though I first met Dean Massaro on a preview day for admitted students in the spring of 2006, her reputation preceded her. I heard from a close friend (then already a 1L at the College of Law) that Dean Massaro was an exceptional professor who led the collegial community by example. My tour guides reassured me that if I came to the College of Law, I would see Dean Massaro around campus on a daily basis. Even then, it was clear that she commanded the respect and admiration of students, and I was excited by the prospect of becoming one of them.

As President of the Student Bar Association, I have had the privilege of meeting with Dean Massaro on a monthly basis. Our meetings always lead to swift resolution of student concerns and leave me feeling a real sense of connection to this exceptional leader. Our bond results from her humanness: at every meeting, she asks me how I am—and really wants to know. She sees through a *pro forma* “fine,” and is not afraid to probe further. She asks if I am exercising and meditating; she wants to know how she can help when something is amiss. Her sincere interest in my well-being is moving, and it is not unique to our relationship. Dean Massaro is loved and respected because she cares in this way for everyone she meets—and does so in every role she plays.

As an administrator, Dean Massaro is an outstanding advocate for students. She is regularly involved in student events, and ensures that students interact with the exceptional speakers and visitors hosted by the College. Her pride in us ensures that we, in turn, are proud representatives of the College of Law.

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Dean Massaro hosts regular forums for students, and is constantly visible, both during her office hours and when she walks the halls. She is always prompt, courteous, and personable.

As a professor, Dean Massaro is a dynamo. Her four-unit Constitutional Law II class is one of the only early morning elective classes that is always highly attended. In class, she insists on intellectual rigor and demands a high level of engagement in class discussion. At the end of class, we students often feel as though we have just gotten off a roller coaster: somewhat terrified, a little nauseous, but exhilarated. Discussions frequently spill over after class, both with the dean and amongst ourselves. She is a first-class academic, and our admiration of her intellect is easily justified. Dean Massaro is always informed on the latest developments in constitutional law, and she continues to e-mail us even after finals. She shares herself and her past with her students, so that when the semester ends, we know who she is and where she comes from. She has a unique and subtle sense of humor, and while I did not always get her jokes, I always wanted to laugh with her. When she announced that she was stepping down as dean, the first question students asked me, with desperation in their voices, was: "But she's not leaving us, is she?" I was happy to answer in the negative.

When the time came to select the twelfth dean of the College of Law, I was fortunate to represent the student body on the dean search committee. Dean Massaro set the bar high, and in the initial process of identifying the attributes we wanted in a new dean, the committee and students began by articulating Dean Massaro's successes. She has the unique ability to keep people happy and invested, whether they are struggling through hard economic times or surviving the notoriously stressful law school experience. Beginning at Orientation, Dean Massaro communicates her belief in students clearly and powerfully. Three years later, 3Ls are still inspired and wholly committed, because Dean Massaro substantiates her words with action. Supported by an amazing team, she oversaw the total remodeling of our law school. Her ability to inspire and follow through is why students who met with dean candidates wanted these visitors to present us with ambitious goals in a frank and forthright manner and prove their ability to deliver. In each candidate, we looked for Dean Massaro's unique blend of modesty and confidence, and we had to continually remind ourselves that we were not rehiring Dean Massaro.

Dean Massaro's thoughtful wisdom and tireless work ethic have inspired alumni, faculty, and staff, allowed her to connect with the bench and the bar, and enhanced the classroom experience. Students are proudly committed to the College of Law, and are thankful to have benefitted from her grace and determination. We know that the investments she has made, both in students and in the school itself, will pay dividends for decades to come. Thank you, Dean Massaro, for inspiring us, leading us, and lifting us to excellence.