

St. John's Law School

# Armed Forces Society

*Bringing Together  
Students Who Serve*



**F**rom the Staff Judge Advocate for the Commandant of the Marine Corps to an Apache pilot in the Army's 4th Infantry Division, all these men and women share a passion for law and an unwavering commitment to their country. But although united by experience, military students and alumni had never had a formal opportunity to come together at St. John's School of Law—until now.

Law School Vice Dean Andrew J. Simons, a 1965 St. John's alumnus and former Navy Lieutenant who served as an Operations Officer on a survey ship from 1960-1962, recalls, "It occurred to me that we had a lot of veterans in our student body...[and] that we weren't doing enough to help them. The Law School has many societies that provide a place for people of like interest and backgrounds to get together, but we didn't have anything for servicemen

them didn't even know each other," Simons says.

Eager to get started, the group—dubbed the Armed Forces Society—selected their president Kristin M. Roshelli, a first-year law student and former Air Force Captain, having served on active duty at Langley Air Force Base as a nurse from 2002-2005. "We were all on board," she says.

Tracy L. Adamovich echoed Roshelli's enthusiasm. "Coming into my first year of law school, I was just out of the service. I was still trying to readjust to civilian life and to friends who really didn't understand the military way and the bigger picture." Adamovich—who graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point in 2001 and served as an Army officer for five years, including one year in Iraq where she supervised casualty reporting as an Adjutant General Officer—says she greatly appreciated the opportunity to be a part of the society

me were extremely positive," Daly states. "When you have a group of students who self-identify and who want to create a society of service to others, I think a dean should always respond positively."

As military personnel are accustomed to do, the students hit the ground running. With Thomas Ryan as Vice President and Jennifer Fraser Widenhofer as Director of Special Events, the society held its inaugural holiday dinner last November and immediately afterwards launched a care package drive for troops overseas. "We mostly advertised throughout the Law School," Roshelli relates. "Most of the donations came from employees, students, and faculty in the Law School, [and] even with that we had a lot. It was great because we could get other students involved," says Fraser. "It was a way to bring a little bit of awareness to the students."

Determined to do even more, the following spring the Armed Forces Society partnered with the Law School's Animal Rights Society to host a "5K for Vets and Pets," with the proceeds being split evenly between the Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund and the Brooklyn Animal Resource Coalition.

With the society's first year a great success, its members wasted no time in looking ahead. Roshelli says the group plans to hold another care package drive and possibly host a second 5K run. Beyond that, she notes the mission of the society is to support fellow veterans, and although specific goals are still being developed, she sees the possibility of one day establishing law clinics to help returning veterans.

"We're a small group of students," Fraser adds, "but with the support of Dean Simons and the Law School, we could get anything done that we've talked about." For his part, however, Simons is quick to turn the credit back to the students. "They're activists," he says. "They decide what they want to do and then they go ahead and do it."



“They personify the finest tradition of St. John's students who have represented their country in the armed forces and who continue to represent their country after graduation by service in government and public interest office...”

—Dean Mary C. Daly

and women, and I thought that was missing from our program.”

Rather than simply reflect on the void, Vice Dean Simons decided to do something about it. In the fall of 2007, he posted a notice on the Law School television message system announcing a meeting to gauge interest in establishing a club for current and former military folks. Eleven people came and brought their enthusiasm with them. "It didn't occur to me that a lot of

during her second year and only wishes it had been available her first. "[The society] is a great thing. It connected all of us who have similar experience. We view the world in a different way, and it's nice to find other students who understand what you went through and what you are going through."

Mary C. Daly, Dean of St. John's School of Law, recalls being approached with the concept for the society. "My initial thoughts when the idea was presented to

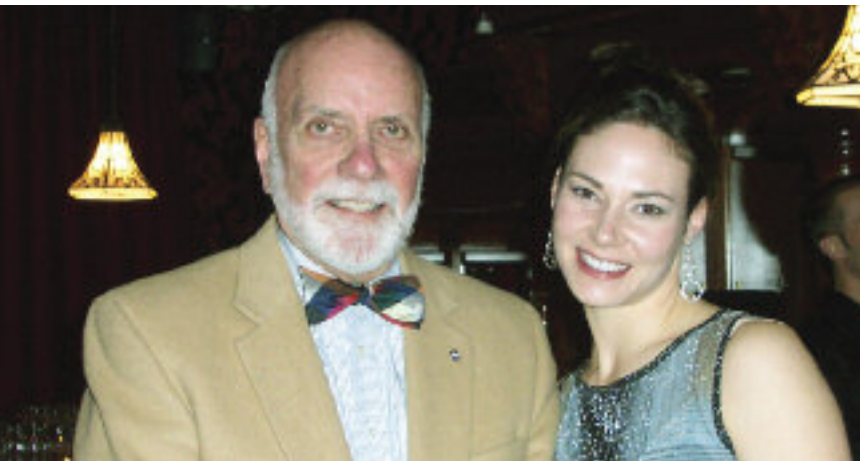
"They're just an extraordinary group of students given their experience defending our freedom," Daly states. "They personify the finest tradition of St. John's students who have represented their country in the armed forces and who continue to represent their country after graduation by service in government and public interest office. We have a long and deep tradition at St. John's of helping others and this is a very special and unique manifestation of that tradition." She anticipates that through the society, the Law School's military students will be able not only to serve the wider community but also to support each other.

interests as your own and perhaps a similar background ... [and] it also gives the opportunity for military members to do various work that's beneficial to the community. When you work collectively towards these worthwhile goals, you certainly can achieve more than working individually."

Perhaps the highlight of the society's inaugural year, however, occurred at the Law School Alumni Association's Annual Luncheon held in January in Manhattan. Vice Dean Simons was honored and was asked to address the gathering of approximately 250 alumni. He invited the eleven members of the Armed Forces

were standing at their table, the crowd of alumni broke into applause—but not simply applause: a standing ovation as St. John's graduates celebrated these students who not only were pursuing a legal education, but who also had answered the call to serve their country.

And the appreciation did not end there. "A lot of alumni came up afterwards and said, 'We really appreciate your service,'" Roshelli remembers. "Even afterward, alumni were e-mailing us saying, 'How can we get involved?'" Simons noted, "It's important for veterans and servicemen and women to know that they would be



*“They’re activists..... They decide what they want to do and then they go ahead and do it.”* —Vice Dean Andrew J. Simons

**Top Photo:** Vice Dean Simons with Kristin M. Roshelli (2L), Armed Forces Society President at the Armed Forces Society Holiday party.

**Bottom Photo:** Members of the Armed Forces Society organized a care package drive. Pictured (left to right): Kristin Roshelli (2L), Jennifer Fraser Widenhofer (4L), Joseph Capasso (4L), Thomas Ryan '08, Tim DeCicco (4L), Tracy L. Adamovich (3L), Michael Ivanciu (3L), Thomas Kehoe (3L), Vice Dean Andrew J. Simons '65, Dr. Allan Jacobs '08 and Nicholas R. Alioto (2L).



Indeed, this sentiment is virtually universal. While Ryan notes the friendships developed through the society, Fraser recalls her surprise at attending the inaugural meeting: "I didn't know there were others like me!"

"I think it's a great idea," Brigadier General (Ret.) Joseph P. Composto '74 states, "It gives you an opportunity to associate with people who have similar

Society to join him at the luncheon. All attended save one, whose deployment to Afghanistan prevented him from doing so.

At the close of his address, Simons spoke of the Armed Forces Society and introduced each of the ten students by name. He asked them to stand as he called them and to remain standing until all were called. When all ten had risen and

comfortable at St. John's Law School—we welcome them."

Indeed, through programs such as the newly established Armed Forces Society, St. John's will continue to recognize and support the men and women of the Law School who, over the years, have donned the uniform of the United States military and served with honor, courage, and distinction.