

Law schools lack training in representing crime victims

BY DENISE PERREAULT
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Mark Mandell, who has served on a host of national and state commissions charged with improving the judicial system, was unanimously elected chairman of the board of directors at Roger Williams University School of Law in January.

The longtime attorney has won many awards for his legal work over the years and his name usually is included among national lists of the state's top lawyers.

Mandell recently spoke with Providence Business News about the law profession in Rhode Island and his plans for the law school, where his son, Zach Mandell, is a third-year student.

PBN: What do you see as your role as chairman of the board of directors at Roger Williams University School of Law?

MANDELL: My role is to help represent the community - that is, the state, the lawyers and judges and the citizens of the state - at Roger Williams' law school because this is a position of trust. I also am trying to set the right policies that govern all facets of the operation of the law school. I care deeply about the education of our law students and our young people.

PBN: What is the most important aspect of a Rhode Island law student's education today?

MANDELL: Professionalism, practicing diligently on behalf of your clients, but that has to include practicing ethically. I teach a class at the law school in the spring semester, this is my third year, on advanced trial advocacy. There are trial-advocacy classes that are prerequisite that are taught by very able judges and lawyers, and this is a more specialized class for those students who have decided that they really want to try to make trial work their career.

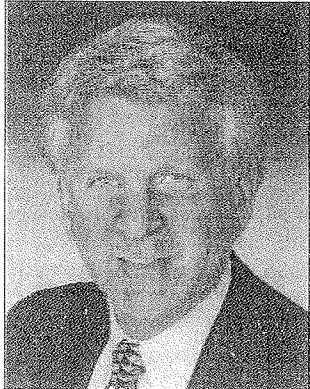


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RAISING THE BAR: Mark S. Mandell, chairman of the board of the Roger Williams University School of Law, oversees the state's only law school, a distinction that assures it has a "profound impact," he said.

PBN: What do you say to people who would like to see the law school become more involved in the political arena?

MANDELL: I don't think it is appropriate for the law school to be involved in the political arena. Where the law school can and does have involvement are on issues affecting justice and the practice of law, but not from a political standpoint. I'm not saying that there would never be an issue that could so affect the system of justice, and that issue resides in the political arena, that the law school would never comment. But it would be a rare instance.

PBN: What makes Roger Williams' law school different from others?

MANDELL: One thing that makes it unique is that it is the only law school in our state, so it has a profound impact on Rhode Island, and there are not many situations like that. Admiralty

(marine law) is an outstanding program. I think trial advocacy is an outstanding program. The full-time professors [in trial advocacy] are very talented. [They teach students] how to prepare for a trial and how to proceed in a trial, what to do, why, how to be successful, how to do it the right way.

PBN: Do you have plans to change any law-school policy?

MANDELL: One of the most important jobs we have is just to continue to grow the law school. ... I am the national chair of a board at the National Center for Victims of Crime in Washington, D.C. There is really no law school in the United States that has a curriculum to teach law students how to represent victims of crime, in either civil or criminal cases.

We just started a pilot project this semester where someone from the national center flies up once a week to teach law students the beginnings of that - that is, how to represent victims of crime and what the law says about victims of crime in both civil and criminal cases. So it's pretty exciting. [The national center] is an organization that was set up by two of Sunny von Bulow's children 25 years ago.

PBN: So is Roger Williams' law school going to start a curriculum for a formal course of study on victims of crime?

MANDELL: We just started a pilot program and we're going to find, hopefully, the funding for it, but there are many people across the county who are interested in it because unfortunately there will never be a shortage of crime victims. ... Nobody else is doing it [specializing in crime victims] and there is a great need for it. My goal

is that other law schools eventually would copy us.

PBN: You donated \$250,000 to the law school in 2009 to increase pro bono legal services. Can you tell us about that?

MANDELL: My wife (attorney Yvette Boisclair, partner in the same firm) and I did. To me, it is the most important function, the most important work we can do, which is to represent people without the means to hire a lawyer. It combines the best of the principles of social justice and legal justice. The law school has an outstanding Pro Bono Collaborative, with some very talented staff members working there. Law school students at Roger Williams are required to do a total of at least 50 hours of pro bono work. It's gone up, as it should; it used to be 20 hours.

PBN: How have you seen the law profession change during the many years that you've practiced law in Rhode Island?

MANDELL: It is more sophisticated. People practice in more complex cases than ever before, with more complex technologies. The techniques from many years ago can still be used, but everything has been updated. ... [As an example] there's something called e-discovery, meaning electronic discovery, which is very sophisticated, very expensive, when for instance you ask for all the e-mails produced on a subject. ... Plus, there are many more lawyers than there used to be, so the competition is much greater. And also, there is unfortunately less civility in the practice. ... It comes from all the competition, I believe. ■

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INTERVIEW

Mark S. Mandell

POSITION: Chairman of the board of directors of the Roger Williams University School of Law

BACKGROUND: Senior partner in the Providence law firm of Mandell Schwartz & Boisclair Ltd., he has practiced law for 36 years and focuses on personal injury, wrongful death and medical negligence, recently winning the highest award in Washington County for a victory in a dram shop case, \$15.2 million. He is former president of the state trial lawyers association, the state bar association and of the Association of Trial Lawyers of America.

EDUCATION: University of Alabama, bachelor's degree in political science, 1971; Georgetown University Law Center, law degree, 1974

FIRST JOB: Cutting lawns for a landscaping company in Providence

RESIDENCE: Warwick
AGE: 61

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