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# In Honor of McDowell Professor Emeritus Richard J. Kovach

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**IN HONOR OF MCDOWELL PROFESSOR EMERITUS  
RICHARD J. KOVACH**

*“Professor Kovach is a brilliant teacher with both academic and practical knowledge of all areas of tax.”*

*“Great instructor. Cares about teaching and obviously loves what he does.”<sup>1</sup>*

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1. Anonymous student comments from Nomination for Outstanding Professor of the Year.

For almost thirty years, The University of Akron School of Law was fortunate to number Professor Richard J. Kovach among its faculty. In June 2009, Professor Kovach elected to take a well-deserved retirement.

Richard Kovach is a native of Ohio who graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Oberlin College and earned his law degree from the Harvard Law School. He returned to Akron to work for one of the area's largest and most prestigious law firms, Brouse McDowell. He specialized in the area of tax and pensions. At Brouse McDowell he worked with many outstanding lawyers, including the firm's founder, C. Blake McDowell, Sr., and C. Blake McDowell, Jr. Having developed a desire to teach in the area of taxation, Professor Kovach became an Associate Professor of Tax and Director of the Graduate Program in Tax at Grand Valley State University in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

He was hired by The University of Akron and taught at the Law School from 1980 until his retirement. In 1998, he was honored with a C. Blake McDowell, Jr. Professorship.

Professor Kovach taught ten different tax courses, as well as Agency and Partnership (Basic Business), American Legal Systems, and Wills, Trusts and Estates. He served as a member of the Advisory Committee of the Joint Center for Taxation Studies, a joint venture between the College of Business Administration and the School of Law established by the Ohio Board of Regents in the 1980s. He also served as the Director of the School of Law's Tax Institute from 1982 to 1987.

Professor Kovach pioneered the "cross-listing" of law school courses with the Graduate Program in Taxation in the College of Business Administration. This meant that courses he taught were often listed in both colleges and had a joint enrollment of law students and graduate business students. He was also instrumental in laying the foundation for the establishment of two joint degree programs with the College of Business Administration. These programs allowed law students to obtain both a J.D. and a Masters degree in business in four years instead of the usual five.

Professor Kovach was a visiting professor as part of a faculty exchange at the University of Wolverhampton School of Legal Studies in Wolverhampton, England, in 1990-1991.

Professor Kovach was also a scholar who during his career published over seventeen articles and one book. Many of these were cited by other scholars working in the area of taxation and some were summarized for use by accountants and lawyers working in the area of tax.

But his most enduring contributions were in the area of teaching. Professor Kovach had a gift for taking areas that others would find complex and dry and making them understandable and interesting. He was famous for his dry sense of humor, which often involved telling stories about his family and particularly his wife, Mary Ann Kovach ('75). However, Professor Kovach always made himself the object of the joke. Over the years there were many times when every single student in his class gave him the highest possible rating on the student evaluation form. Though he typically taught small classes, which put him at a disadvantage, he was one of the final nominees for the Outstanding Teacher Award on seven occasions and actually received that award in 1993.

Professor Kovach was also generous in using his expertise in the area of tax and pensions for the benefit of others. It was not uncommon for him to work with law students who were having problems. In one instance, a former law student whom he did not have for class, contacted the Dean's office in what that graduate believed to be a desperate situation because of how much the graduate was said to owe in taxes. Though Professor Kovach did not know this graduate and had not had the graduate for class, he readily agreed to meet with the graduate and determined that some mistakes had been made by the graduate's employer. The end result was that rather than owing a large sum to IRS, the graduate received a refund.

Professor Kovach also worked on the University's Well-Being Committee with respect to benefits and also conducted faculty lunches where the topic of retirement was discussed. Professor Kovach leaves the School of Law with a bright record and the friendship and admiration of his colleagues at the School of Law and the alumni who benefitted from his classes.

