

NOT JUST A GREAT MISSISSIPPIAN

*Edward J. Westbrook**

While this issue of the *Mississippi Law Journal* rightly honors a giant of the Mississippi legal community – Richard Gershon, Mississippi must share its admiration for Professor Gershon with South Carolina. For it was in South Carolina that Professor Gershon took perhaps his greatest leap of faith by lending his talents to starting only the second law school in South Carolina modern legal history – the Charleston School of Law (“CSOL”). When Professor Gershon contacted the Founders of the Charleston School of Law, there was literally no school – no building, no faculty, no curriculum, and no students. Many said the reason there was no second law school in South Carolina was that it would be impossible to do. But for Professor Gershon, who became CSOL’s first dean, the impossible simply took more effort. Starting with a few dedicated administrative colleagues, Dean Gershon set about to build a class, secure a faculty, create a curriculum, and get a suitable facility to open the school. In Professor Gershon’s view, nothing was beyond reach. His infectious personality and constant smile endeared him to students, their parents, the Charleston legal community and perhaps most importantly, the American Bar Association inspectors.

As one of the five Founders of the Charleston School of Law, I can say without hesitation that we would have been lost without Dean Gershon. Most of us had absolutely no experience in starting or running a law school. We just had an idea. Professor Gershon turned the idea into reality. He set an example by his confident demeanor that our idea was actually going to work. If someone as distinguished as Professor Gershon was willing to come to a fledgling school, that spoke volumes to faculty candidates considering whether to join the effort. Professor Gershon’s engaging manner and scholarly presence assured prospective

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students and their parents that the Charleston School of Law was the place they needed to be.

Professor Gershon lived the law school's motto of *Pro Bono Populi*. He embodied the community spirit that we sought to encourage among our students. He could often be seen jogging around town, meeting with community leaders, or engaging with students in the Barrister coffee shop. He became the face of the Charleston School of Law, and no law school could have had a better face.

Once Dean Gershon had done what was thought impossible by many and gotten the Charleston School of Law provisionally accredited by the American Bar Association, he decided it was time to move on to other challenges. While we were heartbroken to see him leave, we knew that his insatiable desire to improve the standards of legal education would overcome our efforts to keep him in Charleston. We recognized that Professor Gershon would be a treasure wherever he went and that the Mississippi legal community would benefit from him. So, our loss became Mississippi's gain. The Charleston School of Law and the entire South Carolina legal community, including the thousands of Charleston School of Law alumni who now practice throughout the state and country, will be forever indebted to Dean Gershon for taking the chance that allowed so many the opportunity to join our great profession.