

Cultivating lawyers for Kansas, J.L. Weigand Trust helps brightest students to keep them in state

BY JOHN STEARNS

Few Wichitans know it, but a multimillion-dollar scholarship fund based here has been helping some of Kansas' brightest minds become lawyers at some of the state's most prestigious firms since 2004.

It's all thanks to a man who died 10 years ago with a simple wish: Keep Kansas' top law school graduates practicing in Kansas.

The estate of Wichita lawyer J.L. Weigand Jr., who died in 2002 at age 69, funded the roughly \$6 million endowment behind a scholarship program that some law schools say may be the most generous in the country.



J.L. Weigand Jr.

Of the 36 students who have received money from The J.L. Weigand Jr. Notre Dame Legal Education Trust since 2004, 25 have stayed in Kansas to practice, including 10 in Wichita. Four of the students remain in law school.

Claudette Glenn, Director of the Weigand trust, calls that success.

"When you consider that these are the top students in their class and the most highly recruited by out-of-state firms, we're quite pleased," she says.

The scholarship covers all tuition, books and fees, plus a generous room and board allowance that amounted to \$7,200 this year. Students must attend law school at the University of Notre Dame, the University of Kansas or Washburn University.

To qualify, students must be in the top 10 percent of their class, have lived in Kansas for at least 10 years during their life, and have demonstrated intention to practice law in Kansas upon graduation. Students must reapply each year for the scholarship and can qualify for any or all of their three years of law school.

"It's a very elite group," Glenn says.

The scholarship is worth about \$60,000 a year at Notre Dame, \$29,300 at Washburn and \$27,300 at KU. But it's much more than a big financial handout, Glenn says: It's also admission into a valuable network of current and former Weigand scholars.

"A Weigand Scholarship is like a Heisman Trophy," Glenn says. "Once you get it, you are a Weigand forever."

J.L. Weigand Jr. was a cousin of Nestor Weigand Jr., the current chairman and CEO of J.P. Weigand & Sons Inc. and one of the fund's three trustees. The other trustees are also relatives of J.L. Weigand Jr.

"I don't think he could have ever envisioned this trust being as effective as it has been in as short a time as it has been," Nestor Weigand Jr. says. "I think he had hoped to



JOHN STEARNS / WBJ

Claudette Glenn, Director of The J.L. Weigand Jr. Notre Dame Legal Education Trust, kneels at Weigand's Wichita grave. Weigand enjoyed J&B scotch and Planters peanuts after his long days in the office.

leave an indelible mark — and he has."

Nestor Weigand credits much of the trust's success to Glenn. "She really cares a lot," he says.

Glenn joined the foundation in 2003 after it received IRS certification as a charitable foundation. Some of her prior experience includes 15 years in marketing at Pizza Hut headquarters in Wichita.



Nestor Weigand

KEEPING HOME-GROWN TALENT HOME

The late Weigand is described by those who knew him as an eccentric, intelligent, frugal individualist who loved Notre Dame, where he received his bachelor's degree.

He returned to Wichita, the city of his birth, after graduating from Georgetown University's law school. He joined his father's firm, Weigand, Curfman, Brainerd and Harris.

Glenn says Weigand hated seeing top Kansas law graduates recruited to out-of-state firms.

Almost 30 years before he died, the life-long bachelor set a goal to amass money for a perpetual legal scholarship fund. The thinking was, if students' costs are fully covered, they're less likely to leave their home state for lucrative big-city salaries to pay off their student debt.

The trust has a video about Weigand's life that notes his love of J&B scotch and Planters peanuts after long days at work, his penchant for never throwing anything away — and his frugality.

That frugality has paid off for dozens of aspiring lawyers and will help countless more.

"We're only spending a part of the interest every year" from the endowment, Glenn says. "So it is designed to go on forever."

The fund has distributed almost \$2 million so far through 64 scholarships to 36 students, some of whom have won it each year of law school, others not until their final year.

One three-time winner is Eric Pauly, who attended Washburn and has been a business and tax attorney at Foulston Siefkin LLP since 2009.



Pauly

"I'm very grateful for the Weigand Trust for what they did for me," says Pauly, 30.

When he applied, he was in Kansas City, his wife was in dental school, and he was trying to figure out how he would pay for law school. "It became a no-brainer" when he won the money. Once in school, he began meeting other Weigand scholars and the networking began.

It continues today through regular events statewide.

Andrew Nolan, who oversees recruiting at Foulston Siefkin as one of its partners, says Weigand scholars are the kind of lawyers the firm likes to hire.

"They are at the top of the talent pool," he says.

Foulston Siefkin has two Weigand scholars on staff, a third coming in the fall and a fourth coming in 2014. Two Weigand scholars are interns at the firm this summer.

GENEROSITY IS MULTIFACETED

Weigand scholar Jeffrey Pyle just completed his second year of law school at KU and is interning this summer at The Law Offices of Michael J. Studtmann in Wichita, working on criminal defense, family law and bankruptcy cases.

He's been a Weigand scholar for two years and has won the award for his final year. With a 13-year-old son in Wichita, Pyle, 34, is grateful to be able to stay in Kansas and focus on paying for his son's college rather than worrying about paying for his own.

"It's been fantastic," he says of the fund's aid. "That kind of assistance gives you choices that you wouldn't otherwise have with law school."

Many times, law school graduates have so much debt they end up practicing in areas they might not otherwise choose, just to pay the bills.

"This assistance gives you the opportunity to do whatever it is you're passionate about doing," Pyle says.