Dino D’Angelo 1920-1991

Dino J. D’Angelo, real-estate lawyer, patron of the arts, and benefactor of the Law School, died at his office on September 12. He was seventy years old.

In 1984, Mr. D’Angelo contributed $4.5 million to the expansion of the law library, which now bears his family name. The building extension was completed in 1987. Mr. D’Angelo regarded his gift to the Law School as a repayment of debt to an institution that shaped his life. “We all have debts to pay, and each of us pays them in his own way. The University of Chicago helped me break through barriers... and showed me new horizons.”

Born in Abruzzi, Italy, Mr. D’Angelo came to the United States with his mother when he was six. The family ran a grocery store on the ground floor of the 12-flat building at Laflin and Flournoy in Chicago that Mr. D’Angelo’s father had bought when he immigrated to this country just before his son was born. From the age of seven, Mr. D’Angelo worked in the store before and after school and paid his way through college and law school. He entered the University of Chicago in 1938, earning a bachelor’s degree in 1942 and his J.D. in 1944.

Mr. D’Angelo served two years in the army as a 2d Lieutenant in the Transportation Corps. On his discharge in 1946, he began his own law practice, working as a solo practitioner for fifteen years until joining Robert S. Fiffer ’47 to create the firm of Fiffer & D’Angelo. He later became a partner in the firm of Friedman & Koven.

Mr. D’Angelo was a patron of the arts and had an extensive personal collection. In 1978 he donated to the Law School the sculpture Diarchy by Kenneth Armitage, which is now permanently displayed in the Laird Bell Quadrangle.

Mr. D’Angelo was also a successful real estate developer. Among his acquisitions was the landmark 310 S. Michigan Avenue building, which he restored to its former elegance. He was perhaps best known, however, for his purchase in 1983 of the Kemper Building, home of the Lyric Opera, to which he returned its original name—the Civic Opera Building. Mr. D’Angelo refurbished the building and the opera house and reopened the Civic Theatre, previously closed for seven years.

In 1972, Mr. D’Angelo’s career was abruptly halted by acute depression, which resulted in a prolonged period of hospitalization. His health was restored with the discovery that some forms of depression, including his, had physical causes and could be cured with medication. In 1975 he resumed his business activity with renewed vigor.

Dean Geoffrey Stone, who came to know Mr. D’Angelo well in recent years, described him as “a truly extraordinary individual. Dino overcame severe hardship and, building upon that experience, emerged as one of the most ecumenical, vital and generous individuals I have ever known. He truly loved the Law School and never forgot the role it played in his life. We will never forget him.”

Provost and former Dean Gerhard Casper, who was especially close to Mr. D’Angelo, recalled him fondly. “It was commonplace when we were together for me to ask: ‘What are we going to argue about tonight?’ Dino and I argued a lot during the years when I also saw it as my task to persuade him to finance the law library extension. To be sure, our arguments were always friendly. There was much bantering and teasing. I usually could recognize when Dino turned serious because he would then begin to address me as ‘Sir’ or as ‘Dean Casper.’

‘In gratitude for Dino and Becky D’Angelo’s extraordinary generosity, the library was named ‘D’Angelo Law Library,’ not ‘Dino D’Angelo Law Library.’ Dino wanted it that way to give recognition to his entire family, from his parents who emigrated from Italy, to Becky and his children.

‘After the funeral mass at the church of Our Lady of Pompeii in Chicago’s old Italian neighborhood where Dino grew up, Becky said to me: ‘Dino loved you guys at the U of C. I shall remember Dino not only for his and Becky’s generosity but even more so for that love.’

Mr. D’Angelo is survived by his wife Becky, three daughters, his son Louis, who graduated from the Law School this year, his brother Oscar, and six grandchildren.