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2014 Year in Review: 2 Law Schools Welcome New Deans While a Third Experiences Abrupt Departure

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The justice center would move criminal courts from the City-County Building. (IL file photo)

Creating a justice center outside of the city’s center raised concerns about accessibility by the public, the extra time to travel to court by attorneys, and the impact on businesses and real estate if the court-related functions left. At this point, civil court would remain in its current location in downtown Indianapolis, but Indianapolis Director of Enterprise Development David Rosenberg said civil courts could be relocated to the new criminal complex in the future.

The mayor selected three bidders and released the request for proposals in April. The city did not make most of the RFP public until October. The mayor’s office announced Paris-based WMB Heartland Justice Partners as the winning bidder Dec. 12, and it will pay WMB Heartland $1.6 billion over 35 years for the new justice center.

City officials have repeatedly said that taxes will not be increased to pay for the construction and that efficiencies created by consolidating criminal courts and services in one location will fund the complex.

2 law schools welcome new deans while a third experiences abrupt departure

Parrish

Indiana’s law schools saw new leadership this year when Austen Parrish joined Indiana University Maurer School of Law in January and Andrea Lyon joined Valparaiso University Law School in July. Parrish came to Bloomington from Southwestern Law School in Los Angeles, where he served as the school’s interim dean for 16 months.

John Applegate, IU executive vice president for University Academic Affairs and chair of the dean search committee, said Parrish will fit in well at IU Maurer.

Lyon

“He is enthusiastic about looking change in the face and figuring out a way that we can still provide a superb education in a new environment,” Applegate said. In his first year on the job, Parrish has created partnerships with several schools – both in Indiana and out-of-state – to encourage students to attend IU Maurer for their legal education.

Just a month into her tenure as dean at Valparaiso Law, Lyon told alumni in Indianapolis about her nontraditional plan to improve the institution’s national ranking in US News & World Report. She wants to emphasize the school’s focus on training people to be lawyers and wants to get a national reputation for its clinical programs and legal writing courses that give students hands-on experience.
Valparaiso Law is annually classified in the “rank not published” category of the magazine, a designation given to schools that have a ranking below US News’ cutoff point of roughly 150.

And sandwiched in between Parrish’s and Lyon’s first days on the job was the sudden departure of Indiana Tech Law School Dean Peter Alexander in May. Indiana Tech announced May 23 without any explanation that Alexander – the school’s first and only dean – stepped down days earlier. Alexander said in a statement that he had achieved the goals he established for the institution and has a desire to pursue other employment opportunities. At the time, the school said Alexander would remain with the school in a consulting role but did not detail what his duties would be going forward.

Alexander came to Fort Wayne in January 2012 from Southern Illinois University School of Law to help launch Indiana Tech’s law school, which opened to its first class in the fall of 2013. Associate Dean for Academic Affairs andre douglas pond cummings was named interim dean.

“While Peter is and was a dynamic and charismatic leader, the vision is completely shared by me and the folks we hired,” cummings said shortly after Alexander’s departure. “I think we’re totally and completely on track as far as what we set to do in the very beginning.”

At the time Alexander left, Indiana Tech was in the process of seeking provisional accreditation from the American Bar Association. An ABA site team visited the school in September and submitted its report to the bar association’s Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar’s accreditation committee, which will decide whether the school qualifies for provisional approval. Without approval, Indiana Tech graduates would not be eligible to sit for most states’ bar exams.

The school announced in late November that Charles Cercone, currently dean of faculty at Western Michigan’s Thomas M. Cooley Law School, has been selected as Indiana Tech’s new dean. He begins at the school Jan. 5, 2015.

Bad barristers pay price for legal misdeeds

Stop us if you’ve heard this one before: an Indiana attorney accused of stealing potentially millions from his clients is criminally charged and resigns from the bar. No, it’s not William Conour (more on him in a minute); 2014’s version is Valparaiso attorney Clark W. Holesinger. Holesinger was charged in February in Porter County with four counts of Class C felony theft of property valued at $100,000 or more and one count of Class D felony theft.