



By Ellen Rosen
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Philadelphian Gives Drexel \$50 Million: Business of Law

Philadelphia trial lawyer Thomas R. Kline is giving \$50 million to Drexel University's law school, which has been renamed the Drexel University Thomas R. Kline School of Law.

As part of the gift, the school, founded in 2006, will establish a trial advocacy center. The center, to be known as the Thomas R. Kline Institute of Trial Advocacy of the Kline School of Law, will be housed in the historic 24,000-square-foot Beneficial Bank Building in Philadelphia's Center City neighborhood.

Kline, a founding partner of Kline & Specter P.C., specializes in catastrophic injury litigation and whistle-blower cases. He has worked on lawsuits involving Vioxx and Risperdal, as well as representing one of the victims of Jerry Sandusky, the Pennsylvania State University assistant football coach now in prison for molesting children.

Kline bought the building in 2012, when it had fallen on hard times. It was slated to be used as "a pool hall," which, he said, "met with community resistance."

He was inspired by its 50-foot ceilings, granite facade and first-floor interior space which he thought could house a "monumental courtroom." He didn't disclose the purchase price but said it was recently appraised at \$5 million.

When he bought the building, he didn't have a specific use in mind, but intended it for something cultural or academic. Kline, however, also sits on the board of trustees of the university and chairs the law school advisory board. The building and the law school soon coalesced.

Drexel's president, John Fry, as well as the law school dean, Roger Dennis, began engaging "in dialogue about developing the law school" with Kline about six months ago. The two academics "fell in love with the idea of offering the most innovative curriculum possible in the most elegant and dramatic of settings," Kline said. The hope, he added, was to have "the latest technology along with all of the old grandeur."

The gift's terms are confidential. It will be among the largest given to a law school, according to the Chronicle of Philanthropy, which tracks donations.

Dennis, the dean, said a team on Sept. 22 will begin discussing plans for the building and for expanding the existing small trial advocacy program.

Kline will be involved in the plans. While the terms of the gift don't mandate his participation in the design or administration of the center, he said, he intends to be active. "I still have the key," he said.