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\$50M gift to Drexel law school

Trial lawyer Thomas R. Kline's grant includes the Beneficial Bank building.

By Chris Mondics
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In one of the largest gifts ever to a U.S. law school, Drexel University said Wednesday that Philadelphia trial lawyer Thomas R. Kline would give the eight-year-old school \$50 million to bolster its effort to reach the top ranks

of legal education.

Drexel president John A. Fry said the money would be used to fund scholarships, add faculty, and expand the law school's trial-advocacy program, which provides training for lawyers who plan to focus on courtroom practice.

See **GIFT** on A14



Benefactor
Thomas R. Kline, one of the city's and nation's most prominent trial lawyers, whose gift, Drexel said, is the fourth-largest ever to a U.S. law school.

STEVEN M. FALK / Staff Photographer

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\$50M gift to Drexel law school

GIFT from A1

Included in the gift is the former Beneficial Saving Fund Society building at 12th and Chestnut Streets, an imposing Classical Revival-style structure that has been vacant since 2001 and that will house the law school's Institute for Trial Advocacy.

In recognition of the gift, the law school will be named the Thomas R. Kline School of Law.

"This is a major, major moment for the law school," Fry said. "This gives us the opportunity to put this relatively new law school on a firm financial footing and, in particular, establish it as a force for the practice of trial advocacy."

Kline, chairman of the law school board, said the idea for the contribution emerged from discussions with Roger Dennis, the law school dean.

"It is our collective vision to create a law school with national stature," Kline said. "The foundation is there. What we now have is an opportunity to not only build programmatic changes, but we also have a magnificent magnet that is a true gem of the City of Philadelphia."

With the addition of the building at 12th and Chestnut, which will require extensive renovation and which Kline estimates will be ready for use in 2017, the law school will effectively have two sites: its main campus in University City, and a new location in Center City near city and federal courts and many law firms.

Kline is one of the city's — and nation's — most prominent trial lawyers. He represented one of the victims in the Pennsylvania State University sexual-abuse cases and became a national spokesman for others with claims against the university. He cofounded the firm of Kline & Specter P.C. in 1995 with partner Shanin Specter, son of late longtime U.S. Sen. Arlen Specter.

Since then, the firm has reached the upper ranks of law firms handling catastrophic personal-injury cases. On its website, it lists awards and settlements on behalf of clients of more than \$1.7 billion, noting at the same time that the results of many other resolved cases could not be reported under terms of confidentiality agreements.

The gift comes at a time of intensifying competition among law schools for a declining number of students. Overall enrollment at the nation's law schools has dropped about 24 percent in the last three years, fallout from the 2008 financial market collapse and sharp cutbacks in hiring by law firms.

That effectively has caused a repricing of legal education, with the stronger schools offering ever more financial aid as an incentive to talented students to enroll. Dennis said the Kline gift would

help Drexel, where the current tuition is about \$40,000 a year, to provide more in the way of financial aid and scholarships, boosting its competitive edge.

Kline's gift is the fourth-largest ever to a U.S. law school, Drexel said. The largest was a \$130 million contribution to the University of Arizona law school in 1999 from broadcasting executive James Rogers; next is a \$100 million gift from Domino's Pizza founder Thomas S. Monaghan to the law school of Ave Maria University in Florida; in third place is a \$55 million gift to the Chapman University law school from real estate developer Dale E. Fowler and his wife, Sarah Ann.

The Drexel law school had been named for real estate investor and Drexel graduate Earle Mack, an early contributor. His name came off the school several years ago, however, to create new fund-raising opportunities, university officials said.

The Beneficial Saving Fund Society building was designed by Horace Trumbauer, a noted Gilded Age architect from Philadelphia whose clients included the city's wealthiest families, as well as those in New York. For years, the building served as headquarters and a retail banking outlet of Beneficial Bank.

Eight massive pillars brace the exterior; inside, the first-floor ceiling rises 50 feet. Above that are the bank's old offices and a walnut-paneled boardroom with a sprawling walnut meeting table and 22 directors' chairs, each still bearing the name of the board member who sat in it.

Kline said he anticipated the first-floor space would be converted to a practice-courtroom facility and possibly offices. Dennis said once the trial-advocacy program was established in the new building, he expected to draw adjunct faculty from the many lawyers who practice in the city and federal courts nearby, as well as practicing lawyers seeking additional training in more advanced features of trial advocacy.

Kline, whose son graduated from the Drexel law school, said he bought the building in 2012 with the idea of putting it to some public purpose. It sits in the heart of the Market Street East area, where a number of commercial-redevelopment projects are in progress, including a neighboring stretch of Chestnut Street a block away.

"This building is designed to be a permanent fixture of the law school," Kline said. "It is only 21 blocks from" the main campus. "I actually plan to challenge the students not to use public transportation, but to use good old-fashioned shoe leather. It will do us all some good."

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