



William J. Palatucci '89: 2014 Distinguished Graduate at Alumni Dinner Dance



William J. Palatucci '89 received the Distinguished Graduate Award at the Annual Alumni Dinner Dance on May 2. Palatucci is Special Counsel at Gibbons P.C., a leader in the state's Republican Party and a member of the Seton Hall Law Board of Visitors. Dean Hobbs, who presented Palatucci with the award, spoke of Palatucci's work as an advisor to Governor Chris Christie '87 and his active role in the political campaigns of Presidents Reagan, George H.W. Bush and George W. Bush, among many others. "If Bill Palatucci believes in someone, he will work tirelessly on that person's behalf," said Dean Hobbs. *Pictured, from left: Dean Hobbs, Bill Palatucci and Laura Palatucci, Bill's wife.*

As early as Palatucci can remember, he knew law school was in his future. Born and raised in Haskell, near the Wanaque Reservoir, Palatucci grew up next to the family business, a small neighborhood bar – "a shot-and-a-beer place" – that his father owned. "My father also managed a couple of rental properties and he prepared taxes for many of his customers," Palatucci said. "I grew up around the workings of a small family business and we needed the skills of an attorney. And I always had an interest in the legal aspect of his businesses."

Conversation at the Palatucci household often turned to politics and current events: "My father was an avid reader of the editorial pages, we always watched the evening news and the Sunday morning talk shows, so much of our dinner table discussion was about what we had heard and seen." The interest in current events continued in college, where, during his senior year at Rutgers University, Palatucci's own passion for politics sparked when he was presented with the opportunity to volunteer for Tom Kean, Sr. during his gubernatorial run. "I was fortunate to learn about political campaigns from him," Palatucci said, "And it was exciting when he went on to win."

Palatucci, newly married to his high-school sweetheart, Laura, attended Seton Hall Law as an evening student. He particularly appreciated the camaraderie of the night class. "I enjoyed the fact that there was a varied and diverse student body – they were working during the day or they had family," he said. "We were all very busy and very stressed, trying to get through it together."

After Palatucci graduated, he continued his work in both New Jersey and national politics, dedicating himself to several Presidential election campaigns and serving as principal consultant during Christine Todd Whitman's run for the U.S. Senate in 1990. Palatucci joined the law firm, Dughi & Hewit, P.C., in 1993, where he founded the firm's government affairs practice. He was named a partner in 2000, and the firm's name was changed to Dughi, Hewit & Palatucci, P.C. That same year, he served as a senior advisor to George W. Bush in his successful run for president. Palatucci was named Republican National Committeeman for New Jersey in 2010.



His most recent campaign effort helped secure the reelection of Governor Christie in 2013, serving as Chairman of the Governor's campaign, and also, as Co-Chair for the Governor's Inaugural Committee.

In a recent profile, the *National Review* described Palatucci as: "a private person who would rather operate in the back room than in the spotlight, and he takes pains to shine it elsewhere." And yet, "Despite his protests to the contrary, Palatucci is ... one of New Jersey's most powerful political power brokers. In the state, where he has played a key role in nearly every Republican presidential campaign since 1984, his imprimatur matters."

Palatucci's political work bears the influence of his upbringing, and is reflected in how he dedicates himself only to the candidates he truly believes in – those who operate on a plane of integrity and sincerity. As quoted in the *National Review*, Palatucci said, "To this day, assessing political candidates, 'I try really hard to look at them through the eyes of the guys who were at my father's bar.'"

Governor Christie was unfortunately unable to attend the Alumni Dinner Dance, but Dean Hobbs spoke on the Governor's behalf when he presented the Distinguished Graduate award to Palatucci: "I asked the Governor to describe Bill. He said, 'First and foremost Bill is my most trusted friend. From the beginning he has given me great counsel and advice and he believes in me and what I hope to accomplish by the time I finish my term as Governor. I can think of no one more deserving of this award than Bill.'"

Last year, Palatucci joined Gibbons P.C. as Special Counsel in the firm's Corporate Department "I enjoy the opportunity to get involved in many different areas of the firm – land use planning, litigation, and strategic planning for clients," he explained. "It's been rewarding to work with such a large group of talented lawyers, and I enjoy assisting clients by introducing them to our many professionals, whether it's a large corporation trying to resolve a protracted business dispute or a company that is expanding to New Jersey. We have the experience to roll up our sleeves and really help."

As he continues to pursue his work in the political realm and in private legal practice, Palatucci also volunteers actively. He is a member of the National Advisory Board for the Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University and he chairs the University of Phoenix Board of Trustees' Jersey City campus. Palatucci also sits on the Board of Visitors at Seton Hall Law.

"I enjoyed my law school experience," he concluded, "but the reason I decided to join the Board is simple: Dean Hobbs called and invited me, so I really have to give him the credit. I have a great respect for Dean Hobbs' vision for the law school and I welcomed the call. I'm happy to contribute if my support can make a difference."