By Trevor Maxwell

Coming out of one of the nation’s smallest law schools, Tim McCormack ’01 didn’t expect to run across too many of his fellow Maine Law alums when he went to work in Washington, D.C. in the early 2000s, first as a policy advisor to Sen. Susan Collins, and then as a lawyer in private practice.

Yet there they were. John Bean ’03, Amanda Wood ’01, Matt Walker ’01 and, later, Justin Weiss ’06, were just some of McCormack’s contemporaries whose careers had also led them to Washington, D.C. Once there, they became part of a larger network of Maine Law alumni from earlier years, a group that includes Martha Casey ’82, David Evans ’78, Frank O’Toole ’70, Charlie Cragin ’70, Mary Bell ’74 and Ron Battocchi ’74.

McCormack recalls his wife coming home one day from her job at the U.S. Department of Labor, and asking whether he knew a guy named Richard Ewell, who happened to work in the same office.

“I know Richard,” McCormack said. “He was in my class at Maine Law.”

For a small school, Maine Law packs quite a punch in the nation’s capital. Alumni are thriving in a wide variety of fields in Washington, including private practice, politics, government agencies, public policy, and business. More than 150 alums live, work, or are retired in the Washington metropolitan area. Only Massachusetts and, of course, Maine itself boast a higher concentration of Maine Law graduates.
The Law School has hosted an annual alumni reception in Washington for many years, and the administration is taking full advantage of the connections and job opportunities in the city. Beginning in the spring of 2015, Maine Law will launch its Semester in D.C. Externship Program, matching students with positions in federal agencies of their choice. Externs earn academic credit while working alongside seasoned attorneys.

As more Maine Law graduates make their way to Washington, there are more connections to leverage in networking, which can be critical for interview opportunities and long-term success.

“I really encourage people to look at D.C. There is good work down here, and a great alumni network of Maine Law folks,” said McCormack, 45, who recently joined the Board of Directors for the Maine Law Alumni Association.

At the Phillips and Cohen law firm, McCormack specializes in the representation of whistleblowers who work to recover money from companies that have defrauded the government.

“Maine is a small place, and a lot of people want to live in the Portland area. For that reason alone, the competition is less intense in Washington. There is also a lot of appreciation for people who have the kind of solid, nuts and bolts education you get at Maine Law.”

The lure of the Hill

In the early 1980s, the Maine Law alumni network in Washington, D.C. was small but lively when Martha Casey took a job on Capitol Hill.

A Massachusetts native and Democrat, Casey had always been interested in politics and public policy. She worked as a Congressional aide before coming to Maine Law, and she imagined returning to the city after graduation, possibly to work in the Justice Department.

“I remember sitting in the law library the night that Ronald Reagan became president,” Casey said. “I thought to myself, I guess I won’t be working in that department.”

Her boyfriend at the time took a clerkship in Washington, and after many phone calls in the spring of 1982, Casey landed a job in the office of Massachusetts Congressman Brian Donnelly, who soon earned a spot on the House Ways and Means Committee. Casey worked as legislative counsel to Donnelly until 1987.

“I was there for tax reform, Medicare and Medicaid. I became a healthcare expert without really intending to,” Casey recalled.

That expertise propelled Casey into her next career move as a prominent lobbyist for hospitals and other clients in the healthcare industry. As a consultant with O’Neill, Athy & Casey, she represents Brigham & Women’s Hospital, Boston Medical Center, and Massachusetts General Hospital, among others. From her firm’s headquarters on the historic Dupont Circle, Casey has been a leading advocate for hospitals in every budget battle.
since the Reagan era. Casey has also expanded into education, with clients including Harvard College and Northeastern University. She volunteers her time on the board of directors of the University of Maine School of Law Foundation.

While the Maine Law contingent in Washington was not as large in the 1980s as it is today, Casey made time to get together with fellow alumni in the city, including David Evans, John Veroneau ‘89, and Jane Earley ’74.

Evans, a member of the Maine Law class of 1978, also fondly recalls those gatherings. They met once at a Chinese restaurant, and other times at apartments or townhomes.

“It was a lot of fun. We’d share stories about Maine, talk about family and jobs,” Evans said. “This was long before it became more organized, with Maine Law receptions and the Dean coming to town, bringing people and updates from the school. Those events are huge now.”

The steady growth of a lawyers’ town

Evans is a partner at Clifford Chance US LLP, the American headquarters of the multinational law firm based in London. He specializes in project finance, utility regulation, and commercial contracts.

Evans has been involved in energy and finance matters his entire career, including positions as Staff Counsel to the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission investigating the accident at Three Mile Island, as Chevron’s chief natural gas lawyer, as Vice President and General Counsel of an independent power developer, and as a partner in two major law firms. He has also remained deeply engaged with Maine Law. Evans was president of the University of Maine School of Law Foundation for a number of years, taking a leadership role in fundraising and advocacy from 2007 to 2013.

His first opportunity in Washington was as a participant in an honors law graduate program run by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. Evans describes it as a classic path for an aspiring lawyer. Work for a federal agency. Get experience. Earn a reputation for high quality work. Move on to the next step in your career.

“That is one thing that always struck me about government agencies. There is a lot less bias than people face at big East Coast firms,” Evans said. “To the people making hiring decisions in the government, the only question that matters is – Can you do the job? It doesn’t matter if you went to Maine Law or Harvard or Yale.”

Both Casey and Evans have encouraged Maine Law graduates to seek employment in Washington, and they have been delighted as the numbers of alumni in the metropolitan area have gone up.

“For years we always asked each other: Why can’t we get more Maine Law graduates to Washington?” Casey said. “Then, gradually, more people started coming down. We started getting more calls from people looking to make connections, which was great.”

“It has really taken off in the last 15 years. The government response after 9/11 created whole new swaths of the D.C. economy, and those jobs are going to young professionals. My neighborhood in Arlington has developed entirely in the last 15 years, and almost all new residents are under 35.”

The statistics support Casey’s perspective. Washington’s economy, driven largely by growth in government agencies and contractors, has flourished over the past decade and a half, while other cities were stagnant. Since 2001, Washington has enjoyed the lowest unemployment rate among the largest 10 metropolitan areas in the nation. For overall job growth between 2001 and 2012, Washington ranked second, adding more than 150,000 jobs. Only Houston fared better.

The terrorist attacks of 2001 motivated Brian Tomney, class of 2006, toward a career change and a move to Washington. A 13-year veteran paramedic for the City of Portland, Tomney was at work on 9/11 when the FBI located the car of Mohammed Atta at the Portland Jetport shortly after the attacks. He traveled with other paramedics and firefighters to two FDNY funerals in New York City, and visited Ground Zero about a month after the attacks, when the wreckage was still burning.

“I woke up on New Year’s Day 2002 and said, I’m going to law school and then I’m going to work for the Justice Department,” Tomney recalled.

It was an ambitious path from which Tomney never wavered. He enrolled at Maine Law in 2003, interned at the U.S. Attorney’s Office in Portland as a rising 2L, and then in the U.S. DOJ’s Counterterrorism Section as a rising 3L. Tomney was selected for the DOJ Honors Program
Staying connected: Outreach builds Washington relationships


“Our talented and generous network of D.C. alumni, in both the private and public sectors, provides advice, encouragement, and jobs to our students and recent graduates,” said Peter Pitegoff, Dean at Maine Law.

“Additionally, many opportunities in D.C. involve public service, which is a signature attribute of Maine Law and a powerful draw for our graduates.”

For many years, leaders at Maine Law have paid close attention to D.C. and have nurtured those important connections to the city.

Maine Law’s annual alumni reception in Washington brings together a large and enthusiastic crowd of alumni and friends. It is one of the most anticipated events of the year for friends who often don’t have extra time throughout the year to catch up with their former classmates. The 2014 reception was held on April 30 at the AGC Townhouse on Capitol Hill.

The Law School has a faculty and student exchange agreement with Howard University Law School, and faculty members maintain active relationships with the other law schools in Washington.

Faculty also engage with the federal government with respect to policy development and funding opportunities, including support for domestic violence prevention work done by our Cumberland Legal Aid Clinic, and for Professor Lois R. Lupica’s wide-ranging Consumer Financial Distress Project.

Maine Law’s Semester in D.C. Externship Program launches in the spring semester of 2015. The program is designed to assist law students in identifying and securing full-time, semester long externships with a federal agency of their choice. To complement their field placement experience, students will enroll in a seminar on government practice taught by Washington lawyer Jane Earley ’74, who is working with Maine Law to launch this pilot program.

following his graduation. He was among five individuals picked to work in the Criminal Division, out of several hundred applicants.

After three years as a prosecutor in the Criminal Division’s Narcotic and Dangerous Drug Section, in 2009 Tomney was promoted to a job involving the highest levels of national security. As Counsel for Rule of Law to the Deputy Attorney General, Tomney oversees U.S. prosecutors who work hand in hand with prosecutors in Afghanistan and Iraq. The mission is to build the capacity of those countries to successfully prosecute drug trafficking, terrorism, and other crimes.

“I’ve enjoyed living and working in D.C. My experience is that people either really love it here and thrive in this environment, or they get chewed up,” he said. “Compared to Maine, the biggest drawback for me is that the beach is at least three hours away, and it can be five hours away, depending on traffic.”

“What has helped me most is that I knew exactly what I wanted to do,” Tomney said. “When I cross Pennsylvania Avenue to work every day, I look around, I look at the Capitol, and I think about how fortunate I am, and why I came here.”

‘The Maine connections are real’

McCormack, the qui tam lawyer with Phillips and Cohen, took his own unique path to D.C., as part of the youth movement to the city in the early 2000s. He arrived in Washington in 2003 after clerking for federal judges in Maine and Vermont.

Like many Maine Law alumni who now call D.C. home, McCormack thought he would work in the city for a few years and then look for a job back in Maine.

“I was actually planning to go to work for a firm in Portland, but one of my co-clerks convinced me to think about Washington. She had worked on the Hill for many years, and said, ‘Go down to D.C. Maine will always be there,’” McCormack said.

With help from Maine Law alumni working in the office of Sen. Susan Collins, McCormack interviewed for a job, and the timing could not have been better. McCormack had studied forestry at the University of Maine, and Collins needed an advisor on forestry and agriculture.

After his year as an advisor to Collins, McCormack decided he wanted to be more of a “nuts and bolts” lawyer. His next career step was away from Capitol Hill and into private practice. He joined Goodwin Procter LLP, specializing in complex commercial litigation. While there, he met his wife, Lisa Wilson. McCormack then moved on to Phillips and Cohen, where he has played key roles in successful whistleblower cases involving hospitals, a medical device company, government contractors and pharmaceutical companies.

“I’ve been very fortunate. I met my wife and started a family here, and I have a job that is challenging and tremendously rewarding,” said McCormack, father to youngsters Natalie and Ben. “It is a really cool combination of working with clients who are at a place in life where they need help, and at the same time they are trying to do the right thing.”

McCormack, Casey, and Evans all agreed that the Maine Law alumni network is an expanding and effective tool for job-hunting, and for those simply testing the waters in Washington.

“The Maine connections are real,” Casey said. “We love it when we can show a job seeker around or answer questions. We are going to go out of our way to help those people.”
A livable yet truly international city

Kate Shorr ’10, who grew up in Portland, has seen the results of the Maine Law alumni network first-hand. Shorr was selected as a Congressional intern in Senator Susan Collin’s office during her last semester as an undergrad at the University of Maine in Orono, where she majored in Political Science. The internship sent her to Washington in the spring of 2004, and she immediately fell in love with the city.

During her internship, Shorr worked closely with Maine Law alumnus Steve Abbott ’91, the Senator’s Chief of Staff. Following the internship, Abbott offered Shorr a permanent position in the office, first as a staff assistant and then as the Senator’s State Scheduler and Executive Assistant. Shorr says that Abbott and other lawyers she worked with urged her to pursue her law degree, and in 2007 she decided to return to her native city of Portland for law school.

“On the Hill, you are just surrounded by lawyers. Everywhere you turn there are lawyers doing really cool things with their degrees,” said Shorr, who was part of the pre-law program at the University of Maine.

“Steve Abbott and the other lawyers in Sen. Collins’ office were great mentors. Tim McCormack was there at the time, and he sort of took me under his wing when I was an intern. Being surrounded by so many lawyers, the idea of law school never left my thought process.”

After graduating from Maine Law in 2010 – with the nation mired in a historic recession following the financial crisis of 2008 – Shorr was anxious to move back to Washington, despite not having a job lined up. She moved to D.C. and slept on a friend’s couch, waited tables and joined a temp agency. All the while, she worked the phones and email, reaching out to Maine Law alumni in the area to seek advice, grab a cup of coffee, or ask to help make a connection for a potential job. That is how she met Amanda Wood, a 2001 Maine Law grad. At the time, Wood was working for the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee and offered Kate advice on networking and gave her names of other alumni in the area to contact.

Ultimately, Shorr joined powerhouse law firm Foley & Lardner’s government affairs practice group in its Washington office. She worked at the firm for two years before making her next Maine connection in the summer of 2012 when she attended a Washington reception for Angus King, who was running as an independent to replace retiring Senator Olympia Snowe.

Shorr kept in touch with the King campaign that fall and after King was elected, he hired her to join his new office as a member of his senior staff. Shorr currently serves as Senator King’s Director of Scheduling, and also assumes the title of Legislative Counsel when necessary to handle various legal issues and analysis as they arise.

“It has been quite a ride, and I’ve enjoyed all of it. I see myself staying in Washington for a very long time,” Shorr said. “I do love it here. There is so much going on, but it’s not overwhelming. I go up to New York and I get overwhelmed. Washington is a very livable city with a ton to do.”

Evans agreed. He especially likes the variety of opportunities, such as the chance to mingle with and learn from people who come from around the world.

“You can have a virtual U.N. sitting together for dinner. It is truly an international city,” Evans said. He loves to run and bike along the Canal. Evans also enjoys the weather in Washington, although he loves returning to Maine, where he now spends much of his summer. His mother lives in Maine, and he has a sister nearby in Massachusetts.

McCormack lives in D.C. proper. The neighborhood has a cohesive and friendly vibe, with the Metro only three blocks away, he said.

“I definitely miss Maine, the size, the collegiality. But D.C. has so many opportunities. My wife and I both have jobs that are not available in other places. If you are going to live in the city, this is a pretty good one,” he said.

Attending Washington National baseball games at Nationals Park is a favorite activity for Shorr, her boyfriend, who also works on Capitol Hill, and their friends, including Wood, who now works as the Director of Employment Policy at the National Association of Manufacturers. Shorr has also stayed close friends with fellow 2010 Maine Law graduates, Mike Anderson and Nick Lund, who also both live in Washington. Anderson most recently worked for BAE Systems, and is now pursuing his LL.M. this year at George Washington University. Lund is a nature writer and lawyer with the National Parks Conservation Association.

“It’s pretty amazing to have so many Maine friends in D.C. Nick was the first classmate that I met at Maine Law. Mike was the Vice President of the Student Bar Association, and I was President. Amanda has become one of my really good friends here. It is fun to live in a city like Washington but have friends here that you have that history with, you know?” Shorr said.

“There are so many Mainers here that it gets to the point where my D.C. friends joke about it. They’ll say, ‘jeez, Kate, you Mainers are everywhere.’ It’s true, we are.” ML