



Economic Development Spurs Engineer/Lawyer

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Michael Cantor '80 '83 is clearly a booster for economic development in Connecticut. He serves on state and University boards promoting it. He is expanding his Hartford-based law firm with his partner, Phil Colburn II. And he is committed to the education of innovative UConn students.

“The bottom line is that we view UConn as an economic growth engine for this state,” Cantor says. “We want to do whatever we can to help that along.”

Scholarships, Cantor Colburn has found, are one way. As a 90-person firm specializing in intellectual property law, Cantor Colburn depends on skilled graduates familiar with cutting-edge technologies. And as a UConn chemical and materials engineering major who went on to become a successful lawyer, Cantor says his business is all about innovation in a global economy.

“The more innovation there is, the more intellectual property is produced,” he says. “We are called upon to protect that intellectual property. So it certainly behooves us to have a vibrant economic environment surrounding us that is both creative and innovative.”

To move all that creativity along, Cantor Colburn recently gave a gift of \$50,000 to establish the President’s Challenge Engineering Scholarship, to give a boost to promising students. Cantor remembers the help he received when he went to UConn, in the form of mentoring from his advisor, professor Jim Bell (now retired). During freshman year, he learned about patent law. By senior year, he had applied for engineering jobs and taken the law school admissions test.

“I received an offer for my dream engineering job—at GE—and got into law school,” he says. “I picked law school, and it ended up being the right pathway.” He eventually worked for GE in a different capacity, when the company became one of his clients.

Cantor Colburn is no typical law firm. Where a standard law office would have the tax specialists in one place, the real estate lawyers in another, Cantor Colburn’s offices are more like a science lab. Lawyers

specializing in chemistry congregate in one corner, and those focusing on physics gather in another. Biotechnology and computer science specialists sit in their groups. A number of the firm's lawyers and agents are UConn graduates, and almost all have technical backgrounds.

“In the past 10 to 15 years, patent law has become more well-known to young people studying chemistry or technology,” Cantor says. It is growing, too, as evidenced by Cantor Colburn's own growth: 12 years ago, the firm employed about 10 lawyers in one office. Now it has 90 lawyers and agents in what will soon be five offices (a fifth is opening in Houston this year). Scholarships to promising students, he says, are a way to fuel that growth.

“It's the right thing to do,” he says. “We live here, and we want Connecticut to thrive.”