

Joseph B. Meyer, UW Distinguished Alumnus

By Julianne Couch
Alumnews Editor

Fast Facts:

EDUCATION: BA '64, Mathematics; JD '67
OCCUPATION: Attorney at Law, and Wyoming State Treasurer
SELECTED ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Wyoming Secretary of State, 1999 to 2007; Special Assistant for Governmental Relations to the UW President, 1995 to 1998; Wyoming Attorney General 1987 to 1995; Assistant Director, Wyoming Legislative Service Office, 1971 to 1987; A&S Distinguished Alumnus, 2010.

As a young UW graduate, Joe Meyer couldn't find a job in Wyoming using his math degree. A graduate of Natrona County High School, he did find work testing uranium, thanks to his minor in chemistry, working for \$225 a month. He found out pretty quickly that job wasn't a lot of fun, he said, so with a friend's encouragement he decided to enroll in law school.

"The dean tried to talk me out of it, saying that math wasn't a very good background for studying the law. That made me mad." The ensuing challenge to prove the dean wrong resulted in Meyer's success in and love for the law.

As a child, Meyer said, he was an avid reader and frequently rode his bike to the Casper library. He was the first generation college graduate in his family, although he didn't start out at UW. He received a football scholarship to attend the Colorado School of Mines, but learned before long that he didn't want to be an engineer or continue to play football. He transferred to UW in spring 1960.

"I was not the best student UW ever had," Meyer said, but he was on the Student Union board and the bowling team. He pledged SAE but said he never went active with the fraternity, partly because of his grades. "I wasn't trying very hard and my mother was worried, so I decided to bum around in Europe for a semester. Then I came back to see what

would happen if I tried."

Meyer said once he decided to grow up, "life became much easier." He graduated law school and practiced law for four years, two years as Fremont County deputy county attorney and two years in a private law partnership. Then he was offered the chance to serve as the assistant director of the newly created Legislative Service Office in Cheyenne. This was 1971, and Meyer and his wife Mary had one young child. They decided to go to Cheyenne for a couple of years so he could work with that state agency, helping to develop a more consistent system. The two years turned into 16 years and they had remained in Cheyenne.

When Mike Sullivan was elected governor, Meyer decided he would like to serve as Sullivan's attorney general. Meyer said it didn't matter that they were in different political parties. "Sullivan said he wanted the best people Wyoming had to offer." So Meyer threw his hat in the ring and got the appointment.

The longest serving attorney general in Wyoming history, Meyer said: "You can do a lot of good as the people's attorney. You can take care of them and the legislature."

After Sullivan's tenure ended, Meyer went to work as the president's assistant for Governmental Affairs and Communications. In 1998, he began to seriously consider the discussion of his friends and family who said he should run for state office. "I had never given any thought to becoming a politician but I knew I had the knowledge to be effective, so I decided to run for Secretary of State." During that experience Meyer discovered that he "liked campaigning, riding in parades, and discussing the issues with friends and constituents around state." He thought he'd retired at age 65, but he said numerous Republicans asked if he'd stay on in government, so he ran for state treasurer, the position he now holds.

"I never thought about whether I'd win or lose. I just thought, this is a new adventure, let's make it a good one. I wanted to have the same friends going out as I had going in. We ran clean campaigns; there were no hand grenades, no bad experiences."

In spite of his busy career as a lawyer and public servant, Meyer has stayed



Joseph B. Meyer


involved with UW. He is a lifetime member of UWAA, was a member of the College of Law Advisory Board, the UW Student Mentor program, chairman of Family Practice Center's UW Accreditation Committee, a member of the UW Space Allocations Committee and a current Cowboy Joe Club Wrangler.

"I love UW and schools in general. Anything I can do that gives education another leg up is good. UW is an institution that most anyone can use. I admired what they did for me. After all, that's where I met my future wife, Mary." Joe and Mary (Orr) Meyer (BA '65, MA '68) have two sons and daughters-in-law who are also UW graduates, which makes for an active association with UW.

He also continues working with students, formerly as a College of Law instructor and still occasionally speaking to political science classes about what it is like to be an elected official. He tells them it is "not all fun sometimes, but it is rewarding. You don't always make the right decisions, but some are not that easy to make."

In his prior role as attorney general, Meyer chaired the Conference of Western Attorneys General, and was on the executive committee of the National Association of Attorneys General. This gave him the opportunity to teach classes to newly elected attorneys general from

Continued on page 9

Meyer said he was honored to be named a UW Distinguished Alumnus. Considering his slow start in college life, now he says “I would have loved to stay in college all my life. UW is my life; it made me what I am. I firmly believe that for others like me without a history of education, UW is one of the best places to improve your life.” Of all his accomplishments Meyer said his UW education is the one he is most proud of and appreciates the most. 

Joseph B. Meyer, UW Distinguished Alumnus

Continued from page 7

around the nation. Most of them were elected, rather than appointed, as he had been. Meyer describes himself as someone who is not a politician or a “lawyer’s lawyer.” Instead, he said, “I don’t use Latin phrases, I am very earthy, using common words, talking the sort of talk that people understand. That’s the way I am, I want to convey and communicate in a common sense way.”

Former Wyo. Gov. Dave Freudenthal summed up Meyer’s contributions to UW and the state. “In his professional endeavors and his personal undertakings, Joe has promoted the University’s interests and the affiliation of its graduates. He made significant contributions to our profession. He argued the school finance case before the Wyoming Supreme Court in 1994. He was the lead attorney for the 50 state attorneys general on Indian gambling and taxation issues. His experience and wisdom were what lead him to be invited