Donnell Gift Supports Loan Repayment for Graduates

The University of Denver Sturm College of Law recently received a gift of $250,000 from the Donnell Initiative Fund to support the Loan Repayment Assistance Program (LRAP). Not long ago, the law school established LRAP to help graduating students make the financially difficult decision to pursue a career in the public interest. LRAP promotes and encourages committed students to accept lower-paying public interest jobs by providing forgivable loans to repay those students’ law school related debt.

Cathlin Donnell, who died of breast cancer in 2004, was an accomplished Colorado lawyer who devoted much of her professional time and talent toward solving systemic social problems, particularly as they affected the lives and life prospects of women and/or involved the system of justice. Donnell was the founding partner of the Denver law firm of Donnell Davis & Salomon; a founding member of the Colorado Women’s Bar Association (CWBA); and the first female U.S. attorney in Colorado. She spearheaded CWBA’s early efforts to look at pay equity for women in law firms, co-chaired the Colorado Supreme Court’s Task Force on Gender Bias in the Courts and was an active member of the Colorado Supreme Court Committee on the Effective and Efficient Use of Juries.

The Donnell Initiative Fund gift will help the College of Law expand the number of students supported by — and increase the amount of support provided to participants in — LRAP. About the gift, Diana Poole, a good friend of Donnell’s and president of the Donnell Initiative Fund, says, “During her lifetime, Cathlin was committed to making a difference, which she did time and again on nearly every issue to which she devoted her attention. She felt fortunate that her success as a lawyer allowed her the freedom to do this. In administering her foundation, we were hard-pressed to think of any more appropriate legacy, or any way to better magnify Cathlin’s impact in the world than enabling law school graduates similarly committed to social change and social justice to pursue professional opportunities where they, in turn, can make a difference.”

LRAP has proven to be both extremely popular and competitive for anyone considering a public interest career. To date, over 70 applicants have applied to the program, and only two per year have been selected for a total of eight currently in the program. The gift from the Donnell Initiative Fund will help to expand this key program.