

Statement of Case
Honorable Thomas S. Durkin Memorial Scholarship Campaign
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May 2025

Honoring a Life of Justice, Environmental Stewardship, and Community

The Honorable Thomas S. Durkin was a beloved family man, esteemed judge, and lifelong advocate for justice and environmental preservation. His life—defined by integrity, compassion, and most of all, an abiding kindness — touched and changed the countless “folks” Tom encountered in his too-short, but so full, life. Following his passing on December 3, 2024, at the age of 67, we are proud to announce the creation of the Honorable Thomas S. Durkin JD’85 Memorial Scholarship at Vermont Law and Graduate School (VLGS), his alma mater.

About Thomas S. Durkin

Born in Brighton, Massachusetts, and raised in Marlboro, Tom’s connection to Vermont began in childhood through family ski trips to Hogback Mountain. He carried that love for Vermont with him throughout his life, eventually earning his law degree from Vermont Law School after graduating from Marlboro College. His early passion for justice and environmental stewardship, shaped on the slopes of Hogback, the rolling hills of Marlboro College and rural campus of VLGS, helped inspire and guide Tom’s distinguished legal career.

Tom began his legal career serving southern Vermont in practice with two law firms with great skill, integrity, humility,geniality and service to the community, ultimately being named by Governor Jim Douglas, a Republican, – even though Tom was well known at the time as a Democrat – to the position of Superior Court Judge on Vermont’s Environmental Court, where he presided with distinction for two decades.

Tom was renowned as a Judge for his thoughtful rulings, mentorship, selflessness, and fairness. Self-proclaimed as the “Happiest Judge in America,” Tom wanted everyone to feel welcome in his courtroom; "My goal is that everyone gets a fair shake," Tom said on his retirement from the bench. "Due process is the essence for me. Courtrooms are magical, and people must be respectful."

Tom’s contributions to the law and justice were recognized with the Vermont Bar Association’s President’s Award in 2024, a recognition of those who have made exceptional contributions to the Bar and a testament to his exceptional service and influence.

Beyond the courtroom, Tom’s life was filled with love and joy. He was a devoted husband to his wife Sue for 42 years, a proud father to Michael, Emily, and Caitlin, and a cherished grandfather to seven grandchildren. A true Vermonter, Tom found inspiration and solace in the outdoors, whether skiing, sailing, gardening, or tending to his historic farmhouse.

Tom's legacy is one of kindness, wisdom, and unwavering principles, leaving an indelible mark on his family, friends, classmates, colleagues, and the broader Vermont community.

The Vision: A Memorial Scholarship at VLGS

To honor Tom's life and legacy, we established the Honorable Thomas S. Durkin JD'85 Memorial Scholarship at VLGS. This scholarship supports JD students pursuing legal education with a focus on environmental law, justice, and stewardship—values that defined Tom's career and life.

Our Progress: Halfway to Endowment

Thanks to the extraordinary generosity of a lead donor and several early contributors from Tom's family, friends, and colleagues, we are delighted to share that we have raised \$50,000 to establish the scholarship fund. This puts us halfway to our goal of raising \$100,000 to endow the scholarship in perpetuity. An endowed scholarship ensures that the principal remains untouched while investment earnings provide annual support to deserving students year after year.

Next Steps: Join Us in Completing the Vision

We invite you to help us reach the \$100,000 mark and fully endow the Honorable Thomas S. Durkin JD'85 Memorial Scholarship. We are encouraged too that Tom's law school classmates (from the Class of '85) will be celebrating their 40th reunion in June, and the scholarship will be highlighted on their class giving page.

Why This Matters

Tom's impact on the Vermont legal and environmental community was profound, and this scholarship reflects his values by supporting the next generation of lawyers dedicated to justice and environmental stewardship. Through this fund, students will be inspired and empowered to carry forward Tom's legacy of service and fairness.

How You Can Help

We are inviting contributions of all sizes to help us complete our goal of endowing the scholarship. There are many ways to give, and all donations are tax-deductible.

Every gift brings us closer to ensuring that Tom's values and commitment to environmental justice continue to make a difference through the students who will follow in his footsteps.

Together, we can ensure that Tom's life—defined by kindness, fairness, and a deep love for Vermont—continues to inspire and make a difference.