

IN MEMORIAM: PROFESSOR KATHRYN R. HEIDT

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What is most notable about the life and the career of Professor Kathryn R. Heidt is not that it was tragically cut short by her death on May 24, 2005, but that she was able to achieve so much, both personally and professionally, in the too-brief time allotted to her. After receiving her bachelor's degree from Penn State and her J.D. from Cleveland State College of Law, Professor Heidt clerked for two years for the Honorable John T. Patton of the Ohio Court of Appeals before becoming an associate with the Philadelphia law firm Duane Morris & Heckscher. Opting for a change in her path in the law, she obtained an LL.M. from Yale Law School and began her distinguished academic career. Before joining the faculty of the University of Pittsburgh as a Professor of Law in 1995, Professor Heidt had served on the law faculty at Wayne State University Law School, and had been a visiting faculty member of the University of Pennsylvania Law School, the University of North Carolina School of Law, New York Law School, and the Law Faculty of the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands.

A commercial law expert with a particular emphasis on bankruptcy, in 1993 Professor Heidt authored a seminal book on one of the most important and complex issues of modern commercial law—the relationship between environmental law and bankruptcy law. The work—*Environmental Obligations in Bankruptcy*—put her at the center of a series of critical legal issues, and established her as an intellectual force to be reckoned with in the bankruptcy field. Authoring such a work is somewhat akin to starting a family, and Professor Heidt devoted substantial time during the remainder of her academic career to fulfilling her continuing obligations to her scholarly offspring—producing annual supplements for the work, revising the book chapter by chapter, and—as an acknowledged authority in the area—authoring briefs when the Supreme Court entertained cases on the intersection of bankruptcy and environmental regulation. She also managed to continue putting out important articles on bankruptcy topics while also sharing her intellectual passion for and expertise in commercial law with her students. Her devotion to teaching led her to inaugurate the University of Pittsburgh's participation in the Duberstein National Bankruptcy Moot Court and, while

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her health permitted, to coach the team of Pitt Law students participating in the moot. Her respect for students and the seriousness with which she approached her teaching is shown by one of her last articles—a commentary on a critical Supreme Court opinion on bankruptcy law that appeared in the highly influential American Bar Association publication, *The Business Lawyer*—which she co-authored with one of her Pitt Law students, Jeffrey Waxman.

The reputation Professor Heidt established through her scholarship made her much in demand as a public speaker, as a resource in efforts at commercial law reform, and as a leading participant in professional groups. Over the course of her too-brief career she gave some 50 speeches and presentations to groups of lawyers, judges and educators. During one particularly hectic two-year period she delivered no less than 14 public lectures. This does not count her testimony before a Congressional subcommittee working on bankruptcy legislation and other government panels working on bankruptcy issues. She also authored several reports on behalf of the American Bar Association directed to governmental bodies addressing bankruptcy reform. Indeed, Professor Heidt was a particularly active participant in ABA bodies concerned with commercial law. She served, *inter alia*, as Vice Chair, then Chair of the influential Business Bankruptcy Committee of the ABA, as well as chairing several subcommittees of that group. She also chaired the Creditors/Debtors' Rights Section of the Association of American Law Schools, and served as a Fellow of the American College of Bankruptcy from 2001 until her death. Her service, however, was by no means limited to professional groups. She acted as peer reviewer for several scholarly journals (including the prestigious *The Business Lawyer*) and served on the Board of Editors of the *Journal of Bankruptcy Law and Practice* for some 13 years, until her death. All this was in addition to her service to the schools where she taught, including serving on a dean search committee at the University of Pittsburgh, chairing the President's Commission on the Status of Women at Wayne State University, and representing the Law School in the Academic Senate at Wayne State.

Professor Heidt's scholarship, teaching and professional activities were marked by careful analysis and execution, and by passion for the subjects she took up. But while her academic and professional activities demanded an immense commitment of time and energy—particularly difficult during the later years of her life when she battled debilitating health problems that would have defeated a lesser spirit—Professor Heidt's foremost passion was her family. As a colleague working in the commercial law field, I had the good fortune to witness both her brave devotion to her profession and the reciprocal love of family that clearly was at the center of Professor Heidt's values and

character. One year Professor Heidt and I traveled together to a bankruptcy conference in Philadelphia. At that time her health problems required that she use crutches and a wheelchair, but she overcame these challenges with grace, good humor and an undaunted spirit. During our return flight to Pittsburgh I could see that the demands of the conference, during which she had taught multiple sessions for advanced bankruptcy practitioners, had taken a toll, and I worried that the loss of an entire weekend of recuperation to that conference would be too much even for Kate's brave spirit. But then I saw the genuine joy and restoration come over her face when she found her always-supportive parents and her young daughter waiting for us at the baggage return carousel. It was immediately clear to me that a major reason for Kate's remarkable professional success in the face of great challenges was the network of mutual support—and her own joyful participation in it—that she enjoyed with her family.

Professor Kathryn Heidt's admirable achievements sharpen our sadness at her untimely loss. Those same achievements, however, create a legacy that allows her life to continue in the lives of the many who benefitted from her great intelligence, her generous and brave spirit, and her quiet wisdom. Professor Heidt's life was a force for good. When the initial shock of her loss has worn off we will realize that what is important is not that she died, but that she lived.
