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Trial Lawyer Gives \$50M to Drexel Law School

By *THE ASSOCIATED PRESS*

PHILADELPHIA — Philadelphia trial lawyer Thomas R. Kline has amassed a fortune during a long career representing people harmed in unusual, and unusually tragic, ways.

His clients include a 4-year-old who lost a foot on a subway escalator, Victim No. 5 in the Penn State-Jerry Sandusky case, a 5-year-old girl kidnapped from her Philadelphia classroom and sexually tortured, and countless people injured by medical mistakes.

The dress factory owner's son from a small Pennsylvania coal town is now taking on another cause close to his heart. Kline has pledged \$50 million to Drexel University for the law school that will soon bear his name, the largest gift in Drexel's history and one of the largest law school gifts in the country.

"I don't focus on the money," Kline said Wednesday at his penthouse office. "I hope the focus on the gift is on what it will be able to accomplish."

Kline's gift includes a historic, if long-neglected, bank building on a gentrifying retail block downtown. He plans to restore the classical Horace Trumbauer building to a trial advocacy center for the law school, complete with a mock courtroom in the soaring first floor.

"I fell in love with it, and decided it had to be saved," Kline said.

Drexel's law school opened in 2006 and now has 400 students. The school was named for alumnus Earle Mack after he pledged \$15 million, but the name was dropped after officials decided the program needed a stronger foundation.

"I think this gives us an opportunity to put this relatively new law school on firm financial footing, in particular to establish it as a real force for trial advocacy," Drexel President John A. Fry said of Kline's gift.

Kline, 66, a Drexel trustee, attended law school at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh. He was raised in Hazleton, attended Albright College in Reading, earned a master's degree in history at Lehigh University in Bethlehem, and worked as a middle school history teacher in Hazleton and a lawyer in Pottsville before settling in Philadelphia in 1980.

For the past 20 years, he has led a powerhouse law firm with Shanin Specter, the son of the late Sen. Arlen Specter. Five lawyers in the firm also have medical degrees.

"He's an amazing storyteller. The jury hangs on every word he says," said former Legal Intelligencer courthouse reporter Shannon Duffy.

Kline's mentor, Philadelphia courtroom great and namesake Temple University law school benefactor James Beasley, and his wife, Paula, a teacher, both died 10

years ago. His wife and both parents died of cancer.

"We all have tragedy in our life. Life is that kind of journey," said Kline, whose damage awards include \$51 million in the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority escalator case (later reduced to \$7.6 million) and \$10 million in the kindergartener's death.

While damage awards can help victims recover, Kline believes the law's most crucial function is to force changes that safeguard the public.

"I've represented many clients ... (with misdiagnoses) which have left them paralyzed, and left them blind, and left them brain damaged, and even deaf. The civil justice system allows a person to seek compensation," he said. "But along the way ... it also provides a learning experience to those who may have failed another human being."