Wilkes finds promise in new law school

FOUR YEARS ago, as part of its annual strategic plan update, Wilkes University's Board of Trustees considered the option of opening a law school in Northeastern Pennsylvania. A bold step, because there are significant risks in such an undertaking.

But Wilkes has a history of founding programs that are much needed for the region's economic development.

Consider, for instance, the creation of its division of engineering, the Nesbitt College of Pharmacy and Nursing, the purchase of the former Call Center, and the partnership with King's College to operate a Barnes & Noble bookstore in downtown Wilkes-Barre.

All of these endeavors had risks but ended up being wins for everyone— the city, region, students and the university—and they are wonderful examples of the ways a university can and should serve its community. The proposed Wilkes Law School Planning Initiative emerged from this same philosophy that asks: What do students and the region need to continue to prosper?

After considering the law school option, the board of trustees asked the administration to appoint an ad hoc committee and charged it with the responsibility for studying the idea. This committee looked carefully at the need for a law school in the region, the unique contribution Wilkes University might make to legal education, given its historical commitment to and expertise in student mentoring.

The committee's recommendation to continue studying the initiative led to a nationwide search for a dean of the Wilkes Law School Planning Initiative, which concluded when I accepted the position. This is an extraordinary opportunity and a challenge I look forward to meeting.

The idea of starting a law school in Northeastern Pennsylvania comes at the right time for legal education. Debate over the future of legal education began in earnest with the release by the American Bar Association in 1992 of the McCrate Report, a document that urged the creation of clinical programs at all ABA-accredited law schools in the interest of enhancing skills training among future members of the legal profession.

Discussion over other issues of importance to legal education crystallized one year ago with the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching's release of "Evaluating Lawyers: Preparation for the Profession of Law" — a volume that praises what legal education does very well and offers suggestions on how legal edu-