

Samantha Ramage graduates in first Northern Ontario law class

By **Robin Burridge** -

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Samantha Ramage, left, with Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler and Dean of the Bora Laskin Faculty of Law Angelique EagleWoman at the Law Society of Upper Canada Call ceremonies at Roy Thomson Hall in Toronto. Ms. Ramage is one of 36 students from the inaugural Laskin class who was called to the bar last week.

Island woman wants to be part of the change

THUNDERBAY—Manitoulin's Samantha Ramage was one of 58 students to graduate from the charter class of Lakehead University's Bora Laskin Faculty of Law this spring, and was called to the bar with 35 of her fellow classmates this past Friday.

"The whole day was surreal," 29-year-old Ms. Ramage told The Expositor. "When you're in the trenches trying to get through all the work, you know the day is coming, but it's a surreal experience when you're finally there and past being a student."

Ms. Ramage explained the day was additionally special for her, as Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler was honoured at the Call ceremony with an honorary Doctor of Laws degree.

"As he addressed the crowd, he spoke of Chanie Wenjack, a 12-year-old Anishinaabe boy who died from hunger and exposure after trying to find his way home from a residential school," said Ms. Ramage. "He spoke of the work Gord Downie has done to shed light on this history. He spoke of righting these wrongs, of perseverance and of unity.

Watching Alvin was a reminder of why I am wearing these itchy black robes, why I worked this hard and walked this path. I am lucky enough to have played a small role in some of Alvin's selfless work by helping the tenacious Julian Falconer and amazing Meaghan Daniel. I am honoured to work for the Grand Chief, to learn from him and to know him. Congratulations, Alvin.

Congratulations, classmates. My hope is that you remember Thunder Bay, remember Chanie, remember the injustices we have learned and experienced and share as Canadians. Take that darkness and light it up. We are the next generation, we are part of the change."

Ms. Ramage grew up on Manitoulin and attended Cambrian College for Journalism after graduating from Manitoulin Secondary School. After returning

home for a short time, she was hired as the communications officer for the Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association, which led Ms. Ramage to Thunder Bay.

“I wanted to go back to school for something and to make a difference,” she explained. “I started my undergrad at Lakehead University and when I learned of the law school opening up I wanted to apply.”

Ms. Ramage explained that she was attracted to how Laskin blended aboriginal and Canadian law. In her admission letter she wrote about how the law can sometimes be unfair, especially for indigenous people, and how she wanted to help change that.

“Working for Julian (Falconer, of Falconers LLP, the firm that Ms. Ramage works for), I’m doing what I wrote about in my admission letter—I’m so lucky,” said Ms. Ramage.

As part of the inaugural Laskin class, Ms. Ramage also took part in the integrated practice curriculum (IPC), a new alternative to the traditional law school requirements to article with a firm after graduating. Instead of articling, Ms. Ramage earned her degree in three years, taking six classes a semester with practical components woven throughout and a half-year placement her final year, which she did with Falconers LLP.

Ms. Ramage met Mr. Falconer while working for the UCCMM Tribal Council. He offered her a job, and Ms. Ramage worked part-time at the firm throughout her semesters at Laskin, full-time in the summer in addition to her placement, and was hired by the firm as an associate after graduating this past spring.

“The firm is small—there are seven of us (lawyers),” she said, “but the team is incredible. It takes on really meaningful cases and when I go home at night I feel good—like I’m helping make a difference. Everyone there is really

supportive too—it's not a shark tank as some law firms are portrayed on television.”

As part of a requirement in applying to Laskin, Ms. Ramage needed to have three years of post secondary study. Although she hadn't completed her BA at the time, her two years of journalism school and two years at Lakehead fit the bill. Though it is not a requirement, Ms. Ramage has been working on completing her general BA and is currently on her final credit with her BA to be completed later this year.

Ms. Ramage was also one of several students to be featured in a recent MacLean's Magazine article: 'Lakehead University's First-Class Lawyers' by Jennifer Lewington.

“I want to be a part of the change,” the article quotes Ms. Ramage as saying. “I think my role in that change will be around accountability, with regard to the Crown, and asking those questions that indigenous people have been asking forever. Namely, she asks: ‘Why are things the way they are and [how] can they be different?’”

“Being in the first class and the first IPC, all eyes are on us,” Ms. Ramage said of the article. “Everyone is waiting to see how we do. We want to make everyone proud.”

Ms. Ramage said she was surprised and pleased by the feedback from people back on Manitoulin who saw the article and hopes it encourages other youth to pursue their dreams.

“We were all put on this earth to do good for others,” said Ms. Ramage. “Being a lawyer, we are here to serve our clients and help people.”

Ms. Ramage said she plans to return home to Manitoulin to practice eventually, but for now is still learning and honoured to be apart of the inaugural Laskin class and part of the Falconers LLP team.