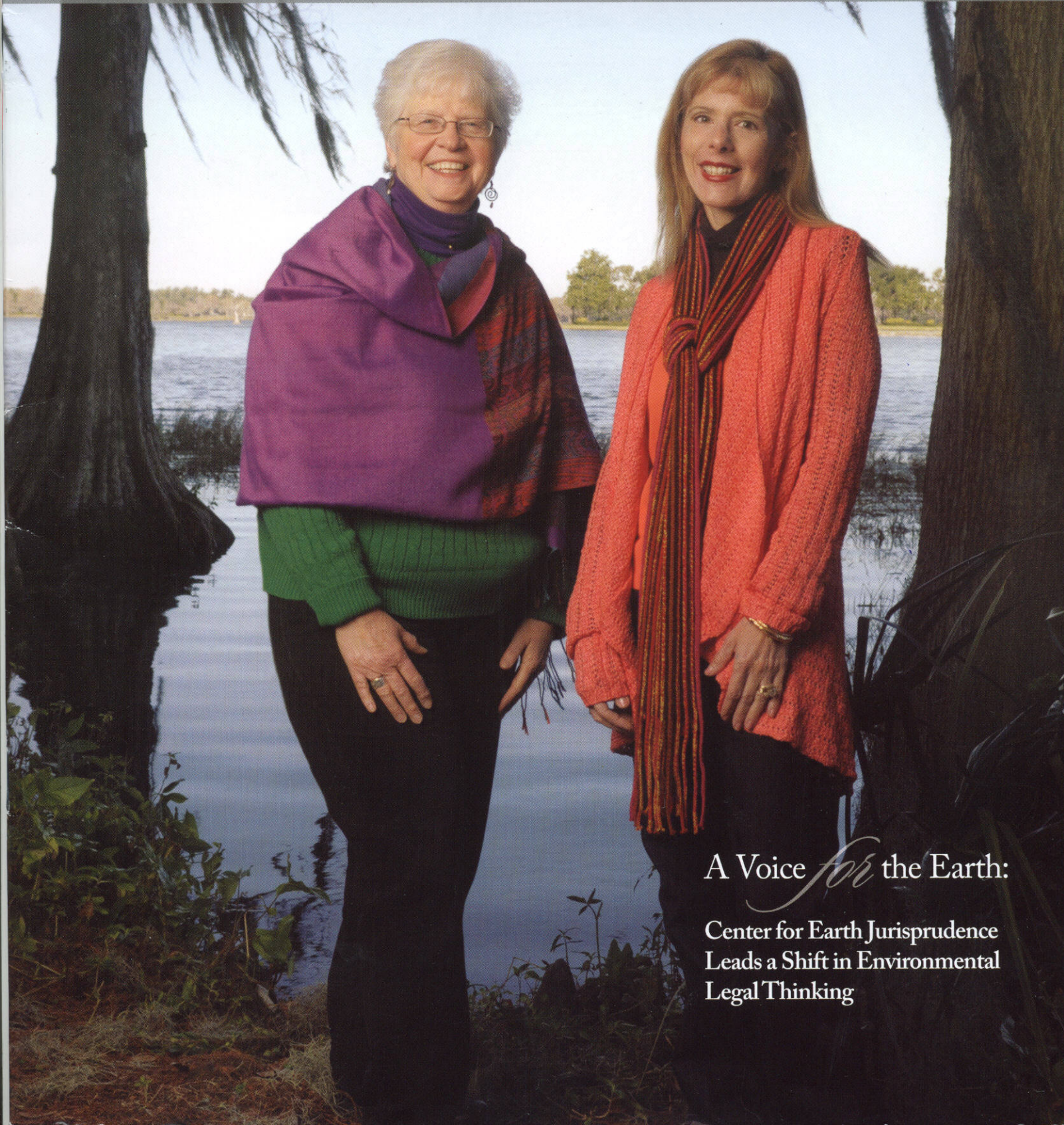


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A Voice *for* the Earth:

Center for Earth Jurisprudence
Leads a Shift in Environmental
Legal Thinking


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A Voice for the Earth:

Center for Earth Jurisprudence Leads a Shift in Environmental Legal Thinking

At distinguished institutions like the Barry University Dwayne O. Andreas School of Law, the faculty is engaged in not only transmitting knowledge to its students, but endowing them with an ethical foundation. This mission is seen every day in our classrooms, throughout our campus, and in our commitment to the community. But it is more than just what we do, it is who we are.

In line with this foundation in ethics, Barry Law is at the forefront of the Earth jurisprudence movement that seeks to shift the thinking in how we legally protect the environment. Before becoming an attorney and eventually a legal educator, I worked as an organic chemist and studied the work of Rachel Carson, whose 1962 book *Silent Spring* alerted the public to the environmental and human dangers in pesticides and other toxins. During her courageous stand against the chemical industry, Carson explained, "But man is a part of nature, and his war against nature is inevitably a war against himself." Similarly, Earth jurisprudence recognizes the inseparable interconnectedness of all of Earth's inhabitants.

Five years ago, the Barry Law School began sponsorship of the Center for Earth Jurisprudence. In the cover story of this issue of *Barry Law Magazine*, Sister Pat Siemen, OP, JD, the director of our Center for Earth Jurisprudence, explains our role in advancing the Earth jurisprudence message, which "recognizes the inherent value of all members of creation and promotes increased legal protection of the natural world."

Other stories in this issue also reflect the school's ethical foundation, from our faculty teaching abroad as Fulbright scholars, to alumni like **Tonya Meister** who strive to fight for the underdog, to a presentation from the prioress of the Dominican Sisters of Adrian on their sponsorship of Barry University and the law school.

Living up to the values and morals we instill in our students is a humbling responsibility, and one we are proud to accept.

Leticia M. Diaz, PhD, JD
Dean and Professor of Law



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TONYA MEISTER: A Sea of Compassion



"I had tears in my eyes after the decision because it had significant, far-reaching consequences to protect seafarers and make sure they are not taken advantage of by ship owners."

— Tonya Meister

When oil gushed into the Gulf of Mexico last summer at an estimated rate of 2.5 million gallons per day, Tonya Meister (JD '03) was at the ready. Having recently become board certified in admiralty and maritime law, Meister was prepared to do what she does best — fight for the underdog.

It was helping people who depend on the sea for their livelihood that drew Meister to maritime law. Working on a sailboat in The Bahamas during a summer job while in college exposed her to the conditions that the boat's crew had to endure. She knew then that she wanted to fight for the rights of people who work on the water.

"Growing up, I always wanted to be an attorney helping people," said Meister. "Through my experience in The Bahamas, I saw the plight of the seaman. That is why I wanted to focus on maritime law."

While earning her law degree at Barry, Meister volunteered with the Space Coast Seafarers Ministry in Cape Canaveral to satisfy the volunteer requirement in a maritime context for graduation. Upon graduation and admittance to the Florida Bar in 2003, Meister began work at Morgan and Barbary, P.A. in Melbourne, Fla. But since she was the only attorney at the firm focusing on maritime law, it was up to her to secure clients. Then her volunteer work with the Seafarers Ministry

paid dividends when the organization referred her first case.

The case involved a crewmember of a ship that later went bankrupt. Meister fought for the crewmembers and was able to secure back pay, severance pay and travel back to their home countries. As the crewmembers continued to work on other ships, they referred work to Meister and she was able to build a practice.

"Maritime law is very specialized, so it was a little scary starting out," said Meister. "To build a practice, it's important to treat people how you want to be treated. They will remember you and they will refer you other business."

Meister then moved on to Lipcon, Margulies & Alsina, P.A., a firm in Miami specializing in maritime and admiralty law. It was there that Meister began work on an amicus brief submitted to the U.S. Supreme Court on behalf of Port Ministries International. The brief demonstrated the harsh conditions seafarers face, and the landmark decision in the case — *Atlantic Sounding Co. v. Townsend* — upheld the rights of seafarers.

"I had tears in my eyes after the decision because it had significant, far-reaching consequences to protect seafarers and make sure they are not taken advantage of by ship owners," said Meister. "It was an important

decision and I was honored to have the opportunity to be involved in it."

Meister left Lipcon, Margulies, and Alsina, P.A., in 2009 to open her own practice. The next year, the BP oil spill affected the livelihoods of tens of thousands of businesses along the Gulf Coast, and a law firm in Louisiana enlisted Meister's help in taking on BP and aiding those affected in Florida. Fortunately, the oil didn't impact Florida as extensively as was initially feared, and Meister helped those affected navigate the claims process but she did not take any cases.

"I gave out a lot of free legal advice in advising people on the claims process," said Meister. "I'm busy and successful by focusing on things that I feel good about, so I didn't feel good about taking people's money when they could claim it themselves."

Meister, whose sister Tamara graduated from Barry Law in 2008 and works as a public defender in Melbourne, Fla., is focused on building her practice, with ultimate goals for expansion. Her passion remains in maritime law and helping those in need.

"I love maritime law. I've always loved the water, so this type of practice fits me," said Meister. "I like to help the underdog. For me, to help someone makes it worth staying at work late or sacrificing personal time because I really believe in what I'm doing."