He grew up in Indiana and Connecticut, but applied only to colleges in Washington, D.C. While attending George Washington University (he was the first in his family to graduate from college), he interned on Capitol Hill, riding his bike over early in the morning to open mail for a series of Connecticut representatives.

Next came Harvard Law School (HLS), where classmates remember him as everybody’s friend and where he was recruited to coach the school’s first women’s intramural basketball team. The school for him was less about lawyering—he jokes that he was not a natural lawyer and so was the only member of his class not to receive a job offer from either firm he worked for one summer—and much more about forming friendships. “Our class was more cohesive than others, and in part that was really Mark’s influence,” explains Helen Marinak Blohm, J.D. ’80, who played on that basketball team. “He would often be the one planning the party, getting the group together, or doing social things that made us seem more connected to each other.” To this day, some of his closest friends, including top adviser Howard Gutman, now a partner at Williams & Connolly, are old HLS classmates.

Back in Washington after graduation, working for the Democratic National Committee as a fundraiser, Warner observed the plight of candidates burdened by large campaign debts and decided to secure his financial future before entering public life. His first two ventures failed, but his third, buying and trading spectrum licenses—the airwaves upon which cell-phone calls are transmitted—earned him an estimated $200 million.

His reentry into politics, managing a gubernatorial bid for Virginia’s Douglas Wilder, came just months after he nearly died of a burst appendix while he and his wife, Lisa Collis, were on their honeymoon in 1989. Wilder won the race and Warner took over the state party, making more friends and building a network that launched him into the 1996 U.S. Senate race against the popular Republican incumbent, John Warner. Warner versus Warner was not particularly close, but Warner still laughs about the time he was campaigning in southern Virginia with signs that read “Mark not John,” and a driver pulled over to ask, “Is that a biblical reference?”

Following the loss, Warner retired to his Alexandria venture-capital firm, Columbia Capital, and got involved in projects around the state that kept his contacts and networks alive for another campaign. Among other things, he set up programs to help students learn computer skills and, as the dot-com boom of the late 1990s took off in Northern Virginia, he developed a website to help senior citizens navigate healthcare choices.

In 2001, stepping into a political void, Warner ran for governor at a time when Democrats did not hold a single statewide office. To the surprise of nearly everyone, he won by a narrow margin, thanks to aggressive outreach to sportsmen and rural Virginians in the southwestern corner of the state, where he was helped by a bluegrass theme song and a NASCAR truck sponsorship. The nation was grappling with the recent shock of September 11; Warner had watched the Pentagon burn from the roof of his campaign headquarters.

Because Virginia allows its governors to run again, but not to succeed themselves, Warner knew from the moment he entered office that the clock was ticking down on his four-year term. He confronted a softening economy and financial chaos, including a state deficit that soared from $700 million to $3.8 billion. He soon became known as the “Power-Point governor” for his tireless jawboning across the state with charts, graphs, and presentations. His efforts resulted in a budget deal with the Republican-dominated legislature that raised taxes and added reforms to close the deficit without severe budget cuts. The money, he asserted, preserved the state’s coveted AAA bond rating and paved the way for record-setting investment in the state’s K-12 educational system.

By the time he left office in 2006 (leaving matters to his hand-picked successor, Timothy Kaine), Warner was wildly popular across the state. He had helped to install a massive broadband network for rural areas and to revitalize the state’s economy and government; during his

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Aloian Scholars

Matthew Drazba ’08, of Kirkland House, and Ana Vollmar ’08, of Dudley House, are this year’s David Aloian Memorial Scholars. They are to be honored at the fall dinner of the Harvard Alumni Association in October.

Established in 1988 in honor of David Aloian ’49, a former HAA executive director and master of Quincy House, the scholarships are awarded to two seniors who have made unique contributions to their Houses and to undergraduate life.

Drazba, of Pinole, California, was a House liaison officer to the department of athletics and organized Kirkland’s entries for the College’s annual intramural competition, leading the House to win the Straus Cup. His work in the theater prompted a revival of Kirkland’s annual “Shakespeare Night.” And his involvement with the Institute of Politics helped bring speakers to the senior common room events.

Vollmar, of Hamden, Connecticut, was a liaison to the Dudley Faculty Fellows program, which brings undergraduates closer to faculty members outside the classroom, largely through dinners. As maintenance steward at the Dudley House Cooperative in Cambridge, she put in extra hours to help restore operations there following a fire last fall. Moreover, she took a lead role in creating a fully productive vegetable garden at the co-op, purchasing seed and topsoil and offering instruction to housemates on tilling and planting.

Photograph by Justin Ide/Harvard News Office

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