

# YLD...In Brief

The Official Newsletter of the State Bar of New Mexico Young Lawyers Division

April 2015

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Veterans' Clinics, **Spencer Edelman**  
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Wills for Heroes, **Spencer Edelman,**  
**Jordan Kessler, Sonia Russo**  
Law-Day Call In, **Spencer Edelman, Robert Lara,**  
**Erin Atkins, Jordan Kessler, Sonia Russo**  
Law Day Essay Contest, **Robert Lara,**  
**Tomas Garcia**  
Constitution Day, **Erin Atkins**  
Diversity Collaboration, **Sonia Russo**  
YLD/UNM SOL Mentorship Program,  
**Tomas Garcia,**  
**Ben Sherman**  
YLD/UNM SOL Speed Networking,  
**Sean FitzPatrick, Ben Sherman**  
YLD/UNM SOL Mock Interview Program,  
**Spencer Edelman, Ben Sherman**  
Summer Fellowship Program, **Ben Sherman**  
YLD In Brief, **Ben Sherman**  
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Interview Program, **Tomas Garcia,**  
**Sean FitzPatrick**  
YLD CLE, **Robert Lara**

## Message from the YLD Chair...

By Ken Stalter



First of all, let me offer a resounding “thank you” to all the attorneys, paralegals, individuals, firms and partner organizations that made 2014 such a successful year for the Young

Lawyers Division. Your participation and collaboration is what makes the legal profession so uniquely rewarding in New Mexico.

Last year, the American Bar Association challenged young lawyer organizations to band together to design and implement regional summits. New Mexico's Young Lawyer Division—along with our counterparts in Colorado, Utah and Arizona—answered the call. Together, we created the Four Corners Regional Summit, which will take place April 9 through 12 in Aspen, Colo. Participation is open to all new lawyers.

Even if you've never been to a YLD event before, please consider attending this conference. With its mix of networking and leadership training, the summit is bound to boost your professional development. It's also our chance to showcase the work and public service of New Mexico's young lawyers.

If you can't make the regional summit, please consider joining us closer to home, where we'll be continuing our key public service and member service initiatives.

For example, the Veterans' Civil Legal Initiative began the year with a new home at the New Mexico Veterans Memorial. Thanks to a new partnership with the Memorial and the City of Albuquerque, we continue to serve veterans with the help of the Veterans Administration and our dedicated

attorney and paralegal volunteers. Though the legal clinic is co-sponsored by the Young Lawyers Division, you do not need to be a young lawyer to participate. In fact, we rely on the experience and expertise of attorneys at all stages in their careers. Please consider volunteering for the clinics, which are held the second Tuesday of every month.

We also continue to sponsor the Wills for Heroes program, which provides basic wills for law enforcement officers and other first responders. This is an excellent way for young attorneys to give back to the people who keep us safe.

If you would rather work with a younger crowd, consider volunteering for Constitution Day. Each year in September, we help attorney volunteers visit classrooms to teach fifth-graders about the U.S. Constitution. This program is not only fun—it's an important way to promote civic understanding.

We also continue our mentorship program, in partnership with the UNM School of Law. Over the course of the year, law students can expect events to help them develop their networking and interviewing skills, as well as informal events to help them meet their future colleagues in the profession.

Time is a scarce resource among lawyers. But it's been my experience that time shared with the bar yields unexpected dividends, professionally and socially. I've never regretted any of the time I've given to the Young Lawyers Division.

Whether you're just joining the profession this year or have been a lawyer for some time, I hope you'll join us for at least one program this year. You'll be glad you did.

## Meet the Board



**Ken Stalter**  
Chair  
Director-At-Large, Position 1

**Ken Stalter** is chair of the Young Lawyers Division. He holds a bachelor's degree from Cornell University and received his law degree with honors from Harvard Law School. After law school, he worked as a public finance attorney and policy advisor before joining the 11th Judicial District Attorney's Office in San Juan County. There, he prosecuted everything from traffic misdemeanors to first-degree murders. In 2014, Ken joined the criminal appeals division of the New Mexico Attorney General's Office, where he continues to prosecute everything from traffic misdemeanors to first-degree murders. He also serves on the Supreme Court's Committee for Rules of Criminal Procedure for the District Courts and, as YLD chair, on the Board of Bar Commissioners.



**Spencer Edelman**  
Chair-elect  
Region 5 Director

**Spencer Edelman** is the chair-elect of the Young Lawyers Division. He is an associate at the Modrall Sperling law firm, where his practice deals with creditors' rights and litigation with a focus on bankruptcy. His practice also includes representing defendants in asbestos litigation and handling real estate disputes. Spencer's efforts with YLD include organizing Wills for Heroes events for first responders, assisting with the Veterans Civil Justice Initiative, organizing volunteers for the Law Day Call-in Program and coordinating volunteers and schools for Constitution Day. He also volunteers with the State Bar organizing judicial brown bag lunches that bring together young lawyers with judges in less formal settings. Spencer serves on the board of the non-profit organization Law Access New Mexico. He plays tennis regularly and attends as many Isotopes games as possible. He is a graduate of the James E. Rogers College of Law at the University of Arizona.



**Tomas J. Garcia**  
Vice Chair  
Director-At-Large, Position 2

**Tomas J. Garcia** serves as YLD director-at-large position 2 and is the vice chair for 2015. He is an associate at Modrall Sperling in Albuquerque and practices commercial, healthcare, torts/personal injury and natural resources litigation. Tomas previously served as law clerk to Justice Charles W. Daniels of the New Mexico Supreme Court. Tomas coordinates various YLD service and member projects including the YLD/UNM School of Law Mentorship Program and the Serving Our Seniors initiative. On a national level, Tomas is an American Bar Association YLD Scholar and he serves as an associate editor for the ABA publication *The Young Lawyer*. An Albuquerque native, Tomas received his law degree from Georgetown University Law Center, his master's degree in public policy from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, and his bachelor's degree in political science from Yale University.

## Meet the Board



**Benjamin I. Sherman**  
Immediate Past Chair

**Ben Sherman**, past chair of YLD, is the founder of Ben Sherman Law LLC, located in Albuquerque. His practice is focused on representing injured workers in workers' compensation cases. Prior to becoming a solo practitioner, he worked for the Second Judicial District Attorney's Office and for the legal department of the City of Albuquerque. Ben graduated from the University of New Mexico School of Law and has been practicing law in New Mexico for the past seven years. A fluent Spanish-speaker, he enjoys representing people from all communities and truly appreciates New Mexico's diversity. In his free time, Ben enjoys playing soccer, participating in outdoor activities, listening to music and spending time with his family and friends.



**Sean M. FitzPatrick**  
Director-At-Large, Position 3

**Sean FitzPatrick** primarily focuses on tort litigation as an associate attorney at ABQ Accident Attorney. Previously, he prosecuted a range of criminal cases while working at the 11th Judicial Court District Attorney's office. Sean is actively involved with many of the YLD programs including Constitution Day, Wills for Heroes and UNM School of Law's Mock Interview Program. Sean continues to work to make sure young lawyers in New Mexico are represented well on issues that concern them such as the Bridge the Gap Mentorship Program. Sean also serves on the State Bar's Natural Resources, Energy and Environment Law Section Board of Directors. In his free time, Sean enjoys exercising with his wife, Eva, and connecting with nature during wilderness adventures.



**Sonia Russo**  
Director-At-Large, Position 4

**Sonia Russo** is a native New Mexican who earned her A.B. in Political Science from Brown University and her J.D. from Boston College Law School. She is an Assistant District Attorney in the Second Judicial District Attorney's Office prosecuting felony property and drug crimes. Before becoming a prosecutor, Sonia was an associate in the litigation department of Modrall Sperling. While in law school, she served as an extern for the Hon. James A. Parker and the Hon. C. LeRoy Hansen of the U.S. District Court for the District of New Mexico. At her law school commencement ceremony, Sonia was awarded the Susan Grant Demarais Award for Excellence in Clinical Work for her work as a student attorney in the BC Law Prosecution Clinic. Prior to law school, Sonia was an AmeriCorps member with the National College Advising Corps at Brown University. Her interests include travel, tennis and a myriad of visual and performing arts.

## Meet the Board



**Robert Lara, Jr.**  
Director-At-Large, Position 5

**Robert Lara** joined the Third Judicial District Court as an Associate Staff Attorney in 2014. He provides legal analysis and recommendations regarding statutes, administrative rules, and case law affecting judicial actions pending before the Court. Robert also assists in managing the Court's Self-Help Clinic, which serves pro se litigants in civil cases, primarily domestic matters. He leads the YLD High School Essay Contest and Wills for Heroes programs, participates in the Law Day Call-in program and the YLD/UNM School of Law Mentorship Program. Additionally, he is an active officer on the boards of the New Mexico Hispanic Bar Association and Phi Alpha Delta Law Fraternity International-District V. Robert is a 2007 graduate of the UNM School of Law, where he was awarded the Deans Award for Outstanding Service to the University. Robert volunteers his legal expertise to the New Mexico Dachshund Rescue Association, and spins a turntable in a DJ booth.

**Vacant**  
Region 1 Director



**Jordan Kessler**  
Region 2 Director

**Jordan Kessler** joined the YLD Board in January, and serves as the Region 2 representative. She is an associate at Holland & Hart in Santa Fe, where she practices natural resources and energy law. Her practice focuses on regulatory and permitting issues. A Santa Fe native, Jordan received her undergraduate degree in International Relations and French at Tufts University in Boston and returned to New Mexico to attend the UNM School of Law. She served as the Dean's Fellow for Natural Resources at the law school and was a recipient of the Rocky Mountain Mineral Law Foundation scholarship. Prior to attending law school, she was a policy analyst for the Legislative Finance Committee and worked closely with food security issues in New Mexico. Jordan loves traveling, hiking and spending time with her husband and their puppy.

**Vacant**  
Region 3 Director



**Erinna Marie Atkins**  
Region 4 Director

**Erinna Marie "Erin" Atkins** is an attorney in Alamogordo. She practices law with her father and mentor, S. Bert Atkins. Erin specializes in criminal defense and children's law. She works in public defender and indigent defense cases in Lincoln and Otero counties. Erin proudly serves as the Guardian ad Litem in abuse and neglect cases and maintains a busy family law practice. She currently is co-president of the 12th Judicial District Bar Association, vice chair of the Legal Education Committee for New Mexico State University of Alamogordo, a commissioner for the New Mexico Commission for Community Volunteerism, a board member of the Otero County Juvenile Justice Board, a board member for a non-profit service organization, and serves as the substitute Adult Drug Court Judge. Erin volunteers with a local girls' youth organization on weekends. She is a 2009 graduate of the University of New Mexico School of Law.