

YLD...InBrief

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

February 2016

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2018 ABA/YLD Annual Convention, **Sonia Russo,**

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YLD... *In Brief*, **Ken Stalter, Spencer Edelman**

Annual Public Service Project in Outlying Areas,

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Interview Program, **Tomas Garcia**

YLD CLE, **Spencer Edelman**

CLE at Annual Meeting, **Robert Lara**

Message from the YLD Chair...

By *Spencer Edelman*



Seven years ago I left the comfort and familiarity of home to start a new career and new life in New Mexico. It is a decision I am thankful for every day. Despite the initial difficulty of adjusting to new surroundings, I quickly adapted in no small part because I was welcomed with open arms by a group of colleagues and a group of young lawyers committed to extending New Mexican hospitality to me. As the 2016 chair of the Young Lawyers Division I hope to extend that same hospitality and ensure that all members of our division know that they have a home in the YLD.

Accordingly, this year we will be placing extra focus on getting CLEs that are useful, interesting and entertaining for YLD members, in particular. We will also be doing our best to bring Wills for Heroes clinics, judicial brown bag lunches and networking opportunities around the state. I am fortunate to be guided, surrounded and supported by committed board members from all parts of New Mexico who will be spearheading this effort. If you have questions about upcoming events or want to get more involved by helping set something up, don't hesitate to ask. YLD is the home for young lawyers and everyone is welcome!

All members of the State Bar that are 36 years old or younger or that have been practicing for five years or less are members of the YLD. Our YLD is among the most active divisions in the nation because of the commitment of the leadership and our membership to public service and member service. Two of our recent initiatives demonstrate this commitment. The Veterans' Civil Justice Initiative, a partnership with the VA, the City of Albuquerque, the New Mexico Veteran's Memorial and the Paralegal Division of the State Bar, has provided free legal advice to veterans—giving back to those who have given so much to us. The UNM School of Law Mentorship Program has helped prepare the next generation of young lawyers for practice while also ensuring that law students are welcomed into the State Bar and know all of the services that it provides. In addition, 2015 was a tremendous year for our Wills for Heroes, Constitution Day and Law Day Call-In programs. All five of these programs will continue to grow in 2016 because of the stewardship of your elected board members from around the state and because of all of your volunteer efforts. To get involved (or stay involved) be on the lookout for emails from the State Bar or simply get in touch with me or any YLD board member.

With all of this activity there is still room to grow. My goal in 2016 is to have 100 percent of our YLD membership participate this year. The welcome I received from the New Mexico legal community should reach each and every YLD member. Whether it is volunteering, meeting colleagues at a happy hour, attending a CLE

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Meet the Board



Spencer Edelman
Chair
Region 5 Director

Spencer Edelman 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. Edelman'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. Edelman 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. In 2013-2014 he served as a law clerk for U.S. Bankruptcy Judge David Thuma. He is a graduate of the James E. Rogers College of Law at the University of Arizona and Macalester College in St. Paul, Minn.



Tomas Garcia
Chair-elect
Director-at-Large, Position 2

Tomas J. Garcia is the chair-elect of the Young Lawyers Division. He is a litigation associate at Modrall Sperling in Albuquerque. Before joining Modrall Sperling, Garcia clerked for Justice Charles W. Daniels of the New Mexico Supreme Court. Tomas is a fellow of the American Bar Association Business Law Section and he serves as the vice chair of the Section's Communications and Technology Subcommittee. He is also vice director of the American Bar Association YLD's Affiliates Assistance Team. An Albuquerque native, Garcia received his law degree from Georgetown University Law Center, his master's degree from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and his bachelor's degree from Yale University.



Sean FitzPatrick
Vice Chair
Director-at-Large, Position 3

Sean FitzPatrick graduated from the UNM School of Law in 2012 with clinical honors for his work in a foreclosure litigation case. After graduation, he worked as a prosecutor in Farmington, handling a range of misdemeanor and felony cases. In 2015, his focus shifted to civil litigation. While his work has shifted over the years, his commitment to the YLD and to New Mexico's legal community has not. He serves in many YLD programs including Wills For Heroes, Constitution Day, UNMSOL Speed Networking, UNMSOL Mentorship Program, UNM Mock Interview Program and the Summer Law Camp. In his spare time, Fitzpatrick enjoys exercising with his wife and going on wilderness adventures in the 10th mountain division and the Grand Canyon.



Allison Block-Chavez
Director-at-Large, Position 1

Allison Block-Chavez is an associate attorney at Aldridge, Hammar, Wexler & Bradley, PA, where her law practice focuses on business transactions, commercial litigation, creditors' rights, real estate law, guardianships and conservatorships, wills, trusts and probate matters. Block-Chavez was admitted to the State Bar in September 2014 and served as the judicial law clerk for Chief Judge Michael E. Vigil of the New Mexico Court of Appeals from 2014-2015. As a student at the UNM School of Law, Block-Chavez founded and served as the president of the UNM Law Women's Golf Association, the vice president of community affairs for the Mexican-American Law Student Association and was the student articles editor of the *New Mexico Law Review*. She currently serves on the board for the Elder Law Section and is an American Bar Association Minorities in the Profession Scholar.

Meet the Board



Sonia Raichur Russo
Director-at-Large, Position 4

Sonia Raichur Russo is an assistant district attorney in the Second Judicial District Attorney's Office in Albuquerque and is responsible for prosecuting felony violent crimes. Previously, Russo was with the Modrall Spering law firm. She currently serves as a 2015-2016 American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division Scholar, co-chairs the Wills for Heroes project, the Homeless Legal Clinic, the Law Day Call-In event and coordinates volunteers for the week of Constitution Day. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Brown University and law degree from Boston College Law School. She served as an extern for Hon. James A. Parker and Hon. C. LeRoy Hansen of the U.S. District Court for the District of New Mexico. At her law school commencement ceremony, Russo 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. Her interests include travel, tennis and myriad visual and performing arts.



Robert Lara
Director-at-Large, Position 5

Robert Lara serves as the staff attorney for the Third Judicial District Court in Las Cruces. He provides the District Court with legal analysis and recommendations on a variety of subject matters. Lara specializes in administrative law, election law and domestic relations. He also supervises the daily operations of the Third Judicial District Court's Self Help Center, which provides assistance to pro se litigants in civil and domestic relations cases. Along with his service on the YLD board, Lara is an officer for the New Mexico Statewide Alumni Chapter of Phi Alpha Delta Law Fraternity International and the treasurer for the Democratic Party of New Mexico. Lara is a 2007 graduate of the University of New Mexico School of Law. When not in the office, he can be found advocating for the New Mexico Dachshund Rescue Association, peddling his bike in a triathlon or on the nearest dance floor.



Evan Cochnar
Region 1 Director

Evan Cochnar is originally from California. He earned his Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and History from the University of New Mexico and his law degree from Syracuse University College of Law. He is an assistant district attorney in the 11th Judicial District Attorney's Office prosecuting general adult felonies, including homicide and serious sexual offense cases. While attending law school, he interned at the Albuquerque City Attorney's Office as well as the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of New Mexico. As a YLD board member, he sits on the Wills for Heroes Committee, Law Day Essay Contest Committee, Constitution Day Committee, 2018 ABA/YLD Annual Convention and Annual Public Service Project in Outlying Areas. His interests include travel, theater, film criticism and reading.



Jordan Kessler
Region 2 Director

Jordan Kessler is an attorney at the Santa Fe office of Holland & Hart where she practices natural resources regulatory law. A graduate of UNM School of Law and Tufts University, Kessler enjoys traveling and spending time with family and friends. She was named a 2015 Rising Star by Super Lawyers in energy and natural resources. In addition to her work with the YLD, Jordan is involved in a number of pro bono clinics, including Wills for Heroes and the First Judicial District Legal Fair.

Meet the Board



Anna Rains
Region 3 Director

Anna Rains is a Hobbs native. She earned her Bachelor in Business Administration from New Mexico State University, her Masters of Science in Personal Financial Planning degree from Texas Tech University and her law degree from Texas Tech University School of Law. She is a third year associate at Sanders, Bruin, Coll & Worley PA in Roswell. Rains is a civil litigation attorney who primarily focuses her practice on family law and estate planning. She is an active member of the Chaves County Bar Association, was the 2015 Chaves County Law Day Chair, participates in Big Brothers Big Sisters and is a 2014 Roswell Leadership graduate.



Erinna Marie "Erin" Atkins
Region 4 Director

Erinna Atkins is an attorney in Alamogordo. She practices law with her father, S. Bert Atkins. Atkins specializes in criminal defense and children's law. She works in public defender and indigent defense cases in Lincoln and Otero counties. She proudly serves as the guardian ad litem in abuse and neglect cases and maintains a busy family law practice. Atkins is currently the co-president for 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 Children's Law Section, 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. Atkins is a 2009 graduate of the University of New Mexico School of Law.



Ken Stalter
Past Chair

Ken Stalter is an assistant attorney general in the New Mexico Office of the Attorney General. Specializing in criminal appeals, he represents the people of the State of New Mexico in a range of felony and misdemeanor cases, including prosecutions for homicide, sex offenses, and white collar crime. He received his law degree with honors from Harvard Law School. Prior to joining the Office of the Attorney General, he held positions a trial prosecutor, a policy advisor and a public finance attorney. He serves on the board of the New Mexico Young Lawyers Division and the Committee for Rules of Criminal Procedure for the District Courts.

Message from the Chair *continued from cover*

or getting to know a judge over an informal basis, I urge all of you to get involved and it is my job to make that as easy as possible.

It is undeniable that time is a scarce resource for everyone and especially for young lawyers trying to establish a practice, however, participating in a YLD event is something that everyone should make time for. Sharing your time

with other members of the bar either in social events, at a CLE, or volunteering will yield dividends for years to come and, on top of that, it will be fun! I look forward to a tremendous year full of fostering existing relationships and establishing new ones. If you have any questions about the YLD or how you can get involved, please don't hesitate to email me at spencer.edelman@modrall.com or call me at 505-848-1857. ■