



Recognizing Excellence

The State Bar of New Mexico's 2024 Annual Awards Presentation

The State Bar of New Mexico presents the prestigious Annual Awards to legal professionals who have distinguished themselves or have made exemplary contributions to the State Bar or legal profession over the last year. The following award recipients were recognized for their excellence and service on Oct. 25 at the conclusion of the 2024 Annual Meeting.

Distinguished Bar Service Non-Lawyer Award

KATINA WATSON

◆ *Recognizes non-lawyers who have provided valuable service and contributions to the legal profession over a significant period of time.*

Katina Watson is the Court Executive Officer for the Second Judicial District Court where she is responsible for the non-judicial operations including court programs and services, human resources, information technology, budgeting, and serves as the Clerk of Court. Prior to joining the Second Judicial District Court in 2021, she served as the CEO for the Twelfth Judicial District Court for nine years. Over her tenure with the New Mexico judiciary, she has served on various committees including Budget, Personnel Rules, Classification and Compensation, Performance Measures, Workforce Investment, and Judicial and Staff Workload Studies. In 2018, she was the first CEO to pilot the statewide consolidation of New Mexico District and Magistrate Courts. She has a Bachelor's Degree in Communications and a Graduate Certificate in Judicial Administration from Michigan State University.



Katina Watson accepts the Distinguished Bar Service Non-Lawyer Award from the ceremony's emcee Mitchell Mender, Esq.

Excellence in Well-Being Award

BRIGGS F. CHENEY

◆ *This award was created to recognize an individual or organization that has made an outstanding positive contribution towards change in the New Mexico legal profession's well-being, including destigmatizing mental health, strengthening resilience and creating a synergic approach to work and life.*

Not by design but happenstance, **Briggs Cheney's** career in the law has been that of being a lawyer's lawyer.

For the better part of almost 52 years of practice, Briggs has had the honor of helping lawyers throughout New Mexico - defending them in the civil arena and guiding them through the disciplinary process.

Briggs has been recognized for his legal skills in representing lawyers and he has been a leader in local, state and national bars. He has tirelessly helped the struggling and suffering lawyer as others helped him.



Briggs F. Cheney accepts the Excellence in Well-Being Award.

Judge Sarah M. Singleton Distinguished Service Award **GEORGE DAVID GIDDENS, JR.**

◆Recognizes attorneys who have provided valuable service and contributions to the legal profession, the State Bar of New Mexico, and the public over a significant period of time.

A New Mexico attorney since 1983, in 1997 **Dave Giddens** founded the firm that became Giddens & Gatton Law, P.C. Dave obtained undergraduate and law degrees from the University of Kansas.

His achievements include: Best Lawyers in America in four practice areas, Bankruptcy and Creditor Debtor Rights/Insolvency and Reorganization Law, Commercial Litigation, Litigation Bankruptcy, Real Estate Law, 2018 & 2021 Albuquerque Bankruptcy/Creditor Debtor Rights Insolvency and Reorganization Law Lawyer of the Year, 2024 Albuquerque Real Estate Lawyer of the Year, 2013 Top Rated Lawyer Corporate Restructuring and Bankruptcy, Southwest Super Lawyer 2009, 2012-2024 and 2011's Best of the Bar in Bankruptcy by NM Business Weekly. He consistently received Martindale Hubbell's highest rating, AV, for more than 15 years.

Dave's goal was to always serve clients with expertise and compassion. After 41 years of representing clients and mentoring other attorneys, Dave retired at the end of June 2024.

Justice Pamela B. Minzner Professionalism Award M. MITCHELL MOSS

◆Recognizes attorneys and/or judges who, over long and distinguished legal careers, have by their ethical and personal conduct exemplified for their fellow attorneys the epitome of professionalism.

Mitchell Moss is a respected litigator with extensive courtroom and trial experience, advising and representing individuals and corporations in matters related to commercial disputes, labor and employment, medical, legal and professional malpractice, catastrophic injury and all aspects of insurance defense.

Mitch has tried more than 100 jury cases and resolved thousands of cases, without going to trial, for the benefit of his clients. He is licensed in both Texas and New Mexico. Mitch is Board Certified in Personal Injury Trial Law by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization. A certified mediator and arbitrator, he has mediated thousands of cases and also served as an arbitrator many times.

In addition to advising and representing individuals and corporations, Mitch has successfully resolved death cases; some while representing defendants and others while acting on behalf of plaintiffs. He has also handled administrative matters with the Texas Board of Medical Examiners, the Board of Nursing Examiners, the National Labor Relations Board, the Texas Education Commission and the New Mexico Workers Compensation Administration.

Mitch has been recognized as a Texas 'Super Lawyer' by the publishers of Texas Monthly- Law & Politics Magazine since 2018. In 2023, Mitch was honored as one of the Top 50 lawyers in Central and West Texas by Texas Super Lawyers. He was also recognized as the "Mediator of the Year" by the El Paso Bar Association in 2024.

Mitch served as the President of the El Paso Chapter of the American Board of Trial Advocates (ABOTA) in 2021-2022. He is a member of the George A. McAlmon American Inn of Court and the El Paso Bar Association.

A graduate of Texas Tech University School of Law, Mitch is a frequent guest speaker at conferences and seminars related to business and personal injury law. He resides in Anthony, New Mexico with his wife, Diana, and children Madison, Matthew and Mia Faith.



Elizabeth Friedenstein accepts the Judge Sarah M. Singleton Distinguished Service Award on behalf of recipient George David Giddens, Jr.



M. Mitchell Moss accepts the Justice Pamela B. Minzner Professionalism Award.

Outstanding Legal Organization Award

AMERICAN INDIAN LAW CENTER PLSI JUDICIAL CLERKSHIP COMMITTEE



Rodina Cave Parnall and Alma Buena accept the Outstanding Legal Organization Award on behalf of the American Indian Law Center PLSI Judicial Clerkship Committee.

◆ *Recognizes outstanding, extraordinary law-related organizations or programs that serve the legal profession and the public.*

The American Indian Law Center's Pre-Law Summer Institute (PLSI) for American Indians and Alaska Natives started as an 8-week pre-law program in 1967. In 2013, a small group of PLSI alumni dedicated themselves to increasing the number of Native American judicial clerks and judges across all judicial benches. Before 2013, the program produced only six judicial clerks going back over 45 years since the creation of the PLSI program. The Committee started by discussing their clerkship experiences with students and informing them of the benefits of a judicial clerkship. The first PLSI class to work with the Committee graduated from law school in 2016. Since 2016, the PLSI Judicial Clerkship Program has produced 32 judicial clerks in 39 state and federal judicial clerkships (some have completed more than one judicial clerkship). This includes clerkships in several U.S. Courts of Appeals, federal district courts, and state supreme courts. This remarkable increase in Native American judicial clerks can be traced to the Committee's unwavering commitment to the program and students.

The scope of the committee's work includes outreach to students through panel presentations at conferences, offering meaningful mentorship opportunities, coaching on clerkship application materials, and funding students to attend professional development workshops. They also developed the PLSI Judicial Clerkship Handbook, a comprehensive guide designed to help students navigate the application and hiring process. The handbook also includes a section on applying for tribal court clerkships. <https://www.ailec-inc.org/plsi/judicial-clerkship/>.

The committee is currently comprised of eleven PLSI alumni, all of whom have completed at least one judicial clerkship: Lydia Locklear, Chair (PLSI 2014), Alma Buena (PLSI 2020), Jens Camp (PLSI 2019), Rodina Cave Parnall (PLSI 1998), Tim Devine (PLSI 2020), Kateri Eisenberg (PLSI 2018), Joaquin Gallegos (PLSI 2016), Alexander Mallory (PLSI 2016), Doreen McPaul (PLSI 1998), Justice Raquel Montoya-Lewis (PLSI 1992), and Roshanna Toya (PLSI 2016).

Outstanding Young Lawyer of the Year Award

CAMERON S. BUSH



Cameron S. Bush accepts the Outstanding Young Lawyer of the Year Award.

◆ *Awarded to attorneys who have, during the formative stages of their legal careers by their ethical and personal conduct, exemplified for their fellow attorneys the epitome of professionalism by demonstrating a commitment to clients' causes and to public service, enhancing the image of the legal profession.*

Cameron Bush is the owner of Bush Injury Law, a personal injury law firm based in Albuquerque, but serving clients all over New Mexico and Texas. Outside of managing his law firm, Cameron serves as a committee member and attorney monitor for the New Mexico Lawyers Assistance Program (NM LAP).

Cameron's greatest inspirations are his wife, Karla, who he affectionately refers to as his "secret weapon," his late grandfather, "Pa" who taught him much about business, life, and the art of haggling, and the many men and women of the Texas and New Mexico LAPs who mentored him during his early sobriety, teaching him to "give freely, what was so freely given to you."

Robert H. LaFollette Pro Bono Award

RONALD T. TAYLOR

◆Presented to an attorney who has made an exemplary contribution of time and effort, without compensation, to provide legal assistance over his or her career to people who could not afford the assistance of an attorney.

Ron Taylor is an Albuquerque native, married, with three children and seven grandchildren. Ron did his undergrad work at Berkeley and then graduated UNM Law with the “infamous” class of 1966.

After law school, Ron worked as a Peace Corps Volunteer for two and half years in Venezuela, working with two small community city councils. He also worked with several outlying, small groups of peasant farm families to help them develop filtrated water systems.

After the Peace Corps—and following his passion to one day work on ocean-going ships—Ron worked for a year as a deckman on cargo ships in the Pacific Ocean and Bearing Sea.

Ron then returned to Albuquerque to set up his law practice as a sole practitioner where he practiced for over fifty-two years. Ron worked and litigated in the areas of personal injury, estates, property law, as well as commercial law. Ron also made every effort to take on at least two pro bono cases a year through New Mexico Legal Aid and to provide legal services for at least one of the Law-La-Palooza legal fairs each year.

Ron tips his hat to all the the other New Mexico lawyers who have given of their time to perform pro bono legal work, whether it be for New Mexico Legal Aid, or for any of the other community-based organizations, or to just help on their own an indigenous person or family in need of legal assistance.

Ron is deeply honored to receive the Robert LaFollette volunteer attorney award.

Justice Seth D. Montgomery Distinguished Judicial Service Award

JUDGE ROBERT HAYES SCOTT

◆Recognizes judges who have distinguished themselves through long and exemplary service on the bench and who have significantly advanced the administration of justice or improved the relations between the bench and the bar.

Judge Robert Hayes Scott is a native New Mexican who was born in Albuquerque. He attended the Albuquerque Public Schools and the University of New Mexico. He received his undergraduate degree and his law degree from the University of New Mexico. He is a graduate of the National Judicial College in Reno, Nevada. Judge Scott served as Probate Judge for Bernalillo County, a District Court Judge for the Second Judicial District (Civil Division and Family Court) and subsequently was appointed as a United States Magistrate Judge in the Federal Court for the District of New Mexico.

Judge Scott was active in the State Bar Association, serving as a Board member on the Senior Law Committee and one term as the President of the New Mexico District Judges Division. In 2008, Federal Judge Scott presided over prisoner consent verification cases in Seoul, Korea. Hearings were conducted at Daejeon Prison, south of Seoul. These hearings were the first of their kind in the history of the Republic of Korea. Judge Scott was the trial judge for the famous McDonald’s Hot Coffee Case.



Ronald T. Taylor accepts the Robert H. LaFollette Pro Bono Award.



Judge Robert Hayes Scott accepts the Justice Seth D. Montgomery Distinguished Judicial Service Award.