



Si Se Puede Portrait of a Conscientious Advocate

The International Society of Barristers is an invitation-only group of trial attorneys whose skills are honed to the sharpest levels but whose advocacy includes a deep and demonstrated commitment to professionalism. These are not the junkyard dogs of the Bar, but individuals whose membership embraces the most unique of the Society's Articles:

- To abolish any animosity between counsel representing plaintiffs and defendants
- To encourage the maintenance of amicable relationships between counsel in their personal and professional relationships
- To encourage and demand the full discharge of the ethical relationships owed by all concerned in litigation—whether parties, witnesses, counsel, insurance companies or the courts
- To take steps as shall be necessary for the protection of the rights of citizens, the independence of the judiciary and the stature of the Bar

It is a small organization, does not seek publicity for its members, and concentrates instead on publishing cutting-edge articles on critical areas of law and its administration. There are other organizations that recognize superb trial skills, and many Arizona attorneys are prominent in such groups. But the Society is known primarily for the fact that its members are not only superb trial lawyers but also dedicate their skills to cases and causes others eschew. Often, they are the only voice for the disenfranchised, the only recourse for wrongs that need righting but with little if any financial incentive.

Only 14 Arizonans have been invited to join the Society, and the membership reads like a mentor dream list of our state's trial attorneys who could easily take only the "sure things" but instead take the risks, tilt at windmills, go after the improbable judgments. More often than one would believe possible, they prevail, and not through luck. These lawyers are just great at their work, fueled by intelligence, staggering hours of hard work, and a passion for their clients.

On March 14, the Society inducted its 2006 invitees. Among them is its first Hispanic member from Arizona, and one of the first in its ranks ever, Peter Guerrero. Pete's story could be the stuff of a Hallmark movie, but only if it's tempered with a little Clint Eastwood and a little

Edward James Olmos from *Stand and Deliver*. It is a story worth telling for its inspiration and its validation of the best of what we do and why.

Born in Indiana, Pete is one of nine children from parents who emigrated from Mexico seeking a better life for their family. Working as migrant farm labor, Francesca and Nicefero Guerrero dedicated themselves to their children's future, working endless hours at any job available when farm work was not. Pete worked the fields alongside his father and his brothers and sisters. The Guerrero family is the exact portrait of the most fundamental values of this country: work hard, give back, and always keep the family together. The Senior Guerreros' selfless life ensured that their children had not only opportunities impossible for a poor family in Mexico but also hard-wired in each an absolute commitment to return the opportunities, a value that Francesca and Nicefero lived every day.

There are three lawyers and a judge among the Guerrero

Opinions in the magazine are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the State Bar of Arizona, its Board of Governors, the Editorial Board or staff. The magazine provides an open forum for readers. Send your own viewpoint or letter to Tim.Eigo@staff.azbar.org.

siblings, along with the contractors and business owners and housewives. They have enjoyed financial success and professional acclaim, but none of it goes to their heads. This is still a family that never feels entitled, always expresses humility, and always acknowledges the gifts their parents gave.

Pete is a superb trial attorney. His partners of 20 years, Chuck Roush and Bob McCracken, say his only fault is that he won't say no. If he believes in the cause, he will find a way, even if the law says otherwise.

Nothing demonstrates that commitment more than the Valdez case, in which Pete represented a Mexican national who had stayed past his visa validity and was in jail with repeated DUIs. Not exactly a plaintiff with jury appeal, especially because the case was tried in the weeks right after 9/11. However, Mr. Valdez' injury at the hands of the State and County—total blindness in both eyes due to persistent negligent medical care—was so egregious Pete could not turn him away.

By the time of the trial, and directly as a result of Pete's brilliant and inexorable pre-trial lawyering over a period of years, the public defendants had admitted liability and the trial turned on damages. The \$6 million verdict was a vindication of Mr. Valdez' rights as well as testament to the jury's ability to resist anti-foreigner frenzy. More than anything, however, it was a statement about Pete's skill and focus: He would not let anyone in the system diminish the harm because the victim was not attractive.

The same impetus led to his success in representing a busload of prisoners, mostly undocumented, hurt in a bus accident on the way to prison. No one would touch the case, knowing it would be expensive to fund and highly unlikely to survive endless defense motions. A favorable verdict seemed fanciful. Pete took it on, and through artful challenges of the anti-alien/anti-Hispanic prejudice that formed the base of the defense, won a settlement that fairly compensated the plaintiffs. At the heart of his case, and at the heart of most of his work, is his unwavering commitment to



Roxie Bacon

Roxie Bacon is a former President of the State Bar of Arizona.

a simple position: In our judicial system a poor person's life, even an undocumented Mexican's, is entitled to the same level of respect as the wealthiest among us.

Pete helped found Los Abogados and served as its President. He has been a judge *pro tempore*, served on the Commission for Trial Court Appointments, the Civil Practice and Procedure Committee, the Peer Review Committee of the U.S. District Court, the State Bar Appointments Committee, is a certified specialist in personal injury and wrongful death and is included in the "Best Lawyers in America." He owns a sweeping ranch in the San Rafael Valley, right in view of the border his parents crossed so many years ago, full of dreams. He rides that land mindful of its beauty as well as its personal place in his family's history.

But his proudest accomplishment is his family, a sprawling group that includes not just his wife Judy and their daughters Marni and Nikki, but all the siblings and their families, all his partners and their families, all his in-laws and their families, and a posse of friends that enjoy this quiet man, love his puckish humor, and admire his deep commitment to those who need his services.

For young lawyers, his story is a great role model. For the rest of us, his story reminds us that no matter how long we have been practicing, part of our work should always be for others. And for the Society, his story is one that reflects their articulated values: the highest level of advocacy skills combined with the highest level of professionalism. Even the down-home Pete knows this is one "society" that fits him just right.