



OUTSTANDING SUSTAINED CONTRIBUTION AWARD JEROME A. DEHERRERA (ACHIEVE LAW GROUP LLC)



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The Outstanding Sustained Contribution Award is presented each year to an individual whose participation with the Colorado Lawyers Committee over many years has significantly and positively promoted its mission, making an important difference in the lives of children and the underprivileged. This year's recipient is Jerome A. DeHerrera of Achieve Law Group LLC.

Jerome received his B.A. in Economics from Colorado College in 1997, with distinction and honors. He received a Master's Degree in Public Policy in 2001 from Georgetown University, and his J.D. from Stanford in 2004. He began his legal career at Arnold & Porter and then moved to Davis Graham & Stubbs. He then served as General Counsel for Denver Public Schools before creating Achieve Law Group in 2018. His areas of expertise include litigation, political law, education law, contracts, regulatory compliance, real estate, and business law.

The Colorado Lawyers Committee is honoring Jerome DeHerrera for his tireless efforts for more than 15 years on behalf of the plaintiffs in the Taylor Ranch litigation (*Lobato v. Taylor*). Jerome has donated more than 2,000 pro bono hours (that he has reported) to this effort to assure the rights of families whose ancestors settled the San Luis Valley. Jerome first became involved in the litigation in 2005, when he was a newly-minted attorney at Arnold & Porter. Over the years he has served as Task Force Chair, Co-Chair, appellate attorney, and consultant.

The Taylor Ranch litigation involves the rights of landowners in the San Luis Valley to access a 77,500-acre mountainous parcel known as the Taylor Ranch, or as the locals call it: *La Sierra*. This right was created in the mid-1800's when settlers on the Sangre de Cristo Land Grant, then a part of Mexico, were promised access to the mountains near their homes for survival purposes, including wood, grazing, fishing and hunting. More than 100 years later, Jack Taylor purchased and fenced off the land, leading to several decades of litigation and multiple appeals. In 2003 the Colorado Supreme Court upheld the rights of the plaintiff property owners and identified the standard by which the District Court could identify the parcels that are entitled to the access rights. The Supreme Court then remanded the case to the District Court with a mandate to identify all of the parcels entitled to the access rights and to issue orders safeguarding those rights.

After more than ten years, the District Court had examined thousands of parcels of land and found that all but a few are entitled to access. The ranch owner, a young billionaire from Texas, then appealed the identification process and brought another round of appellate issues to the Court of Appeals seeking to eliminate or greatly reduce the access rights that had been confirmed by the Supreme Court. The Court of Appeals affirmed the District Court's process and rejected all of the ranch owner's appellate arguments. Because the ranch owner did not appeal that decision, the Court of Appeal's decision is now the final decision on the substantive rights of the plaintiffs.

With the plaintiffs' access rights now firmly planted in Colorado law for perpetuity, the ranch owner has engaged in several new tactics to intimidate and harass the community so that they won't exercise their rights. He has also tried to divide the community and offered to buy their access rights. This has led to a whole new chapter in the litigation requiring the pro-bono attorneys to ask the District Court to issue orders safeguarding the plaintiffs' rights. In 2020, the Taylor Ranch team brought in a new team of lawyers to lead up this effort. In early 2021, the team filed a motion to stop the ranch owner from intimidating the landowners by excessively tracking them, interrogating them, treating them like trespassers and significantly limiting the plaintiffs' access to the ranch by closing traditional access points. The plaintiffs continue to seek remedies to prevent the ranch owner's interference with their easement rights.

The successes of the plaintiff landowners in the Taylor Ranch litigation would not have been possible without the more than 200 Colorado Lawyers Committee volunteers who have donated their time and talents over the past 24 years. Building on the dedication and hard work of the original lawyers, including Jeff Goldstein and many others, Jerome has continued the amazing tradition of pro bono service at its best. The Colorado Lawyers Committee is sincerely grateful to Jerome for his continued dedication and many contributions. We are proud to honor Jerome DeHerrera with the 2022 Outstanding Sustained Contribution Award.