

NEW MEXICO STATE UNIVERSITY
DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI
**JAMES F. COLE MEMORIAL
AWARD FOR SERVICE**

José N. Uranga '69, Esq.



José N. Uranga '69, Esq. grew up in Carlsbad, New Mexico, and credits his early academic success to his parents. Raised in a bilingual family, his parents emphasized the importance of speaking English, and José was the first in his extended family to graduate high school, noting “I knew I had to break out of the mold or succumb to it.”

“NMSU was instrumental in my success. I am proud to have given back through scholarships and service on the Foundation board.”

In Carlsbad, José witnessed inequities including segregated housing, limited representation of Hispanics in public institutions, and other exclusionary practices which left a lasting impression that shaped his interest in pursuing law: “I was driven by this goal and had to analyze how I was going to get there.”

At NMSU, José studied political science and pre-law while participating extensively in student government. He was elected Associated Students of New Mexico State University student

senator and later as ASNMSU vice president. During a period of significant social and political change on campus and in the country, he worked on issues involving a student bill of rights and university governance.

After NMSU, he attended Georgetown University Law Center, and José’s subsequent legal career spanned more than 30 years. He served as a Judge Advocate General in the U.S. Army, an assistant attorney general in Texas, and a federal attorney specializing in environmental law with the U.S. Department of Justice. He represented the federal government in litigation arising from the Three Mile Island nuclear incident and later received an appointment from President Jimmy Carter as Special Assistant for Environmental Matters to the U.S. Attorney General, coordinating environmental policy among federal agencies and advising senior government officials.

Following his government service, José served as assistant general counsel and senior environmental counsel for several Fortune 200 companies. An avid reader since he was a child, he has also authored six books. Four are part of the Buenavida series, which examines the Hispanic experience in the United States from the aftermath of the U.S.-Mexico War to the present through a fictional family whose experiences are based on historical events. His other books introduce younger readers to Hispanic history and contributions in the United States.

José has also spent much time as a volunteer, including serving for 15 years on the NMSU Foundation Board of Directors and interpreting exhibits for visitors as a docent at the John & Mable Ringling Museum of Art. Additionally, he has served as a guardian ad litem for abused and abandoned children, a pro tem municipal court judge, a member of the American Bar Association Standing Committee on Environmental Law, and a board member or officer for several environmental nonprofit organizations.

Today, he continues to support education, including endowing scholarships at New Mexico State University, and community service while also pursuing personal goals that include visiting every U.S. national park and visiting every continent. ▲