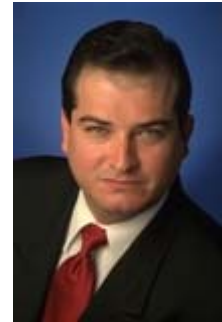


July 19, 2010

Year in and out, our Trial Lawyer of the Year Award attracts nominees from the most extraordinary cases. The accomplishments are so exceptional -- and the lawyers that worked on them are so dedicated -- that choosing a winner is a very tough call.

At our annual Gala and Awards Dinner in Vancouver, B.C., on July 13th, I had the great pleasure of introducing the five case finalists, each with an amazing story. With the capacity audience in rapt attention, I then announced the winner: **Ronald Rodriguez, a sole practitioner in Laredo, Texas.** His is a textbook case of perseverance and courage.



Ronald
Rodriguez

Rodriguez won for having prevailed against Wackenhut Correction Corporation, one of the country's largest private prison companies, for malicious wrongful death and destruction of evidence in the 2001 beating death of Gregorio de la Rosa of Laredo, who was serving a six-month DUI sentence in Raymondville, Tex. (Wackenhut has since been renamed the Geo Group.)

Just four days away from his scheduled release, De la Rosa, an honorably discharged National Guardsman, was attacked in the prison yard in by fellow inmates wielding socks filled with metal padlocks. The lawsuit charged that prison guards and wardens stood idly by and laughed during the 20-minute beating. De la Rosa's family learned that such beatings were not unusual at the privately run correctional facility, but rather, a tradition of payback where prisoners were beaten just before their release.

Although he faced 25 lawyers from 10 firms on the other side, Rodriguez was determined. His sleuthing revealed that Wackenhut had blatantly destroyed evidence in an effort to cover up the fatal beating and that what happened to De la Rosa was typical of Wackenhut's brazen corporate indifference to human life.

In 2006, a jury in *De la Rosa v. Wackenhut Correction Corp.*, awarded \$47.5 million in punitive and compensatory damages against the private prison company and one of its wardens - the largest verdict in Willacy County, Tex., history and one of the largest in the country. Punitive damages against Wackenhut accounted for \$20 million of the award. Last year, the Texas Court of Appeals upheld the verdict, leading to a confidential settlement for the De la Rosa family.

To read a full profile of the *De la Rosa* case, [click here](#).

Please join us in congratulating the four other finalists for the award. Here is a summary of their cases:

- After 20 years of battling inadequate medical and mental health care in California's prisons, the tenacity and perseverance of **Michael Bien** of Rosen Bien & Galvan, LLP in San Francisco and **Donald Specter**, executive director of the Prison Law Office in San Quentin, California, finally paid off. Bien, Specter and their legal team - **Jeffrey L. Bornstein**, **Raymond Loughrey**, **Ed Sangster**, and **Rachel Chatman** of K&L Gates in San Francisco; **Fred Heather** of K&L Gates in Los Angeles; **Paul D. Clement** of King & Spalding in Washington, D.C.; **Ernest Galvan**, **Amy Whelan**, **Jane Kahn**, **Maria Morris**, **Lisa Ells**,

Mark Feeser and **Tom Nolan** of Rosen Bien & Galvan, LLP; **Lori Rifkin** of the Legal Aid Society of San Francisco, Employment Law Center; and **Sara Norman, Rebekah Evenson, Alison Hardy** and **Steven Fama** of the Prison Law Office - convinced a federal three-judge panel to order California to reduce its prison population by over 40,000 prisoners within two years. According to legal experts, the order won in the consolidated cases of *Coleman v. Schwarzenegger* and *Plata v. Schwarzenegger* is the largest state prison reduction ever imposed by a federal court over the objection of state officials. To read more, [click here](#).

- After 13 years of litigation, Royal Dutch Shell Corp., agreed on the eve of trial to pay \$15.5 million to settle *Wiwa v. Royal Dutch Petroleum Co.*, which charged the oil giant with complicity in the deaths of the Ogoni 9 and torture of other Nigerian activists. The settlement was the result of the tenacity and dedication of a legal team headed by three attorneys with New York's Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR), **Jennifer M. Green** (now teaching at University of Minnesota Law School), **Judith Brown Chomsky**, and **Beth Stephens**, who were ably assisted by **Anthony DiCaprio** of Rye, N.Y., a former CCR attorney; **Maria LaHood** and **Deborah Gordon** of CCR; **Agnieszka Fryszman** and **Maureen McOwen** of Cohen Milstein Sellers & Toll PLLC in Washington, D.C.; **Richard L. Herz, Jonathan G. Kaufman, Abby Rubinson, Marco B. Simons** and **Jacqui Zalberg** of EarthRights International in Washington, D.C.; **Susan Farbstein** of the International Human Rights Clinic at Harvard Law School; **Paul Hoffman** of Schonbrun DeSimone Seplow Harris & Hoffman LLP in Venice, Calif.; and **Julie Shapiro**, a professor at the University of Seattle School of Law. To read more, [click here](#).
- Facing powerful defendants determined to crush all complaints about the Missouri pig farm's impact on its neighbors, a team of attorneys led by **Richard H. Middleton, Jr.**, of The Middleton Firm L.L.C. in Savannah, Ga., **Charles F. Speer** of The Speer Law Firm P.A. in Kansas City, Mo., and **Stephen A. Weiss** of Seeger Weiss L.L.P. in New York City - and assisted by **Stephen A. Sael** of The Middleton Firm L.L.C. and **Britt Bieri** and **Gerald Lee Cross, Jr.**, of The Speer Law Firm P.A. - prevailed against the corporate meat industry in *Owens v. ContiGroup Companies*. After nearly eight years of litigation and a month-long trial, the legal team won a jury verdict of over \$11 million in compensatory damages for 15 local residents. To read more, [click here](#).
- When Exxon Mobil Corp. insisted on going to court over the City of New York's charges that the oil giant had contaminated the drinking water supply with the gasoline additive methyl tertiary butyl ether (MTBE), the city hired San Francisco attorney **Victor Sher** of Sher Leff LLP to lead the battle. Sher recruited **Robert Chapman** of Greenberg Glusker in Los Angeles to head up the legal team with him. With assistance from **Marnie Riddle** and **Nick Campins** of Sher Leff LLP, **Harvey Friedman** and **Julia Haye** of Greenberg Glusker, and **Susan Amron, Daniel Green, Amanda Goad, Ramin Pejan, Chris Reo** and **Bill Plache** of the New York City Law Department, Office of the Corporation Counsel, they won a \$104.7 million jury verdict in *City of New York v. Exxon Mobil Corp.* for Exxon's contamination of five wells in Queens. To read more, [click here](#).

Congratulations and thanks to Ronald Rodriguez, all of the finalists, and the lawyers in all 16 of the nominated cases for making us all proud and for their outstanding accomplishments in socially significant litigation that so powerfully honor and uphold what the civil justice system is supposed to be about.

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