



Loosening the 'Golden Handcuffs': Alumnus Accepts the Challenge

By Doug **McPherson**

Steven Pastrana in his office near the Rainey Street Historic District in downtown Austin. Kenji, Pastrana's dog, accompanies him to work every day.

Steven Pastrana, JD '86, knows about opportunity. More importantly, he knows how to seize opportunity. It's something he has perfected since he was a youngster growing up in El Paso, Texas.

"It's a border town with not a lot of wide exposure to the rest of the country," says Pastrana, who practices personal injury law in Austin, Texas.

He says he knew when he was accepted as an undergraduate to the University of Denver, it was an opportunity that would expand his horizons and at the same time make him a better person.

“DU was that gift that exposed me to a wider view of the country and the world,” he says. “I was so appreciative of my professors while I was there. I knew in the future that I would end up giving back to the school because of all the opportunities it has given me.”

Recently he made good on that pledge. When Pastrana learned about the University of Denver Sturm College of Law’s Sturm Scholarship Challenge several months ago, he says it was a clear opportunity that he couldn’t pass up.

“It made a hell of a lot of sense to me,” Pastrana says.

The Challenge allows alumni and friends to maximize their investment in the law school’s outstanding students because the Sturm family and DU are offering matching funds up to \$4 million for endowed scholarships.

Pastrana donated \$50,000 in the name of his daughter Paige, who is studying psychology at Lewis & Clark College in Portland, Ore. “I’m working on her to do her graduate work at DU,” says Pastrana, who got his undergraduate and graduate degrees from DU. “I hope she does it.

“The school matched my \$50,000 and so I was able to leverage my donation,” he says. “I’ve always been appreciative of the law school. It has allowed me to have successes in my career so it was a perfect way to give back to the school and help other young people with similar backgrounds.”

One of his fondest memories is working for a professor as a student clerk doing research. “I really enjoyed the time I was there,” he says. “It’s kind of funny—I was totally bent on being a corporate lawyer. I did that for a while and then shifted to personal injury, and I’ve been pretty successful since then. I’ve been in personal injury for 25 years now.”

Pastrana says another reason he gave the money was because of the situations law school graduates end up in as a result of student debt.

“The cost of law schools, wherever they are, is tough on students when they graduate. It’s hard on kids now. They’re coming out of school with huge amounts of debt. So if I can help in any way of lessening that debt, it makes me feel great.”

He says many students end up in “golden handcuffs.”

“They have to work for a firm and do things they didn’t necessarily want to do out of law school,” he says. “I hope, based on my scholarship, some students can go directly into the kind of law they want to go into.”

Pastrana says he didn’t have debt. “My dad was successful and I didn’t have to worry about that. But in my practice, I deal with everyday people and see the cost they have to incur, and it’s prohibitive.”

So far the Challenge has raised nearly \$5 million and eventually it will add \$10.5 million in scholarship funds. To learn more about the Challenge, visit law.du.edu/alumni/giving-to-du/sturm-scholarship-challenge. 📖



A photo of Pastrana and his daughter Paige sits on his office desk. Pastrana’s gift to the Sturm Scholarship Challenge was made in Paige’s name. “I’m working on her to do her graduate work at DU,” Pastrana says. “I hope she does it.”