

Lillian G. Apodaca '85

Alumni



Ms. Apodaca, whose ancestors settled in New Mexico in 1598, was born and raised in a small northern New Mexico ranching village. At age 13, she started attending an all girls Catholic boarding school in Arizona and also attended Phillips Exeter Academy in the summer.

Although she is a partner and shareholder in one of New Mexico's most prestigious law firms—Bingham, Hurst, Apodaca, Wile & Schoen in Albuquerque—Lillian Apodaca says one of the most important attributes she brings to her practice is “being very down to earth.” “I represent contractors and subcontractors. Most are small businesses. You have to understand their concerns and problems,” she said.

A 1985 graduate of Washburn University School of Law, Ms. Apodaca practices in the areas of business and commercial litigation and transactions with an emphasis in construction law. She is a certified American Arbitration Association construction arbitrator and a frequent seminar lecturer in construction law and alternative dispute resolution.

When it was time to choose a law school, Ms. Apodaca settled on Washburn University or the University of Kansas. “My preference was Washburn,” she recalled. “The Washburn application was due one week before K.U.'s, so I completed the Washburn application first and hand delivered it to the admissions office. Within three days, I was accepted. I saw no reason to apply to K.U. and never completed their application.”

The choice of Washburn proved to be a good one. “The overall environment at Washburn is extremely supportive,” Ms. Apodaca said. “I think the faculty works very hard to create this environment and it is what makes Washburn so very special.” In addition to faculty support she received, Ms. Apodaca appreciated the camaraderie among students. “I made many wonderful friendships while I was there,” she said.

Following graduation from law school, Ms. Apodaca practiced in Kansas for two years before returning to New Mexico, where she passed the bar exam and joined her present law firm in 1987.

During her career, Ms. Apodaca has made her mark in several areas. *Hispanic Business* magazine recognized her as one of 100 most influential Hispanics in the nation, and *New Mexico Business Weekly Magazine* named her as one of New Mexico's Power Brokers. She was co-chair of New Mexico Governor-elect Bill Richardson's Transition Team.

Ms. Apodaca has served as a director of the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda, a coalition of major national Hispanic organizations including the Congressional Hispanic Caucus. She has been a member of the Host Committee of the Hispanic Heritage Awards and is president of the board of trustees of the National Hispanic Cultural Foundation.

She is a past president of the New Mexico Hispanic Bar Association and of the Hispanic National Bar Association, an organization representing the interests of 25,000 Hispanic lawyers, law students, judges, and law professors in the United States. Ms. Apodaca has been a member of the board of directors of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF), serving as vice president. In addition she chaired the board of directors of the New

Mexico State Bar International Law Section. She currently sits on the American Bar Association's House of Delegates and is an Ambassador for the American Bar Association's Business Law Section.

“One of my most passionate causes is pursuing diversity,” Ms. Apodaca said. “I am speaking of diversity in every sense. Diversity of thought, diversity of ideas, ethnic diversity, and so on. It is a concept that we are losing. I think we are simply too overwhelmed or too afraid to have any kind of meaningful dialogue or discussion. Without discussion, I do not believe the best decisions are made.”

Despite her busy schedule, Ms. Apodaca finds time to help Washburn University School of Law. She is a member of the School's Alumni Board of Governors, and provides financial support for its programs. “Washburn has produced more than its share of outstanding graduates,” Ms. Apodaca said. “When you see this sort of success, you have to conclude that the School is doing something right. In order to continue the successes for future generations, our own children, all of us should support Washburn.”

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