

ROGER MALDONADO

Portrait of a President

By Anne Pitter



Anne Pitter is a partner in SGR's New York office. She focuses on Corporate and Real Estate law. apitter@sgrlaw.com

If you are a hippie, a flower child or just a fan of '60s music, you may recall these lyrics: "Only in America / Can a kid without a cent / Get a break and maybe grow up to be President."* Well, that did indeed happen to Roger Maldonado, SGR New York litigation partner, who became President of the New York City Bar Association in May.

Roger comes from a family with a history of serving and protecting America. His father and grandfather were both in the U.S. Army, and he was born on a military base in Puerto Rico. At one time, Roger himself considered West Point and a military career, but his father encouraged a broader approach to service, believing that it would be easier to reach one's full potential outside the Army. It is not a stretch to see how the family tradition translated into a career upholding the law and making sure that the law operates to benefit all members of the community, not only those with means and access. That in a nutshell is a key part of Roger's overall mission as City Bar President, as Roger clearly declared in his inaugural address to the City Bar membership.

Roger's early education was in schools on military bases and Catholic schools. For his advanced studies, Roger attended Yale University and then Yale Law School. His plan was to move back to Puerto Rico to practice law, but the best-laid plans went awry when he met his future wife, Betsy, in undergraduate school. Betsy wanted the same opportunity Roger had to get the best education possible, and she wanted to complete medical school and her residency in the U.S. Betsy might not recognize this in herself, but her insistence on having an equal career opportunity places her among the early crusaders in the equality-of-the-sexes movement.

Roger has a true affinity for New York City. His roots there are as deep as they are in his native Puerto Rico, where much of his family still lives.

Dedicated to serving the community

The concept of service to community manifested itself in Roger's first job out of law school. He joined the South Brooklyn Legal Services office, which provides civil legal aid to low-income residents. His focus was on housing issues, and he put his bilingual skills to good use representing many in the Latino community unfamiliar with the U.S. court system and laws. Roger eventually became director of the Housing Unit.

After eight years at Legal Services, Roger left to try his hand at private practice, where he became a general commercial litigator. Even at that early stage in his career, colleagues recognized Roger's dedication – it was one of his opponents while Roger was working at Legal Services who introduced Roger to the Government Development Bank for Puerto Rico, which became one of Roger's first major clients.

When one of the people with whom Roger worked at the Development Bank started his own practice, he sought out Roger to work together on a copyright matter on behalf of a Latin American musician. With a very

satisfactory result in that matter, Roger expanded his practice, representing underdog musicians against big record labels. At that point, Roger was a name partner in Balber Pickard Maldonado Van Der Tuin, PC. BPMV, a firm focusing on real estate, general business and litigation, was a natural complement to SGR's New York City office. The two combined in early 2017.

Deep roots in New York City

Early in his career, while he was still with Legal Services, Roger joined the New York City Bar Association. With his Legal Service focus on housing issues, he naturally became a member of the City Bar's Housing Court Committee, becoming Chair of the Committee and of the Task Force on Housing Court. Roger was fascinated with the process of bringing together people with diverse points of view – pro-landlord and pro-tenant attorneys and judges in the housing court system – to forge common ground and create a common policy. That experience led Roger to join other committees and take on other roles at the Bar Association. Over the years, he chaired the Council on Judicial Administration, the Task Force on International Legal Services and the Task Force on Puerto Rico, and served as Executive Vice

President of the Bar Association and a member of its Executive Committee.

Roger has a true affinity for New York City. His roots there are as deep as they are in his native Puerto Rico, where much of his family still lives. He married Betsy in 1985 at the World Trade Center. He has lived in the New York area his entire legal career and raised his two children, Roger David and Maria, there. Both of his children have continued the family tradition of service by becoming lawyers. Roger says he feels privileged to serve as President of the City Bar,

without regard to the fact that he is the first Hispanic President of the Bar Association, but the significance of that achievement is not lost on others in the Hispanic community and the legal profession. Roger sees his presidency as an opportunity to further reach out to the New York community in general and to focus on the Hispanic and other community issues that are so important to him.

Despite being in the spotlight now that he is President (which has also earned him a mention in Wikipedia!), Roger is still humble and unassuming, doing his two jobs at SGR and at the Bar Association every day. According to Betsy, he even still takes out the trash. SGR is proud to claim Roger as one of its own. Future issues of *Trust the Leaders* will continue to feature the good works of the New York City Bar under Roger's leadership.

* These lyrics are from "Only in America," written by Jerry Leiber, Mike Stoller, Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil, most famously sung by Jay and the Americans.