

NEVADA TRAILBLAZERS

Meet David López-Negrete:

López-Negrete, an attorney with the Clark Public Defender's office, said his most fulfilling moments come when he serves and helps others.

BY MARY BACON, ESQ.

“Armed with the knowledge that people would otherwise go without greatly motivates my work at the Public Defender’s office,” López said. “Serving the system as a whole is important to me. Everyone deserves a defense and a fair process because ensuring the constitutional rights of one serves the constitutional rights of all.”

López was born in Mexico City. His parents met in the hotel industry and had three children. When López was 7 years old, his mother and siblings moved to Houston, where his maternal grandparents were. And while he learned some English in Mexico City, living in Texas sharpened his learning curve and he achieved fluency within the year. His mother was a teacher, trained in the Montessori Method—a student-centered educational approach. After years of looking for the right opportunity, luck struck and his mother moved the family to Portland, Oregon, where there was an opening at the Franciscan Montessori Earth School.



Consistent with traditional Hispanic values of family staying together, his aunt, uncle, and grandparents soon followed his immediate family to Portland.

“At one point, all seven of us were living together in a two-bedroom apartment,” López said. “I loved it. I got to spend so much time with my cousins. We even started a band called Purgatory.”

After growing up in a smaller city, López wanted to attend college back east—in an area with greater diversity and the energy of a big city. When he toured New York University, his decision was made.

While in college, López took advantage of one of NYU’s many international campuses, with a semester abroad in Florence, Italy. He lived with a host family, learned Italian, and enjoyed the opportunity to immerse himself in a new culture.

“The experience was amazing,” he said. “My brother and a friend even came and visited, and we ended up traveling around to Spain, Germany, France, [and] England the rest of the summer.”

During his junior year, López’s brother moved to New York City for work in the music industry and his sister was also accepted to design school in the city.

“With all of her kids in NYC, my mom sold her house in Portland and moved to the city,” López said. “It was like being home again. In fact, my senior year in college, I lived with my brother, and my sister lived with my mother. I am so grateful for that year and the opportunity to be with family.”

After graduating from NYU, López worked at a collections firm in New York City and then moved to Miami to live with his father and stepmother, working at a maritime law firm while he applied to law school.

However, López had a desire to move back west for a slower pace, and a partial scholarship to the University of Arizona made the place to attend law school an easy decision. During his 2L year, López attended the public interest career fair, and the Clark County Public Defender’s office was there seeking bilingual candidates. He was offered the position and spent the summer arguing motions, examining witnesses, and representing people under Nevada Supreme Court Rule 49.5, which allowed him to practice as a law student under the supervision of a licensed attorney.

“It was great exposure to what the job is really like. It is difficult but rewarding work,” he said.

At the University of Arizona, López was a representative for the law school in the graduate student body government, eventually becoming the president. That experience, and delving more into politics, made him want to participate in government. He took on the task of naturalization, became a citizen, and eventually helped all his siblings and his father go through the process of becoming citizens.

Today, he is a hardworking public defender on the homicide team.

“One of my most memorable cases was when a client initially had private counsel,” López said. “Ultimately, the client couldn’t afford the attorney and the attorney withdrew. While the client was asking for an appointment of counsel, the judge perceived an attitude, so he remanded him to jail and set \$1 million bond. I filed a petition for writ of mandamus and the Nevada Supreme Court exercised their discretion to rule that \$1 million bail was excessive, releasing my client from jail. The case is so impactful to me because it is representative of standing up for justice and fairness. Fighting for fair rules, and a level playing field is fundamental to our legal system.”

District Court Judge Bita Yeager, who was once López’s team chief at the public defender’s office, said he’s an extremely bright and talented attorney.

“He is a tenacious, hardworking team player who is always willing to help others,” Yeager said. “One of the best things about David is that for as talented as he is, he doesn’t take himself too seriously, and is fun to be around and is always up for an adventure or a fun time. He is also an extremely loyal and supportive friend and colleague.”

To stay involved in the community, López volunteers with the Nevada Latino Bar Association. As director of this year’s ¡Andale! 5K Run/Walk (a LSAT scholarship fundraiser) he oversaw its reorganization into a tax-exempt foundation; the team raised a record-setting \$111,500. The Nevada Supreme Court also recently appointed him to Nevada Bar Foundation – the State Bar of Nevada’s charitable arm – and López has served as a temporary member of the Nevada Judicial Selection Committee. He has also been part of the Hispanic National Bar Association, assisting on a subcommittee for judicial vetting, and he was voted as a top lawyer under 40 in 2022.

In his spare time, López has done everything from joining a performing salsa team to dance at the Las Vegas Salsa Super Congress, to playing the bass in a band with his brother and his cousin. They recorded a handful of albums, and while the band split when López went to college, they did a reunion show at his sister’s wedding.



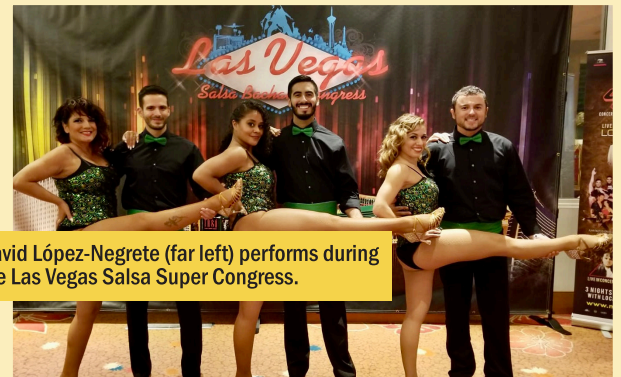
David López-Negrete became a U.S. citizen while enrolled in law school.



David López-Negrete discusses a case on a television appearance.



David López-Negrete attends a Hispanic National Bar Association gala.



David López-Negrete (far left) performs during the Las Vegas Salsa Super Congress.



David López-Negrete performs with his band.