



Remembering Dale Harris

BY GALE MILLER, ALAN LOEB, AND NEIL PECK

Extraordinary lawyer, professional and community leader, mentor, role model, and friend. These superlatives perfectly describe Dale Harris. All three of us were partners with Dale and were lucky enough to have worked with him on numerous cases and matters over more than three decades. We will never forget his warmth, wisdom, sense of humor, compassion, thoughtfulness, and decency.

A Life's Story

Let's first look at the facts, then we'll turn to his personal qualities that we value so greatly.

When asked where he came from, Dale would respond in his best Southern Illinois drawl, "I was born in Crab Orchard, Illinois." He grew up in nearby Marion, where he met Toni, the love of his life. He spent his undergraduate years at the University of Colorado, initially on a basketball scholarship, and then an academic scholarship. Upon graduation, Dale and Toni married and headed off to Cambridge, where he attended Harvard Law School.

After graduation in 1962, they moved to Denver, and Dale started work at Lewis, Grant & Davis (now Davis Graham & Stubbs). Mentored by Donald Stubbs, Dale embarked on a brilliant

60-year practice, encompassing antitrust and other complex commercial litigation, trials, and appeals. He was nationally recognized as a highly experienced and effective antitrust lawyer and was a fellow in the American College of Trial Lawyers. As a natural leader, he became the youngest managing partner in the history of Davis Graham & Stubbs up to that time, while maintaining a busy practice. In more recent years, as a member of the American Arbitration Association's National Roster of Arbitrators and Mediators, Dale handled more than 50 commercial arbitrations and was preparing for an arbitration hearing scheduled to begin the week after he died.¹

Principled Leader

Dale's leadership in the profession was recognized early in his career, through election as president of the Denver Law Club (from which he later received its Lifetime Achievement Award) and of the Colorado Association of Corporate Counsel, which he and author Neil Peck founded. Dale served as president of both the Colorado and Denver Bar Associations and received the Award of Merit from both associations, their highest awards for service to the legal profession. But the list of his leadership within the bar is much longer, including service as state chair of the Fellows of the American Bar Foundation and of the US Supreme Court Historical Society; on the boards of the Legal Aid Foundation, the Colorado Judicial Institute, and the Colorado Trust Account Foundation; and as a member of the Colorado Chief Justice's Commission on the Legal Profession and the Colorado Supreme Court's Judicial Advisory Council.

Dale's leadership was felt throughout the broader community. As a passionate advocate for numerous charities, he chaired the boards of directors of Mile High United Way, the Rocky Mountain Chapter of the Arthritis Foundation, and QuaLife Wellness Community. The Rocky Mountain Chapter of the Arthritis Foundation honored him with its Carl Williams Award (awarded to an attorney who has provided exceptional community service to the Foundation) and the Ruth Vincent Cunningham Award (the Foundation's highest award in recognition of long-time service).



1 Dale and Chuck Turner collaborate at the CBA offices.

2 Dale giving remarks at a 1987 dinner honoring Clyde Martz.

Zealous Advocate

As extraordinary as these achievements are, the person himself was even more remarkable. Dale displayed intense dedication, passion, and loyalty when representing his clients, who included Gulf Oil, US West, Goodyear, and the American Water Works Association, among many others. He carefully listened to clients, thoroughly analyzed their issues, and through his calmness, brilliance, expertise, and wisdom, provided insightful and reassuring counsel. Dale was a worrier. He worried about every aspect and detail of a case and worked long hours, with much lost sleep and countless skipped meals, to resolve those worries. For example, he once lost 30 pounds preparing for, conducting, and winning a lengthy jury trial in a highly complex, difficult case.

Consummate Professional

In addition to his prodigious contributions to the legal profession and the community, Dale had a huge impact on the lawyers with whom he worked. He was instrumental in recruiting author Alan Loeb to Davis Graham & Stubbs right out of law school. He mentored two of us (Alan and Gale Miller), as well as a great many other lawyers, throughout our careers. Dale was a consummate professional in every sense of the word. His patience, professionalism, calmness, work ethic, decency, and written and oral advocacy not only taught us to be better lawyers but inspired us to be better people. Dale's first love was for Toni and their family, but he also loved his firm and demonstrated



empathy for and decency toward his partners, other firm lawyers, and the non-legal staff. As Chris Richardson, another of Dale's partners, said, "Dale made us all better lawyers and better people simply by being Dale."

Words of Tribute

We contacted several people who worked with Dale in the community, and they shared the following thoughts about his leadership and personal qualities.

Chuck Turner, Former Executive Director, Colorado and Denver Bar Associations:

"I can't think that all the accolades really do him justice: one would have had to spend some time with Dale to truly appreciate his wisdom and probity. Yes, the word 'probity' came to me as I was thinking about Dale, and I looked it up to make sure I had the right word. Probity means 'the quality of having strong moral principles; honesty and decency.' Sound about right for Dale? I certainly think so.

"I recall his ability, as president of the Colorado and Denver Bar Associations, to work with

disparate factions, agendas, and personalities without being either dictatorial or wishy-washy. Allowing those factions to be respectfully heard made him a true 'mediator' who was trusted and admired. We had a contentious issue during his presidency surrounding the concept of multi-disciplinary practice—allowing CPAs and others to practice alongside law partners on an equal ownership footing. Dale presided over those discussions masterfully to reach reasonable compromises. He was asked to testify at an American Bar Association meeting on those issues and was universally praised for his thoughtful and useful suggestions.

"But he was not just an academic star and gifted lawyer leader, as his loyalty and unwavering support—in the face of clear evidence of ineptness—of the Rockies demonstrates. Just an all-round prince of a man. I will miss him a lot."

John Asher, Executive Director, Colorado Legal Services:

"Dale was not only an exceptional lawyer—a lawyer's lawyer—he was also thoroughly principled and dedicated to public service. I had

the privilege of working closely with Dale, as managing partner of his law firm and in a variety of his numerous public service positions serving the Denver and Colorado communities, the legal profession, and the cause of fairness and access to justice for those in need.

“As president of the Denver and Colorado Bar Associations and during his six years on the Board of Trustees of the Legal Aid Foundation of Colorado and his six years as a member of COLTAF’s Board of Directors, he was a strong and consistent supporter of utmost professionalism, civility, compassion, and equity. He supported legal services to the indigent and the most marginalized, solely because it was the responsibility of lawyers and was simply the right thing to do.

“Dale gave generously of his resources, especially to legal aid, Mile High United Way, and other causes, but more important he gave of his time and extraordinary skills, good judgment, always helpful common sense and decency, and his wit and wisdom. He had extraordinary ability and legal acumen, but it was always tempered by his humility, calm approach to problem solving, and search for common ground. It was his calm approach to difficult and challenging issues that always face us in legal aid and his warmth, accessibility, and decency that I will miss the most. Our lives will simply not be as rich without Dale being among us, although I hope his wisdom and decency will stay with me and all of us forever.”

Laura Rosseisen, Former President and CEO, Arthritis Foundation, Rocky Mountain Chapter:

Laura worked closely with Dale on many issues over the years and felt close to him personally and professionally. She emphasized that Dale was always gracious and generous with his time. As an example of his leadership skills, Laura described one critical matter she worked on with him when the Foundation went through a significant merger with other arthritis foundations all over the western part of the country. This was a very difficult, complex, and sometimes contentious transaction that involved entities with different needs and fundraising ideas. Dale headed up the deal calmly and with dedication,



Colorado sports buff.

and he made sure everyone felt represented and had their specific needs heard. She said he showed true leadership and earned everyone’s respect and appreciation.

Laura summed up, “Dale was a gentleman—one of the finest I knew. He was kind and caring, had a great sense of humor, and was fully present with friends, colleagues, and acquaintances. He had a sharp and insightful mind and an exceptionally generous spirit. Dale was also very proud, and protective of, his family. His abiding love for his family was evident when he shared stories of their struggles and successes and the simple joys in daily living.

“I will miss our shared passion for Colorado’s sports teams—the Rockies (whose lack of success in recent years annoyed him), the Broncos (whose ownership drama he was sure contributed to their recent decline), the Nuggets, and the Avs—whose success in recent years brought great joy!

“Dale was a friend and mentor—I will miss him very much.”

Julie Butscher, Board Chair, Arthritis Foundation, Rocky Mountain Chapter:

“Dale was always such a gentleman and calming presence. When you spoke with Dale, he always made you feel like the most important

person in the room. He was one of the most giving individuals that we know. His dedication and love for the Arthritis Foundation community will never be forgotten. He will be greatly missed by all who knew him.”

Paul Franke, Past Board of Trustees Chair, Mile High United Way:

“I worked with Dale both professionally and while at Mile High United Way. He was chair of the MHUW Board of Trustees at a time when the organization was dealing with some evolutionary issues. Dale had the unique ability to be a very strong leader, yet he was genuinely loved by all who were involved. He was incredibly smart and insightful but would always give individuals the opportunity to offer thoughts and opinions—before they ultimately came around to Dale’s approach.

“We talk a lot about empathy these days, and I think that may have been Dale’s most distinguishing attribute: he genuinely cared about the organizations and the people that were in those organizations or impacted by those organizations. This was particularly true at Mile High United Way. At a time that required strong leadership and difficult decisions, Dale Harris was the perfect chair: he was that strong leader, made the difficult decisions, but did so with a deep understanding and care for the folks involved. It was an honor to have known him.”

As for the three of us, we will greatly miss Dale—having lunch with him even long after each of us left the firm, sharing stories about our families and cases, and commiserating over (and sometimes celebrating) the Rockies and Broncos. We consider ourselves very lucky to have been his friends. **CL**

NOTE

1. Harris passed away on January 16, 2022. Donations in his memory may be made to the University of Colorado Anschutz Cancer Center General Research Fund (giving.cu.edu/fund/cancercenter-general-research-fund), the Arthritis Foundation (arthritis.org/donate), or the Mile High United Way (unitedwaydenver.org/give). His obituary was printed in the March issue of *Colorado Lawyer*.