

# Ed Ricco

## Finds Place in Appellate Practice

Ed Ricco was 7 years old and living in Teaneck, N.J., when the Russians launched Sputnik, the first satellite to go into orbit. With his parents convinced that science would define the future and Ed already fascinated by astronomy, his future seemed sealed.

By the time he was a physics major at the Stevens Institute of Technology, however, he already had discovered a stronger passion: ballet and modern dance. He was not interested in doing either, but at every chance, he was on the bus to New York City, attending dance performances. In fact, the reason he chose Columbia University for his graduate studies in astronomy – by then he felt too confused by physics – was mostly so he could continue feeding his dance obsession. At one point, he considered becoming a dance critic, and took a class at the New School.

First, he needed to fulfill an obligation to the U.S. Air Force for the ROTC scholarship he had received to attend college. After earning a master's in 1973, he was assigned to an Air Force research laboratory at Kirtland Air Force Base, where he studied the environmental impact of Air Force operations. When the unit was transferred out of Kirtland, his wife, Mary Ann, whom he had met the first day he walked into the astronomy graduate-student office at Columbia, informed him that she wasn't ready to leave Albuquerque. She had a good job at Sandia National Laboratories, where she still works. Instead, Ricco served out the rest of his duty as a computer programmer at the lab.

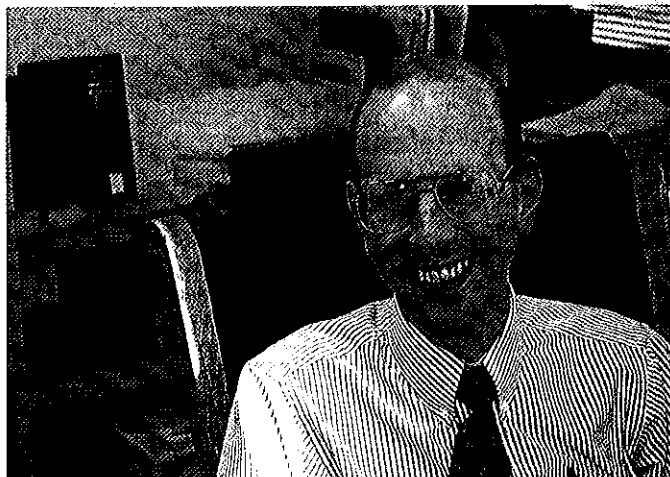
Meanwhile, he started wondering about life after the military. By now, he had doubts about any sort of career in science and knew he couldn't fulfill his dream of being a New York dance critic while living in Albuquerque. He turned his thoughts to the law.

"With the idea that lawyers can make changes in society and that the rule of law could accomplish good, I thought of becoming an environmental lawyer," he says.

During his first semester at the UNM School of Law, Ricco felt disoriented. Law was not about testing hypotheses and getting answers, he learned. Gradually, he decided that the essence of law was its process. "Once I figured it out, I loved law school," he says.

It was during his second year, as a member of the law school's National Moot Court team, when Ricco found his place in the law. Not only did he enjoy the intensity of the experience, he also discovered the intellectual side of law in appellate practice. The team survived the regional competition and made it to the national quarterfinal rounds. Their brief took third place nationally.

"I liked analyzing information, deciding what matters and what doesn't and putting it all together in a brief," he says. "I liked appellate work and was good at it; it was a good fit."



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Ricco's moot court experience was so influential in shaping his career that he has helped prepare the school's ABA National Moot Court teams ever since graduating in 1980. For the past four years he has been the team's adviser.

Following graduation, he clerked for U.S. District Judge Howard Bratton. When his clerkship ended, he joined Rodey, Dickason, Sloan, Akin & Robb. He had clerked for the firm during law school and found another good fit.

It took him a while to find his place, though. At first Ricco wrote contracts and real estate documents, along with motions. In 1992, he proposed focusing solely on appeals, an idea the firm accepted. For the past 15 years, he has headed the firm's appellate practice group, taking on all manner of cases, from health care to personal injury to intellectual property.

"It's been just what I wanted," he says.

And it's been all about the process.

"If the process works correctly, the result will be the right result," he says, "in the sense that it is a result society generally will accept. The most important role of an appellate lawyer from day to day is to make sure the process works, that the rules were followed and the law was applied correctly."

Although Ricco no longer reads the dance reviews in the New York Times every day, he still attends performances from time to time. He also is a licensed amateur radio operator and is the leader of an Albuquerque group of volunteer operators that provides communications support for search-and-rescue missions. He has assisted in nearly 40 missions during the past 10 years. His group also provides the communications network for the Duke City Marathon and other events.

After raising two daughters, he and Mary Ann, a serious film buff, now take in a movie when they can.