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Veteran Immigration Lawyer Wins Sixth Circuit's First Pro-Bono Award

CLEARWATER – For more than thirty years, Clearwater Attorney Ramon Carrion has represented many a client for nothing — or next to nothing.

One was a member of the French Resistance who was separated from his lover, another freedom fighter, during the height of World War II, and now wanted to spend his twilight years with her in the U.S., after they found each other again.

Another is a young Honduran seeking asylum after courageously testifying against the police in his native country — and then losing government protection.

And then there are the countless victims of domestic abuse, from Columbia, Venezuela, and other countries, whose new American husbands make them kowtow to their demands — or risk getting sent back to their homelands.

Now, Carrion, 70, a proud grandfather of five, is receiving special recognition for the work he has done with little to no remuneration.

He is the first recipient of an award, granted for the first time in the Sixth Judicial Circuit, that recognizes an attorney in either Pinellas or Pasco county for outstanding pro bono service.

While the various bar associations in the area, such as St. Petersburg's, Clearwater's, and West Pasco's, recognize attorneys for their pro bono work, as does the Florida Bar, this year marks the first time the circuit has taken it upon itself to do so.

Carrion was honored at a special ceremony on April 17 in Courtroom One of the Pinellas County Justice Center, with many dignitaries and judges attending.

Even without the official recognition, Mr. Carrion's career has been one of accomplishment. A native of Puerto Rico, his family eventually settled in Patterson, New Jersey, where his father landed a job as a maintenance worker and his mother as a factory worker.

Mr. Carrion was the first in his family to attend college, graduating from Rutgers University with honors and then Rutgers School of Law.

In 1976, he moved to Florida with his then-wife, a doctor in training, and was general counsel for Misener Marine Construction, an international company which specialized in construction projects at ports as far away as Panama, the Dominican Republic, Barbados and the Virgin Islands.

Five years later, he started his own firm in Clearwater, specializing in immigration and nationality law. He has assisted foreign investors with their Visas, represented clients threatened with deportation, and helped long-time residents cement their citizenship.

In addition to his pro bono work, he serves as the president of Gulfcoast Legal Services, one of the premiere non-profits providing legal services for the poor, and he is also the president the InterCultural Advocacy Institute, or what used to be known as the Hispanic Outreach Center, in Clearwater.

In an odd twist, his mother and father followed him into the realm of jurisprudence. His father, the one-time maintenance worker, eventually became the court interpreter for the Passaic County, N.J., court system, and after he died of cancer at the age of 49, his wife, Mr. Carrion's mother, succeeded him in the position.



Ramon Carrion
