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## News Releases

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### **Top Story: Saying Goodbye to ICE Deputy Director Alonzo Pena Leading man in law enforcement retires after 28 years of dedicated service**

Years ago, an athletic young man from a small town in Texas dreamed of becoming an Olympic runner. His destiny, however, took him on a different track. He became a Texas state trooper, transferred to federal service, rose through the ranks in law enforcement and became a front runner in the monumental task of keeping America safe. After 28 years of giving his all to a career he loved, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Deputy Director Alonzo Peña retires in December 2010.

For Peña, life began in Falfurrias, Texas—population 5,000. Sadly, his mother died when he was quite young. There was no shortage of male mentors in his life, however, beginning with his father, a World War II veteran, who stressed discipline, a strong work ethic and pride. His athletic coaches, too, influenced the young Peña. Playing sports instilled the value of team spirit that Peña exuberantly credits as the way he learned, not only how to be a team player, but "how to maximize and promote talent."

The town "loved and respected" the border patrol agents and the Texas Highway Patrol (THP), and Peña was no exception. He aspired to become a member of the elite THP.

The THP was highly selective, and Peña made the cut into the academy. Recruits underwent 28 weeks of intense training, including full contact boxing. "The training prepared us for anybody we might meet on the road," said Peña, who is as proud of his THP role as any other in his distinguished career. In 1982, he took to the highway as a Texas state trooper.

In square miles, Texas is the second largest state in the union, but it wasn't big enough to hem in Peña who held fast to his childhood dream of "helicopters, boats and being where the action is."

Peña has not only been where the action is, he initiated, participated in, orchestrated and launched operations needed to combat crime on all fronts. "There are so many evils in the world. Someone has to stand up to injustice. If not us, who?" Peña asks. "There has to be justice, rule of law that must be at the forefront of every society."

Peña served as a special agent with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) beginning in 1984 and then transferred to the U.S. Customs Service. His career gained momentum as he served in positions that held greater and greater responsibilities. He served as the ICE Special Agent in Charge (SAC) of San Antonio, SAC of Houston and then SAC of Phoenix. At the request of Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Janet Napolitano, who knew of his exceptional work while she was governor of Arizona, Peña was tapped to serve as the DHS attaché at the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City. He then journeyed to ICE headquarters to serve as a special advisor to ICE Director John Morton. Shortly thereafter, he became ICE's deputy director, serving as the second in command of DHS's principal investigative arm.

Peña has been an ambassador and advocate for ICE, a partner to local, state, federal and foreign law enforcement, a mentor to special agents and a friend to Mexico. He has overseen investigations related to anti-terrorism, worksite enforcement, drug trafficking, weapons smuggling, financial crimes and child exploitation and generally championed all that's right and just.

Peña's name is practically synonymous with Border Enforcement Security Task Force (BEST). He had a key role in creating this tremendously successful ICE-led comprehensive and multi-agency strategy to fight crime along the nation's borders. In 2004, while serving as SAC in San Antonio, he unified law enforcement partners to share information and collaborate in fighting cross border crime that had escalated in Laredo, Texas.

His goal was to take a proactive, intelligence driven and cooperative stance to halt the horrific crime caused by the drug cartels. Peña's genuine respect for and belief in the abilities of others and his off the charts likability quotient, combined with his zeal to fight the violence along the Southwest border, turned out to be a magnetic force that drew others to the cause. Through his tireless efforts and sheer strength of personality, Peña succeeded where others may have failed. He persuaded other agencies to join forces to combat this crime. Thus was the genesis of BEST. Today, 21 BESTs are in place, including one in Mexico.

At Peña's retirement ceremony on November 19, 2010, the ICE headquarters conference center was filled to capacity. Leaders from ICE and other federal law enforcement agencies, a member of Congress, a representative from a leading law enforcement association, the Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association, and others whose lives Peña had touched throughout his career, paid tribute.

Peña's Chief of Staff Patrick "P.J." Lechleitner, along with ICE Director Morton, officiated at the event. They introduced a long line of people who held affectionate regard and professional respect for Peña.

"Calm, kind, charming, courteous, unflappable, principled, nice, great, right," are but a sampling of the laudatory words colleagues used to describe Peña.

"Al Peña's genuine concern for others, dedication to family and love of his country, wrapped in a resolute commitment to fight crime and keep the public safe, are the ideals he lives and breathes and stamps with his own distinctive style," said Morton. "His appeal is personal. It's due to his empathy. It's real, it's abundant and it allows him to instantly connect with everyone he meets. If there's anything missing about Al, it's negative judgment; you get the feeling there isn't any."

Peña took the stage at the ceremony. He choked back emotion when he spoke of the gratitude and thanks to those who made his "blessed and rewarding career" possible. He had high praise for "the people in the field, the people who answer the calls. They

are the face of ICE." Peña said he is "excited to see the future of ICE," and he is confident that the agency will operate with "the same fire and same enthusiasm" and become even more successful.

Mr. and Mrs. Peña are looking forward to returning to their beloved San Antonio. "We miss Texas," Peña said. "You'll always have a friend in San Antonio."

Morton expressed deep sentiment for a man with "style, honesty and enthusiasm" who devoted "a lifetime's effort in keeping us safe." Morton summed up his first deputy director succinctly, saying in six heartfelt words, "Al, you are a good man."

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