

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

For more information, contact:

Erin Hannan, Vice President of Communications

719-577-5750 or [ehannan@elpomar.org](mailto:ehannan@elpomar.org)

Stella Hodgkins, Senior Vice President and ELD Program Officer

719-577-7017 or [eldprogram@elpomar.org](mailto:eldprogram@elpomar.org)



*Celebrating 85 years*

### **El Pomar Foundation's Elevating Leadership Development program honors Ray Aguilera as 2023 Milton E. Proby Cultural Heritage Room Inductee**

**Colorado Springs, CO – August 4, 2023** –El Pomar Foundation's Elevating Leadership Development (ELD) program annually recognizes individuals of color from Southern Colorado for their leadership and legacy through the Milton E. Proby Cultural Heritage Room Induction Ceremony. This year, El Pomar honored Ray Aguilera (1942-2021), who dedicated himself to the Bessemer neighborhood and greater Pueblo community through youth education, civic engagement, and community stewardship.

Mr. Aguilera dedicated himself to making a positive impact in Pueblo and the Southern Colorado region. As Founder and President of the Pueblo Hispanic Education Foundation (PHEF) from 1988 to 1999, Mr. Aguilera helped provide scholarships for low-income, minority students and organized financial aid workshops. Mr. Aguilera's efforts raised millions of dollars, enabling more than 1,000 Pueblo high school students to attend colleges and universities.

Recognized for his work with Pueblo youth, Mr. Aguilera received numerous local and national awards, including Latino Chamber of Commerce Member of the Year in 1988 and Pueblo Latino Chamber of Commerce Lifetime Achievement Award in 2007. At the national level, Mr. Aguilera's honors included 2007 United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Advocate of the Year and 2019 NAACP Pueblo Community Empowerment Award. In recent years, he was known to many as "Mayor of Bessemer" and due to his profound impact, Governor Jared Polis proclaimed May 18, 2021 as Ray Aguilera Day.

On Thursday, August 3, El Pomar hosted a ceremony to celebrate the civic contributions of Mr. Aguilera at Penrose House Conference Center in Colorado Springs, with El Pomar staff and Trustees, Elevating Leadership Development members, and families of Mr. Aguilera and former inductees present.

Remarks at the ceremony were made by El Pomar Foundation leadership, including President and CEO, Kyle Hybl, and Senior Vice President and ELD Program Officer, Stella Hodgkins; as well as son of Rev. Dr. Milton E. Proby, James Proby; ELD Latino Advisory Council Co-Chair, Caroline Trani; and daughter of Ray Aguilera, Andrea Hansen.

"I believe that many of us strive to leave a legacy; to know that we have had a positive impact on someone else," shared Stella Hodgkins during the remarks. "For Mr. Aguilera, Rev. Dr. Proby and all the inductees over the years, their legacy is hallmarked by their passion and commitment to others' success and well-being. Let's keep the legacy alive. Let us all leave here tonight thinking about how we can contribute to the success of others, to the community at large, and to future generations."

El Pomar President and CEO added, "This ceremony has become an important El Pomar tradition. Since 1937, we've carried out a mission that started with our founders, Spencer and Julie Penrose, to promote the well-being of the people of Colorado. In doing so, we seek out organizations and leaders in the community who share that passion and commitment to making Colorado a better place to live."

The ceremony also included a video tribute to Mr. Aguilera's life and legacy, a special cultural heritage performance by Grupo Folklórico del Pueblo, music by Mariachi Lobos, and the ceremonial unveiling and installation of Mr. Aguilera's plaque in the Milton E. Proby Cultural Heritage Room, joining the company of the 16 previous inductees: <https://www.elpomar.org/programs/elevating-leadership-development/milton-e-proby-room/>

El Pomar established the Milton E. Proby Cultural Heritage Room in 2006 as an extension of the ELD program, which advances the skills, knowledge and network of leaders of color in Southern Colorado. The room is dedicated to preserving and documenting the contributions of African American/Black, Asian Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Latino and Native American individuals from Southern Colorado. Through the Milton E. Proby Cultural Heritage Room Induction Ceremony, ELD celebrates and honors the legacy left behind by those who embodied the ideals of civic involvement and leadership

The tribute video shared at the event is available for viewing [here](#).

### **About Elevating Leadership Development**

*Launched in 2001, Elevating Leadership Development (ELD) -- formerly Emerging Leaders Development -- removes barriers to access to a variety of community leadership development opportunities for leaders of color from Colorado Springs to Pueblo, opening doors to professional development and community leadership roles. The program also hosts the Milton E. Proby Cultural Heritage Room Induction Ceremony, dedicated to preserving, documenting, and honoring the contributions of African American/Black, Asian Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Latino, and Native American individuals from Southern Colorado. Each year a member of one of these communities is inducted into the Milton E. Proby group of honorees and is celebrated in the annual Milton E. Proby Induction Ceremony at Penrose House.*

### **About El Pomar Foundation**

*El Pomar Foundation is one of the largest and oldest private foundations in Colorado. El Pomar contributes approximately \$25 million annually through grants in the areas of health, human services, education, arts and humanities and civic and community initiatives, as well as community engagement and leadership development programs to support Colorado nonprofit organizations. Spencer and Julie Penrose founded El Pomar in 1937 with the mission to enhance, encourage and promote the current and future well-being of the people of Colorado.*

###