

Statement Regarding the Passing of David Villa

The David Villa I knew was so much more than the visionary leader and gold standard CIO the industry knows. David Villa for me, was a teacher, a mentor and one of the most influential people in my life.

It is no secret David had a pioneering spirit and innovative vision for a public pension system in America. However, his true gift was being able to align and rally human capital and energy around that vision to make it happen. David talked about building a cathedral. This was his metaphor for building an enduring public pension system that would stand the test of time. Like all great architects of cathedrals, he knew its completion would go beyond his lifetime. Thus, he worked to leave blueprints for others to follow the work and mission.

David called working for a public pension as missionary work. He elevated the work to the highest level—a calling to ensure hundreds of thousands or millions of hard-working Americans can live their later years in dignity. He dedicated himself to ensure the cathedral worked for the participant and all its partners aligned with the mission.

I was fortunate to be one of his students. David recruited me to SWIB from our native New Mexico early in my career and showed me the way. He shepherded me in more ways than I realized, even today. I became a missionary. My mission eventually led me back to our native New Mexico to implement the lessons I learned. True to the mission, pre-pandemic, David provided inspiring testimony to the New Mexico Legislature regarding the value of preserving public pensions. He did this for other pensions around the country, which was his way of extending the missionary work.

David will undoubtedly be remembered for his mark on the U.S. public pension industry, setting the standard and laying the blueprints for others to follow. However, his true mark will be how he changed lives. How he was able to get you to be your best. How he was able to get you to learn something new and grow. How he was able to see your path and help you walk down it.

He certainly changed my life. My family and I will be forever grateful.

Dominic Garcia
Chief Investment Officer
New Mexico PERA