

Spring 2024

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Roadworthy

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The Primerus Paradigm™

Spring 2024



About Our Cover

In a season of cultivating new growth, we are reminded of the challenges present in promoting the social and intellectual development of our children while maintaining a successful career.



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- Integrity
- Excellent Work Product
- Reasonable Fees
- Continuing Legal Education
- Civility
- Community Service

For a full description of these values, please visit primerus.com

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Managing Editor: **Paige Neirman**

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Roadworthy

Lawyers navigate sometimes bumpy paths of parenting

By Tom Kirvan

By most accounts, it's the toughest job in the world, a sometimes-daunting task that has befuddled brilliant minds for centuries.

Parenting.

It can be a lifelong test replete with pass-fail options and age-old dilemmas, such as "how to parent the child you have," instead of the "child you wish you had."

Balancing the rigorous demands of a legal career with the responsibilities of parenting presents a myriad of challenges that lawyers, like many professionals, struggle to navigate. The legal profession is known for its high-pressure environment, demanding hours, and the expectation for availability that can extend beyond the typical workday. This intensity often clashes with the equally pressing and unpredictable demands of parenting, leading to a delicate balancing act for lawyer-parents.

One significant challenge is managing time effectively. Lawyers often face long hours, including nights and weekends, dedicated to client needs, court preparations, and meeting tight deadlines. This can lead to difficulties in being physically present for family activities, milestones, or even daily routines, such as bedtime stories or school events. The unpredictability of legal work, such as last-minute changes to court dates or urgent client requests, further exacerbates this issue, making it hard to commit to family time reliably.

In addition, the mental and emotional toll of the profession cannot be understated. Lawyers frequently deal with complex, high-stakes cases that require a significant emotional investment and mental energy. This can lead to burnout and stress, which not only affects their work performance but also their availability and emotional presence at home. The challenge lies in finding ways to decompress and switch off from work mode to be fully present with their families.

Furthermore, the legal industry has traditionally valued face time and long hours as a measure of dedication and success, which can penalize those who seek flexibility for family reasons. Although there has been a shift towards more flexible work arrangements, especially with the advent of remote work technologies, the stigma around reduced hours or the need for flexibility can still impact career progression and opportunities.

So, how best to walk this work-life tightrope? Three Primerus attorneys have some thoughts on the subject, based principally on their own real-life experiences. The three include: Colorado attorney Muliha Khan of Zupkus & Angell, P.C.; Ireland attorney Gearóid McGann of Sweeney McGann Solicitors; and New Jersey attorney Charles Montgomery of Earp Cohn P.C. [▶](#)

Law firm's managing partner keeps her priorities straight

By Tom Kirvan

Denver attorney Muliha Khan, who has lived on four continents, became sole owner and managing partner of Zupkus & Angell, P.C. in 2018, some eight years after joining the firm.



Muliha Khan
Owner & Managing Partner
Zupkus & Angell, P.C.

Attorney Muliha Khan has a big job as the sole owner and managing partner of Zupkus & Angell, P.C., a Denver-based civil defense firm that she has guided since 2018.

A Colorado College grad who earned her J.D. from the University of Denver Sturm College of Law, Khan leads a team of six attorneys, five paralegals, and one firm administrator, a tech whiz who just happens to be her husband.

And despite the demands of her leadership role, Khan never loses sight of her chief responsibility – as the mother of three children, Ayat, 13, Imad, 9, and Noori, 9 months.

“If something ever goes wrong for them, I want to be their first call,” said Khan. “I want my kids to always know that I will pick up and I will be there for them.”

The promise is one of those “non-negotiable” items in Khan’s life and underscores her commitment to be the “best possible parent for them,” much the way her mother, Bushrah, and father, Ifthikar, were for her.

“They have been my role models, emphasizing the importance of education, good grades, and a love of life,” she said of her parents, who, respectively, enjoyed successful careers in nursing and civil engineering. “I have benefited greatly from their guidance and support.”

Khan also credits the founders of the firm, Bob Zupkus and Rick Angell, with instilling a culture where inclusion and diversity are valued and where family life matters.

“They set the tone for the firm, recognizing the fact that happy, valued employees will do excellent work for the benefit of our clients,” Khan declared. “And diversity and inclusion are built into my DNA and will always be an integral part of me.”

Pictured with her husband and three children, Muliha Khan said she was destined for a career in the law, saying, "I've always been outspoken and for that reason I knew I wanted to pursue a career in advocacy."



"But Bob and Rick weren't just focused on diversity and inclusion, they understood the importance of fulfillment and finding ways to keep work and family responsibilities in the proper balance," Khan added.

They emphasize the point on the firm's website, noting that "motherhood was never considered a burden – we did not want to lose valuable talent or to alienate clients that were struggling with balancing home and work life," Zupkus and Angell said.

The firm has a predominantly female look to it with 12 women and one man on staff. As such, it has been recognized by The

Women's Business Enterprise National Council with a coveted certification designation. The certification, according to Khan, is reserved only for those businesses that are majority owned and operated by women. In addition, she said, "a multi-part, rigorous screening had to be satisfied before certification was awarded."

When Khan joined Zupkus & Angell (Z&A) in 2010 as a contract lawyer, she was at a challenging point in her professional life after leaving a prominent and large Denver firm where she had spent the previous four years. The job change proved to be just the booster shot she needed, as "Bob and Rick saw something in me that I was unable to identify myself and they

invested in me in a way no one ever had as a lawyer," said Khan.

Khan – who has lived in England, Libya, Bangladesh, and the U.S. – came to America in 1998 to attend school at Colorado College (C.C.) in Colorado Springs, home to the U.S. Air Force Academy and to 14,110-foot Pikes Peak. Upon setting foot in the U.S. for the first time, Khan was struck by a sign in the airport that proclaimed "Welcome to Colorado Springs Where the Air is Rare" – and by the fact that "there was very little diversity."

"I was a little panicked, wondering if I had made the wrong decision," she admitted.

Her outlook on the future would change dramatically once she set foot on campus, where she found some diversity in the college population, providing Khan with a semblance of relief.

"The first year was tough being so far away from home, but I made some amazing friends and being at C.C. was truly a life-changing experience," Khan declared of the elite private college that is one of the nation's leading liberal arts schools.

It undoubtedly played a part in her willingness to embrace novel, innovative, and unconventional leadership methods, she acknowledged.

"I have been a disruptor my entire life," she said emphatically. "I am here to change things, to find better ways to do business and to practice law. I want to keep learning and to keep growing, and for that to be at the heart of our firm culture."

Evidence of her ability to adapt to a changing legal landscape appeared at the onset of the pandemic in March 2020 when the firm made a seamless transition into a remote working environment, principally

because the firm had years of experience with the format.

"We had the tools and technology to be able to work in a pandemic remotely, and I think it gave our clients peace of mind," Khan said.

She can largely thank her husband, Parker Ramey, for that. He holds the title of Firm Administrator, coming to the role in 2015 after spending 15 years in the Denver restaurant industry where he learned to "quickly develop outside-the-box solutions to a wide range of challenges," Ramey said on the Z&A website.

"Years ago, coming to Z&A with no legal-industry-specific experience uniquely positioned me to tackle the administrative challenges of law practice with a disruptor's eye for efficiency," Ramey indicated. "With the skill set to take established systems apart and see how to improve them, I have the daily opportunity to push the technological envelope of what a boutique law firm is capable of."

The perspective is in harmony with his wife's way of thinking and enables them to

keep solid boundaries between their work and home lives.

"Separating family from work can be challenging at times, but we have done a good job of keeping them straight," said Khan. "We have complementary skill sets where I can come up with an idea and Parker will know how we can best implement it."

A prime example was their decision to get married during the pandemic, when public gatherings were severely restricted so as not to become "super-spreaders" of the coronavirus. The 2021 result was a ceremony that Khan lovingly described as "memorable."

It was a Zoom event, broadcast from the couple's basement and beamed to points across the U.S. as well as overseas. Good thing, because Khan's older brother lives in Manchester, England; her younger sister is in Copenhagen, Denmark; and her uncle in the United Kingdom presided over the ceremony.

"He did a great job," Khan said. "It made the ceremony even more special to have him officiating." 



Long known as "America's Mountain," Pikes Peak gained early fame as the first eye-popping sight for westbound wagon trains.

Noted Irish solicitor strikes the right work-life balance

By Tom Kirvan



Gearóid McGann
Managing Partner
Sweeney McGann Solicitors

The founder of the Sweeney McGann Solicitors law firm in Limerick, Gearóid McGann has a busy commercial law practice, representing high-profile business clients over an array of industry sectors.

Ireland is home to more than 30,000 castles, many of which date from the 12th to 16th centuries.

When he was a young father, with four children ages 6, 3, 2, and 1, Ireland attorney Gearóid McGann somehow found time as a sole practitioner to be a fully engaged parent.

It was a conscious decision on his part, and belied a still widely held belief that starting a law practice is an all-consuming proposition.

“I was very busy, and yet they needed a lot of my attention,” said McGann, who over the past three decades has established himself as one of the leading solicitors in commercial and corporate law in the Irish city of Limerick. “I was very much a hands-on dad, and I was happy to be that.

“I took my weekends off and didn’t work terribly late into the night,” he noted. “I’ve always disciplined myself to be home by half-past 6 or 7 o’clock at the latest, and nowadays, even earlier.”

Striking the proper work-life balance, especially when it relates to parenting responsibilities, is paramount, said McGann, who earned his Bachelor of Civil Law and LLB in Employment Law from University College Cork.

“You work better when you’ve relaxed better,” McGann declared. “So, I’ve never been a person that worked 10 to 12 hours a day. I don’t believe in that because I think you burn yourself out and you don’t actually produce quality work.

“I like my time off,” he said unabashedly. “I do cycling. I play a bit of golf, although I’m not much good. I enjoy walking, I play piano. I do loads of things that I enjoy.”

McGann took up the piano six years ago, partly as a posthumous tribute to his mother.

“My mother was a concert pianist,” he noted. “When I got the piano, I told myself



Surrounded by his daughters, Gearóid McGann was in full Irish glory during a visit to Boston for St. Patrick's Day festivities. Pictured, l-r, are Sarah, Gearóid, Nessa, and Hilary, a Boston resident who hosted the get-together.

that it's not going to be an ornament. I would actually go and learn it."

And he did, to a point where it has become a "wonderful" and "enjoyable" leisure time pursuit, McGann said.

His late father harbored dreams of becoming a solicitor, a dream that would be realized by his son in 1985. By the time he was 25, McGann had opened his own law practice, leaving a plum job with a premier law firm much to the dismay of his father.

"I was probably bonkers, but I guess I just didn't have any fear," McGann said. "My father told me that I was mad to leave a very good firm, as I was on a very big salary at the time. I had been offered a partnership to stay at age 25, but I wanted out. I wanted to do my own thing. My father said I was totally irresponsible, especially since I just got married."

But despite his father's misgivings, McGann felt an urge to take a leap of faith even though he and his then-wife had just his father.

purchased their first house and were on the verge of raising a family.

"I wanted to be my own boss," McGann said in explaining his decision. "It was simple as that. I felt almost compelled to do it."

Success soon followed, as McGann quickly developed a solid client base through a mix of "very hard work," a "bit of luck," and the undeniable fact that "you have to be better" than the competition.

"You have to be very good at what you do, otherwise the word gets out very quickly that you're not," said McGann, who early in his career did a lot of criminal law work before turning his focus to business law.

"I did a lot of court presentations myself, and I loved it," McGann said. "I was good at it. I don't go to court anymore, which I miss because I do all commercial work now."

Now, as one of the named partners in Sweeney McGann Solicitors, McGann can reflect on some of the other pivotal moments in his legal career, such as in 1992 when the "work was pouring in" and he decided to hire three more solicitors.

"That transformed everything, and then in 1995, the firm where I trained broke up and two of those partners joined me," he recalled. "It offered me a huge expansion opportunity, which I grasped and we set up the current firm that I'm in now. I was managing partner of the firm from 1995 until about 18 months ago. I'm still here fully as an equity partner, but I handed over the baton as managing partner to one of my other partners."

Of course, not everything has been rosy during his time at the top of the firm, McGann acknowledged.

"We were never trained in law school on how to become an employer," McGann

said of the management responsibilities in heading a firm. "And when we had the financial crash (in 2008), there was no training in handling the challenges of that. Our banks collapsed. Businesses collapsed. . . I'd say that 85 percent of my work at the time was with clients who were now bust. It was an incredible time."

But the recession also offered McGann a chance to forge new pathways for many of his clients, restructuring debt obligations for some and handling buying opportunities for others at a fraction of the normal cost.

He did so without sacrificing time with his children, a joy that he recently shared over St. Patrick's Day weekend with three of the four on a visit to Boston, the historic U.S. East Coast city with a sizeable Irish population.

The visit was hosted by his eldest child, Hilary, a former producer for CNN International who now lives in Boston where she is an audience and engagement consultant for the Irish Examiner. She also operates the Instagram account, News By Hil, that has attracted some 34,000 followers, according to her proud dad.

Also on hand for the celebration were Nessa, a senior renewals manager at Salesforce in Dublin, and her sister Sarah, who recently completed her law school studies in London. Their brother, Michael, is an account executive with LinkedIn in Dublin.

As a father, McGann has done his best to impart the importance of striking the proper work-life balance to his children, wisdom that he also is willing to share with any young lawyer seeking his guidance.

"Working too many hours is the worst thing you'll ever do," McGann maintained. "You won't perform adequately. You will




During a holiday trip to Spain, Gearóid McGann and his son, Michael, posed for a photo op.

leave your children out and you will suffer long term.

"I know there are a lot of lawyers that work obscene hours," he said. "I actually object when law firms send me e-mails at 9, 10, 11, and 12 o'clock at nighttime. I go back to them and say if you keep this up, I'll stop doing business with you. Send me your e-mail at 8 o'clock in the morning up to 7 o'clock at night."

In fact, said McGann, working ungodly hours and firing off e-mails at all hours of the night can be a turnoff to clients.

"Some people think that impresses a client," McGann said of late-night correspondence. "Very few clients are impressed. They'll think that you're charging them a fortune and will wonder if you have any sort of life. A good lawyer is a happy lawyer, which means that you have to have time off, you have to have pastimes, you have to have family time. If you don't have those things, you won't function well, and it will show in your work." 

The skyline of Philadelphia is visible in the distance from nearby Haddonfield, NJ.

Parenting duties pose assorted challenges for pair of attorneys

By Tom Kirvan



Charles Montgomery
Associate
Earp Cohn P.C.

At the tender age of 3 or 4 years old, Charles Montgomery seemingly began charting his career path toward becoming an attorney.

“There’s a family anecdote my parents liked to tell that I was 3 or 4 when I fell asleep mid-sentence and woke up later and finished the sentence without missing a beat,” Montgomery related,

acknowledging the precocious nature of it all. “When my parents relayed the story to a doctor, he apparently was unfazed, remarking to them that ‘your son undoubtedly will be a lawyer someday.’”

A prophecy which indeed became true, as Montgomery would graduate with honors in 2010 from Emory University School of Law in Atlanta before joining the Cherry

Hill, N.J. law firm of Earp Cohn P.C. where he has a busy commercial and insurance litigation practice.

Now, as the father of two daughters, Cora (8) and Jolene (2), Montgomery is of the belief that the anecdotal story from his youth is not all that unusual. In fact, it might be more in the

realm of commonplace for parents of young children.

“Actually, as a parent now, that story isn’t that strange at all,” Montgomery said with a laugh. “Kids do the darndest things all the time and finishing a sentence after pausing for a nap probably happens with some sort of regularity.”

Montgomery, who earned his bachelor’s degree in history summa cum laude from Clemson University, grew up as an only child, which he described as a “different way of being that tends to be stereotypical and largely true.”

His parents, Linda and Chuck, met as students at Belhaven University, a liberal arts school in Jackson, Miss. that is affiliated with the Presbyterian church. His mother was a computer programmer at Clemson, while his late father was a registered nurse at a hospital in nearby Greenville, S.C.

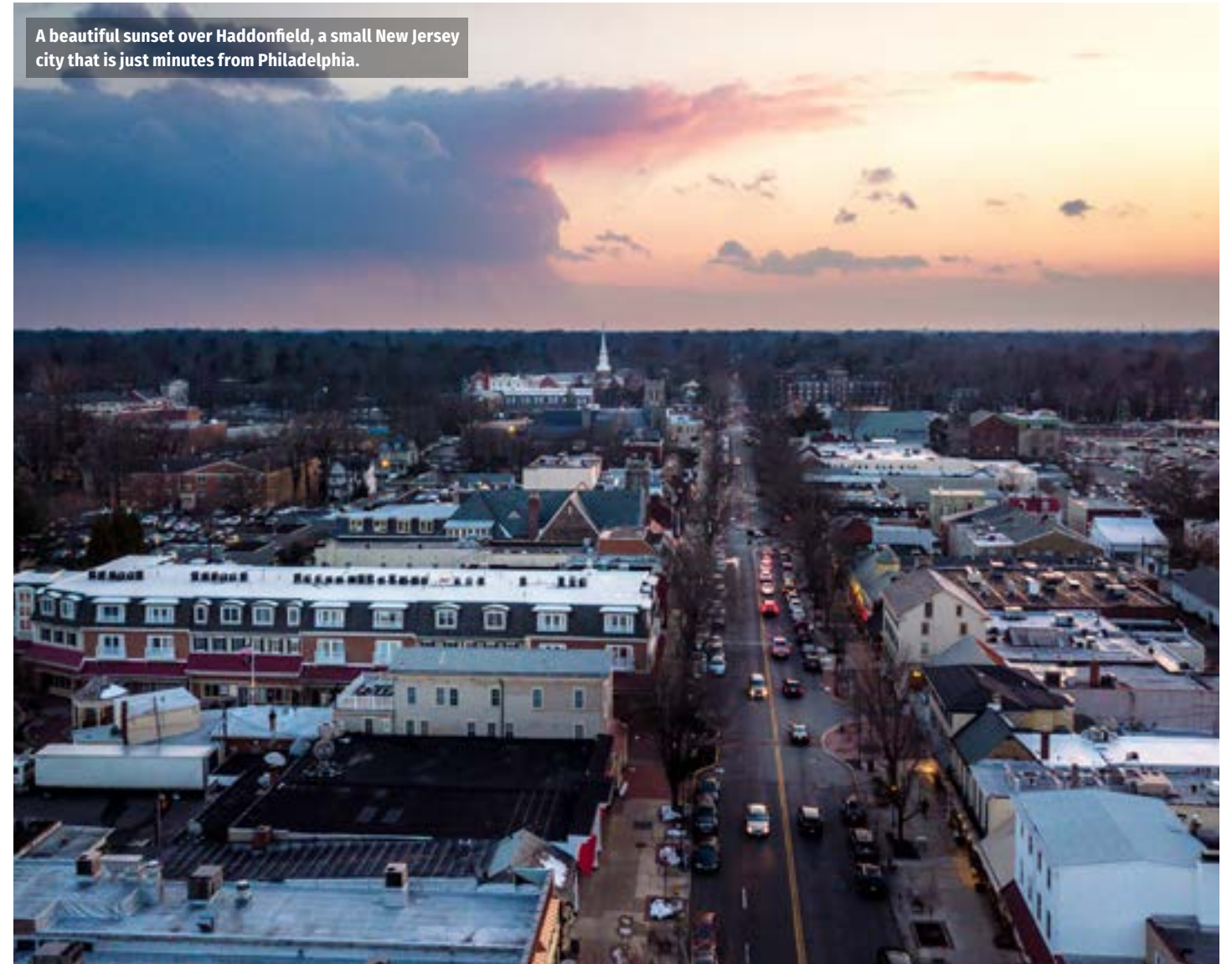
“It was just me and my parents in the household, which is different family dynamic,” said Montgomery, noting that he was accustomed to interacting with adults from an early age thereby accelerating his social and academic progress. “As parents of an only child, they always were available and had time for me, picking me

up from school every day and doing things with me throughout my childhood.

“In contrast, as a legal professional, time is at a premium and you don’t have as much time to devote to certain parenting responsibilities, which can make things particularly challenging when you have multiple children,” Montgomery added.

The challenge can be even greater when both parents are attorneys with demanding legal responsibilities, such as in the Montgomery household in the quaint Philadelphia suburb of Haddonfield, N.J., a place that is home to many of Philly’s sports stars, including Bryce Harper and Jalen Hurts.

Attorney Charles Montgomery with his two daughters, Cora and Jo. When the family took a trip to Disney World a year ago, Montgomery likened the vacation to somewhat of a “military operation” in terms of the planning and logistical challenges presented.



A beautiful sunset over Haddonfield, a small New Jersey city that is just minutes from Philadelphia.

Montgomery and his wife, Julie, met in law school at Emory and she now is a partner with the Haddonfield firm of Brown & Connery, specializing in bankruptcy law.

“My wife’s practice can be more unpredictable in terms of scheduling, as she regularly is dealing with stuff at all hours, whereas my practice is fairly regimented in regards to hearings and other court matters,” Montgomery indicated. “I also have the advantage of working remotely for the most part, while in my wife’s situation everyone is expected to work from the office.”

When their second daughter was born in 2021, a time when outbreaks of COVID were

still prevalent, the Montgomeries decided to hire a nanny to help with the 9-5 child-rearing duties during the work week.

“We bit the bullet then because we were concerned about putting our youngest into a day care setting and risking greater exposure to COVID,” Montgomery explained.

While the couple’s nanny has relieved much of the child care pressure from their daily schedules, Montgomery said that the early morning hours around their household remain as busy as ever.

“There is no shortage of things to do for our kids before we begin our working days,” Montgomery said, while noting that

their older daughter can now walk to the neighborhood school each morning with a friend.

Within a few years, their older daughter may be in line for some babysitting duties, watching over her younger sister while their parents enjoy a night out. Until then, the after-hours will gladly remain mom and dad’s responsibility, according to Montgomery.

“They are our greatest joy,” Montgomery proclaimed of his children. 📺

A student gap year that was ready-made for the silver screen

By Tom Kirvan

The ever-popular “gap year” is typically taken by students between high school graduation and college, offering an academic break that can be used to work, play, volunteer, or to bolster the bank account.

Charles Montgomery took his gap a year after beginning his studies at the College of Charleston and before transferring to Clemson University, spending the time in an unconventional way.

As a movie maker.

He was enticed by a friend to become involved in the film project, which revolved around a script patterned after the 1959 French coming-of-age drama “400 Blows” that centered on themes of disillusionment.

Montgomery admitted that his foray into movie making “sounds more glamorous than what it actually was,” but it did prove

to be an eye-opening experience into how best to fundraise, organize, and improvise.

And to produce a cinematic product.

“My friend was the writer/director, while I was involved in handling much of the production work,” said Montgomery of the movie that was filmed at various locations in and around Clemson, S.C., a college town of 17,000 that currently swells to nearly 40,000 when students are

on campus. “It was fun to do something different that was not just another job.”

Operating within the constraints of a tight budget, the two filmmakers kept bumping up against assorted financial and logistical challenges, obstacles they were able to overcome “through guile and cunning, papering over windows, and by calling in a few favors,” according to Montgomery.


On occasion, they also resorted to some rule-bending, filming some scenes in a

hospital and a major grocery store during the wee hours of the morning when no one in authority was looking.

While the movie “wasn’t as successful as we would have hoped,” it did qualify as the proverbial “learning experience,” according to Montgomery.

The lone mishap occurred during a house party scene when the script called for an actor to fall off a roof – into a supposedly soft-landing spot cushioned by several

mattresses. After the first two takes proved less than satisfactory, the actor reluctantly agreed to give it another go.

“Unfortunately, he broke his ankle on the final take, but we were able write him into a later scene with his broken ankle and cast,” Montgomery said with a smile. 

Time to make America beautiful again



America the beautiful. Those three words were written by poet Katharine Lee Bates in the summer of 1893 after she spent some 30 minutes atop Pikes Peak, marveling at the splendor of the 360-degree views from the summit of the 14,110-foot mountain just west of Colorado Springs.

The words would serve as the inspiration for the poem "America" written by Bates, a professor at Wellesley College who had traveled west to teach a summer course in Colorado Springs. Her poem, of course, evolved into one of the nation's most-loved patriotic songs with such timeless expressions as "O beautiful for spacious skies, for amber waves of grain, for

purple mountain majesties above the fruited plain!"

For many Americans, the song is the country's true national anthem, symbolizing the magnificence of a land from "sea to shining sea."

Framed by the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, America has long been a dreamland for travelers, millions of whom will spend the upcoming summer months visiting our 63 National Parks, ranging from the rugged shores of Acadia in Maine to the grandeur of Yosemite in California.

In between are such treasures as the Great Smoky Mountains straddling Tennessee and North Carolina, the Badlands of South Dakota, the Grand

Canyon of northern Arizona, and the incomparable visual riches of Yellowstone, the world's first national park that features "Old Faithful," the geyser named for its frequent and somewhat predictable eruptions that now number more than a million since observers began counting.

Utah is home to a quintet of national parks – Arches, Bryce Canyon, Canyonlands, Capitol Reef, and Zion – collectively known as the "Mighty Five." The state also is the site of Bears Ears National Monument, a spectacular landscape that one president preserved at the urging of Native Americans who hold the land sacred, while another president in recent years tried to open it up to drilling and mining interests.

In a sense, the ongoing debate over the future of Bears Ears may have been foretold by poet Bates, whose "America" masterpiece also was a classic tale about conflict, of how competing forces can divide a nation if left unchecked. Historians believe that Bates intended her poem as a hopeful prayer for a country that was still searching for its way in the aftermath of the Civil War and the Reconstruction era. The following stanza said as much:

**America! America!
God mend thine every flaw,
Confirm thy soul in self-control,
Thy liberty in law!**

Bates reportedly granted free permission to publish her poem in church hymnals and school songbooks, hoping that it would help unite a nation still deeply divided by the scourge of slavery. While biographers say that Bates was initially surprised by the poem's success, she later attributed its popularity "to the fact that Americans are at heart idealists, with a fundamental faith in human brotherhood."

As we approach the halfway point of 2024, we can only hope that her beliefs hold true, particularly in the run-up to a presidential election that figures to stir political passions like never before. By most accounts, we are a country that appears almost unavoidably divided by race, income, politics, and religion.

It, of course, has become popular – almost fashionable – to take potshots at our political plight, to wax poetic about what ails a country that will forever be known as the "land of opportunity," where many a business dream was spawned and where many a corresponding fortune was made.



In some form or another, the story has been told countless times, exploring the tragedies and the triumphs of a community, a city, and a country that collectively can still take pride in their own collection of jewels.

Our resiliency, for instance.

It ranks as one of our most enduring qualities, helping stitch a sense of unity in today's America. It is especially evident in times of crisis and inexplicable loss, when neighbor helps neighbor and stranger aids stranger in Good Samaritan acts of kindness that easily and willingly cut across political and cultural lines.

It has been an American gem since our founding nearly 247 years ago, surviving the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, a pair of World Wars, the Cold War, and the seemingly endless War on Terror.

But like any precious stone, it needs occasional polishing, a recurring task that requires manpower, money, and moxie.

We have the means to produce all three, of course. The only question we face is whether we have the motivation to preserve our standing as the beacon

of freedom and liberty in a world grappling with nuclear threats, political extremism, climate catastrophes, unending hunger, and a growing immigration crisis.

To some political observers, liberals are trapped in their own ideological bubble, unable to address the everyday concerns of the general public. On the flip side are conservatives, who critics contend are stuck in a media echo chamber where facts are in short supply.

To find some common ground, we need to be reminded of the message penned by a long-ago poet, a true American patriot who saw a country's inherent beauty from its outer natural regions to its innermost human core. **P**

Best regards,

Jack Buchanan, President

Untapped

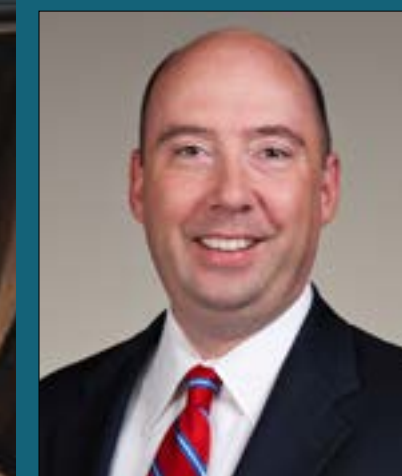
Primerus insurance defense firms eye the London market

By Tom Kirvan

An eye-catching feature of the London skyline, the Lloyd's Building serves as the home of insurance institution Lloyd's of London.



Kelsey Brudvig
Senior Shareholder
Collins & Lacy, P.C.



Christian Stegmaier
President & Senior Shareholder
Collins & Lacy, P.C.

Christian Stegmaier and Kelsey Brudvig, attorneys with Collins & Lacy, are spearheading efforts to make greater inroads into the London insurance market on behalf of Primerus law firms.

Long recognized as the global hub for commercial and specialty insurance, London gave rise to Lloyd's of London more than three centuries ago, launching the capital city of the United Kingdom into its reign as the leading market for insurers that provide coverage for large, complex, and high-profile risks.

In recent months, a group of Primerus law firms has been meeting periodically to discuss ways to tap into the London

market, hoping to attract insurance defense business through a "one stop shopping" approach.

The collaborative effort was the product of a brainstorming session between a pair of attorneys from Collins & Lacy, P.C., a Columbia, S.C. law firm that provides defense work for insurance companies, businesses in the retail and hospitality industries, and clients dealing with professional liability matters.

Christian Stegmaier, managing partner of Collins & Lacy, P.C., and Senior Shareholder Kelsey Brudvig have spearheaded the effort to land more London insurance clients, utilizing the Primerus international brand as a major selling tool for member firms in the global alliance.

"This arose out of a brainstorming session that Christian and I had earlier this year on ways we can get deeper into the London market," said Brudvig, who practices primarily in the areas of retail



Generally known as the world's most famous clock, Big Ben is located at the north end of the Palace of Westminster in London.

and hospitality law and the professional liability sector. "We realized, at least as far as our firm is concerned, we had only tapped a fraction of a fraction of the London market that exists.

"So, Christian came up with the idea of involving other Primerus attorneys and law firms in our effort, to gauge their interest in being part of a group approach," Brudvig said. "He tossed out some names and soon after we got an email chain going to see who would be interested in exploring the possibilities."

Soon after, a number of Primerus firms responded with interest, according to Brudvig, setting in motion monthly conference calls to develop a strategy for capitalizing on the London insurance market.

Among the Primerus firms involved to date: Roberts Perryman P.C. of St. Louis, MO; Thomas Paschos & Associates, P.C. of Haddonfield, NJ; Degan, Blanchard & Nash,

PLC of New Orleans, LA; Lipe Lyons Murphy Nahrstadt & Pontikis Ltd. of Chicago, IL; Szilagyi & Daly of Hartford, CT; Ogden Sullivan Stover & Saar, P.A. of Tampa, FL; Donato, Brown, Pool & Moehlmann PLLC of Houston, TX; and, of course, Collins & Lacy, P.C.

"Working together under the Primerus umbrella, we can act as one very large law firm that allows insurance carriers to one-stop shop for their legal services," Brudvig indicated. "We believe that marketing ourselves that way will be appealing to insurance clients since they can have one main contact across a number of states and jurisdictions, eliminating the need to deal with multiple lawyers and law firms."

Brudvig, a University of Kentucky alumna who earned her juris doctor, magna cum laude, from Charleston School of Law, believes that the team approach could produce cost savings as well for potential clients who are accustomed to paying high

hourly rates from some of the nation's largest law firms.

"As a network of high-quality boutique firms, we can offer more affordable rates since we don't have the staffing and overhead costs of big law firms," Brudvig said, hoping that the lower cost factor should appeal to companies that operate within a heavily regulated industry like insurance.

New Jersey attorney Tom Paschos echoed the sentiments while also praising Brudvig for helping coordinate the Primerus effort.

"That's what makes Primerus so special – collaborating to get things done for everyone's benefit," said Paschos, the founder of a civil defense firm that bears his name. "I am looking forward to going to Lloyd's, hopefully in September, to further cement our relationships. We currently work with some of the underwriters of Lloyd's, but there is so much work that is

generated from Lloyd's that it is difficult to keep track of everything.

"CFC Underwriters is a key client for our firm, and they are writing more and more business in the U.S.," said Paschos, who earned a Master of Laws in Trial Advocacy from Temple University School of Law. "I know Kelsey will do a great job coordinating this very important opportunity for Primerus."


Lloyd's of London, founded in 1688, holds a venerable place in the annals of insurance history. Its inception traces back to a coffeehouse owned by Edward Lloyd, where merchants, shipowners, and underwriters congregated to discuss maritime ventures. These gatherings laid the foundation for what would become Lloyd's, initially serving as a platform for marine insurance. Over the centuries, Lloyd's evolved into a global powerhouse

of insurance and reinsurance, diversifying its offerings to cover a wide array of risks, including property, casualty, and specialty lines.

Its iconic underwriting room, known as the "Room," remains a symbol of the market's tradition of face-to-face negotiation and risk assessment, according to longtime observers of the insurance industry. Visitors can tour the iconic Lloyd's building in the City of London, marveling at its futuristic design and learning about the history and workings of the insurance market. The headquarters, located in London's main financial district, also is known as the "Inside-Out Building," based on its design of having the service pipes, ducts, and stairwells outside the main walls.

Not surprisingly, London's status as a global hub of the insurance market is

deeply intertwined with Lloyd's growth and development. The city's strategic location, historical maritime stature, and renowned legal system contributed to its emergence as an insurance center. Which is why Brudvig and Stegmaier of Collins & Lacy believe strongly in the potential benefits that can be gained by teaming with other Primerus firms in a collective attempt to lure more business from overseas.

"The best type of networking we have is networking with each other, presenting all of the (insurance defense) firms in Primerus as one major law firm," Brudvig said. "By marketing ourselves that way, it will give the decision-makers in London the information they need when they are looking for a law firm in New Orleans or New Jersey or wherever, and the type of high-quality legal representation they will get." 



The Tower Bridge crosses the River Thames near the Tower of London.



Thomas Paschos
Managing Partner
Thomas Paschos & Associates, P.C.

Higher purpose

'Popcorn with Personality'TM drives mission of nonprofit

By Tom Kirvan



Shamus O'Meara
Shareholder
O'Meara Wagner P.A.

A planned “soft retail opening” to ensure a smooth start turned into something entirely different when Highland Popcorn began operations on Super Bowl Sunday, Feb. 11 in the Minnesota capital of St. Paul.

Much to the surprise and delight of those behind the nonprofit enterprise, Highland Popcorn opened its doors to a flood of customers, all eager to sample the gourmet popcorn products that became the talk of the town in the days leading up to the grand opening.

“We had hundreds of customers lined up and down the block and we sold out in 45 minutes,” said Highland Popcorn founder Shamus O'Meara, a shareholder with O'Meara Wagner P.A. in Minneapolis. “We were overwhelmed by the community's response. It was beyond anything we could have imagined.”

Aside from the appeal of Highland's tasty array of products, customers were drawn to the store by a far greater reason – to display support for a business offering job opportunities for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

That, in a nutshell, underscores the importance of the nonprofit venture that has been five years in the making, according to O'Meara, a lifelong Minnesotan who has an adult son on the high verbal end of the autism spectrum.

“This effort, this business, has become something very personal to me,” O'Meara said with his 26-year-old son Conor in mind. “It's difficult to express how challenging it can be for people with developmental disabilities to find meaningful jobs and sustainable work. We're trying to break down some of those barriers and to demonstrate how productive they can become as employees if given the chance.”



An enthusiastic and dedicated workforce is at the heart of the Highland Popcorn operation, which founder Shamus O'Meara hopes someday to expand if demand dictates. In the meantime, those who wish to support the nonprofit enterprise can make a tax-deductible donation via a link at Highlandpopcorn.com.

Success, however, can be a decidedly chancy proposition for any new business operation, particularly when its scheduled start is delayed, O'Meara noted.

"We had some fits and starts getting this launched," O'Meara indicated. "We initially received a commitment in 2019 from a local college to operate out of rent-free space, but when that offer was later withdrawn, we were faced with the challenge of finding a suitable and affordable place in a high-traffic area. And then, of course, we had COVID mixed in for good measure."

Fortunately, Highland, through it all, was able to count on the support of Lunds & Byerlys, a family-owned food store operation with more than 25 outlets in the Twin Cities area, which agreed to sublease

"affordable space to us in a desirable location," according to O'Meara.

The popular grocer also has gone a step further, agreeing to sell Highland Popcorn products in all of its stores, starting with those nearby, thereby giving the brand greater exposure and a significant marketing boost.

"We are very grateful to all of our supporters for the help they have provided us during this whole process," said O'Meara, a University of Minnesota alum who earned his law degree from William Mitchell College of Law in St. Paul. "Their support is helping us fulfill our mission of promoting greater employment opportunities for people with developmental disabilities in the community."

Highland's business concept has benefitted from a creative marketing campaign that has helped spread the good word about the gourmet popcorn. Catchy phrases such as "Small-batch Perfection from a Big-hearted Crew" and "Popcorn with Personality" are shaping the narrative about "a place where new skills are mastered. Confidence is built. And social circles just keep getting bigger. And more social."

In short, "It's popcorn with heart. Popcorn with purpose."

As one of seven children, O'Meara grew up in a rural family of modest means in which popcorn was a food staple.

"My dad loved it, and my grandmother took joy in popping it for the entire family," said O'Meara of the snack food that

rocketed in popularity during the Great Depression. "It was a big part of my life growing up."

It now has taken on a new dimension as he attempts to build a retail business that can "connect a uniquely qualified workforce with the community in a way that brings meaning and joy to all," according to O'Meara.

"Even though we are structured as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, we need to make money to sustain our operation and to provide continued job opportunities for our employees," said O'Meara. "And to be successful at that, we need to offer our customers something distinctive while providing exceptional value and service each time they come into our store."

Open six days a week, the Highland Popcorn store on Ford Parkway in St. Paul is staffed by a dozen employees, some of whom deal with a developmental disability, O'Meara indicated. The "linear process" of popping corn, sorting items,

stuffing bags, lining shelves, and then handling customer purchases is "just the kind of repetitive work that plays to the strengths of those with developmental disabilities," he said.

On the flip side of the staffing equation is an issue that O'Meara didn't anticipate to its fullest extent.

"I've probably received more than 500 emails from parents requesting jobs for their kids, hoping that we can help them find work that fits their skill set," said O'Meara. "That has been the hard part, having to constantly tell them, 'No.' It's been heart-breaking at times."


Perhaps never more so than when a mother and son stopped by the Highland store before it opened, hoping that there would be a spot on the payroll for the 23-year-old developmentally disabled job applicant.

"I had to say 'no,' but their situation just kept nagging at me," said O'Meara of his sudden dilemma.

On the eve of the store opening in February, O'Meara called the young man's parents and offered a glimmer of hope.

"I said he could come in and volunteer, inviting him to help out as best he could," O'Meara related. "He came in and did, working five straight hours without a break. He did a great job."

His performance was so impressive that O'Meara decided to offer the young man a job – of the paying variety.

"When I told his father, he started crying," said O'Meara of the tears of joy. "Then I started crying. It was a very emotional experience to see what a difference this business can make." 



Father-and-son business partners, Shamus and Conor O'Meara are hoping to take Highland Popcorn to great heights, promoting "broader community involvement and support for our workforce" of developmentally disabled individuals. "We believe that Highland Popcorn can become the catalyst for dynamic integrated community businesses with similar visions," said O'Meara.

Conor's Corner

Talk show co-host gives a voice and a face to autism spectrum

By Tom Kirvan

Among the employees at Highland Popcorn is 26-year-old Conor O'Meara, who aside from earning his rightful place on staff as a dedicated worker also served as the inspiration for the new business.

Conor, the oldest son of Highland Popcorn's president Shamus O'Meara and his wife, Erin Delaney, is a person with autism, a neurological and developmental disorder that can cause significant social, communication, and behavioral issues for those affected by it. The condition, which impacts nearly 5.5 million adults in the U.S., is known as a "spectrum" disorder because there is a wide variation in the type and severity of the symptoms

that people experience, according to medical experts.

Diagnosed with autism at an early age, Conor is on the higher-functioning end of the spectrum with strong verbal skills, according to his father.

So much so that Conor is a state champion in adaptive bowling, while also serving as the co-host of a weekly radio program aptly titled, "Conor's Corner."

In promoting the radio show via his website, Conor is up front about his condition and the scope of the weekly format.

"I'm Conor, a person with autism, and I live in St. Paul, Minnesota," he declared on the show's website. "My co-host is Scott. Every Friday at 10:30 a.m., on WFNU 94.1 FM Frogtown Community Radio, we talk about sports, music, life, and whatever is on our minds."

And as a talk show host, Conor has attracted an impressive collection of guests to his program, including the likes of former Minnesota Twins star Joe Mauer, recently elected to the Major League Baseball Hall of Fame on the first ballot; former Minnesota Vikings quarterback Kirk Cousins, who recently signed with the Atlanta Falcons; and Vikings wide receiver Justin Jefferson, a three-time All-Pro.

"The radio show has been a great outlet for Conor," said his father, Shamus. "He loves to talk, whether it's to someone on his show or with someone he meets on the street. It's part of his comfort zone."

It appears that Conor also is at ease in his role as an employee of Highland Popcorn, the business his father launched largely to provide a work outlet for those with developmental disabilities. He is one of a dozen employees at the store, pulling his weight by doing whatever task is needed to keep popcorn sales popping.

"He is part of the team and does what needs to be done," said his father, who, as a renowned Minnesota attorney, has a history of advocating for the

rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

O'Meara has a busy law practice, representing school districts, businesses, and local governments in complex liability, construction, and transactional matters. He also serves as a mediator and arbitrator for construction and commercial disputes and has gained a national reputation for his expertise on school safety measures and emergency management matters.

But foremost, he is a family man. He and his wife, Erin, met during their third year of law school and will celebrate their 30th wedding anniversary this spring. Erin, a graduate of Hamline Law School,

Comfortable behind the mic, Conor O'Meara pulls double duty as a talk show co-host and as a Highland Popcorn employee/booster.



is director of the Municipal Building Commission, which serves as the steward of the Minneapolis City Hall and historic Hennepin County Courthouse.

In addition to Conor, the couple has two other sons, Patrick, 23, and Rory, 21. A graduate of Xavier University, Patrick is head of fan services and security for FC Cincinnati, the professional soccer club based in Cincy. His younger brother is a junior at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio.

Keeping up with the couple's three sons "is a job in itself," O'Meara said with a chuckle.

"But it's one we thoroughly enjoy," he confirmed. 

Limassol, Cyprus

Historic city becomes hub for technology companies

By Brian Cox

The beaches are beautiful in Limassol, Cyprus, and business is booming.

The Mediterranean city is a hub of international business and innovation, according to Andreas Mylonas, the founder and managing partner of AMG Mylonas & Associates, LLC. The law firm's office is nestled in the prestigious Old Port and Limassol Marina area near the city's Old Town section, which features winding, narrow streets radiating out from the old fishing harbor.

Born and raised in Limassol, Mylonas has witnessed the transformation of his hometown into a bustling metropolis that seamlessly blends its rich, historical tapestry with the dynamism of modern business and technology. The city of his youth has changed more in the past decade than at any time in its long history, he says.

Mylonas holds an LL.M. in Digitalization & Tax Law from the Vienna University of Economics and Business, an MBA from the Cyprus International Institute of Management, and an LL.B. from the Democritus University of Thrace. He has also earned a postgraduate diploma in negotiations from Athens University of Economics and Business and completed a program on negotiation from Harvard Law School.

He has positioned his firm to align with Limassol's future. The firm specializes in commercial, corporate, company, and tax law, providing legal consultancy and litigation services. His role as a strategic advisor and counselor covers a broad spectrum, assisting private equity funds, emerging and established businesses, and individual clients with corporate matters, disputes, risk management, and transactions. Mylonas' entrepreneurial spirit has fostered a dynamic, award-winning law firm that not only advises on



Andreas Mylonas
Advocate, Founder, & Managing Partner
AMG Mylonas & Associates, LLC



A seaside destination, the Limassol Marina is home to some of the most eye-catching yachts on the Mediterranean.

national and cross-border corporate tax matters, but also engages significantly in international tax planning, renewable energy, and maritime law among others.

“It’s an exciting time in Limassol,” says Mylonas. “It is the tech center of the Mediterranean and the Middle East.”

Limassol, the second largest urban area on Cyprus next to the capital of Nicosia, is on the southern coast of the island. The city has been at the forefront of Cyprus’s emergence as a business and global technology epicenter, which began in earnest some 10 years after Cyprus joined the European Union in 2004.

A construction boom fueled by major foreign investment has produced towering skyscrapers and a luxury marina that have transformed the landscape of Limassol

and contributed to its metamorphosis into a city with a cosmopolitan flair.

TripAdvisor ranked the city as the third up-and-coming destination in the world and Lonely Planet included it on its “Top 10 Places” list.

Limassol also has a reputation for its wines. The city spreads out from the foothills of the Troodos Mountains, the slopes of which are verdant wine-growing regions. Limassol is the homebase for many of Cyprus’s wine companies. Cyprus’s wine-making tradition goes back thousands of years. Some Cypriot wineries boast the highest vineyards in Europe, and a sweet dessert wine called Commanderia is produced in the foothills and is said to be the world’s oldest named wine still in production.

Along with concentrations in renewable energy, financial services, and international commercial and corporate law, Mylonas’ practice includes shipping law, which is appropriate, considering Limassol’s role as the major seaport of the Republic of Cyprus. The port is one of the busiest in the Mediterranean transit trade.

As part of Limassol’s transformation into a modern metropolis, the Limassol Marina opened in 2014 to accommodate super yachts. The marina features high-end shops, restaurants, bars, and luxury villas. The Molos Promenade, which is lined with palm trees and bordered by busy cafes, leads strollers from the Old Port to the new marina.

In contrast to the modernity of the Limassol Marina, there is Limassol Castle, one of the 10 castles in Cyprus that reflects

the antiquity of the island. The original castle was built around 1000 AD and Richard the Lionheart purportedly married his fiancée, Princess Berengaria of Navarre, in the castle’s chapel in 1191 on his way to the Third Crusade. The castle houses the Cyprus Medieval Museum as well, which exhibits medieval pottery, tombstone, weapons, crosses, and coins.


The beaches that stretch along the length of Limassol also afford an opportunity to step away from the hum of city life, from

the quieter Armonia Beach to the livelier Columbia Beach.

Limassol is also famous for its festivals, particularly Carnival, which is held 12 days before the start of Lent, and the Wine Festival, which takes place over two weeks in September and allows visitors to sample some of the best Cyprus wines for free.

Mylonas says he believes he embodies the spirit of Limassol – innovative, resilient,

and forward-thinking. He embraces his love for the sea, good friends, and wine. His commitment to his profession and his city makes him a prominent figure in the legal landscape and among Cyprus’s wider social circles.

“This is the place to be,” says Mylonas. “If you come to Limassol, you will find it is a safe and great place to work, to live, and to play together.” 



The medieval Limassol Castle is located near the old harbour in the heart of the city.

Bilingual

Language skills help Florida attorney set himself apart

By Tom Kirvan

Images of San Juan, the capital and most populous city in the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, conjure fond memories for Florida attorney Eric Cruz, whose upbringing in the American territory has had a lasting and impactful influence over the course of his 14-year legal career.

A University of Florida alum, Cruz is a graduate of the law school there as well, earning his juris doctor with honors in 2010 before joining Bivins & Hemenway, P.A. in Valrico, some 15 miles east of Tampa.

His ties to the Sunshine State began as a sophomore in high school when his parents moved from Puerto Rico to Spring Hill, a growing community situated 45 minutes north of Tampa. It was a defining moment in his life, uprooted as he was from the familiarity and comforts of his native land to an English-speaking community that seemed a world away from where he was raised.

“Initially, it was a tough adjustment, leaving friends and family behind to build a new life in what amounted to a foreign land for us,” Cruz said of the transition to living in the United States.

The appeal of life in the U.S., where educational and professional opportunities abound, was too much to resist, affording Cruz, his two sisters, and their parents the chance to experience all facets of the American dream.

“Fortunately, we all spoke English well, which made our transition much easier than for those without those language skills,” Cruz indicated.

His fluency in Spanish and English has paid even greater dividends as his legal career has evolved, enabling Cruz to build a steady – and growing – book of business



Eric Cruz
Partner
Bivins & Hemenway, P.A.



Florida attorney Eric Cruz can trace his legal bloodlines to his grandfather, Israel Crespo, who spent the bulk of his career as a prosecutor with the state attorney's office in Puerto Rico, and later in his private practice, just across the street from Cruz's elementary school. At right in the photo, which was snapped at Cruz's law school graduation ceremony, is his grandmother, Fiby Crespo.

from members of the Hispanic community in the Tampa Bay region.

"The growth has been very organic," Cruz said of his work with Hispanic clients. "After I joined the firm in 2010, we just put it out there on our website that I spoke Spanish and was bilingual. It didn't take long for the calls to start coming from people who were looking for someone who could speak their language on legal matters."

Relatedly, Cruz's practice was given another boost by his uncle, a gastroenterologist in the Tampa area.

"He's got a big network of friends, members of his church, and his medical practice – almost exclusively Hispanic – that he started referring me to for business," Cruz said.

Additionally, and somewhat surprisingly, geography has played a part in helping Cruz extend his reach in the Hispanic community.

"In downtown Tampa, there are quite a few bilingual attorneys," Cruz explained. "But east of Tampa, where our office is situated, there really aren't any Spanish-speaking, bilingual attorneys especially in business and real estate. In fact, I might be the only one. So, because of that, my practice really grew organically as my name got around. People would share it at their churches, at their barbers, at their hair salons, and among their friends."

An added benefit of developing his Hispanic clientele, said Cruz, is that "they have developed a comfort level with me" and could become potential "clients for life."

Cruz said he is now at a point in his practice – which focuses on business law, real estate transactions, and estate planning – that it may make sense to add another bilingual attorney to the firm's staff.

"The volume is there," he said of the legal work coming out of the Hispanic community.

Cruz, who resides in North Tampa with his wife, Julia, and their three children, Antonio, Andrew, and Katie, landed a clerkship with Bivins & Hemenway, P.A. between his second and third year of law school. Later that year, he was invited to the firm's holiday party, where he received a full-time job offer upon graduation.

It was a happy moment for Cruz and his then fiancée Julia, who were planning to be married the next spring. The couple met as undergraduates at the University of

Florida where Cruz was pursuing a degree in business management while Julia was completing a degree in education. Their college years in Gainesville were made even more special by the success of the school's football and basketball teams.

"Those were the (Tim) Tebow years, 2007 and 2009, in football, when we won two NCAA championships," said Cruz with a healthy dose of Gator pride. "We also won back-to-back titles in basketball, in 2006 and 2007. It was a great time to be a Florida fan."

When Cruz graduated from law school, it proved to be a decidedly big weekend for his family.

"We literally took up an entire section of the basketball arena for my graduation ceremony," he said with a sense of joy.

The following day, coincidentally, Cruz and his family had a wedding to attend – his own.

"When Julia and I set our wedding date, the date for the law school graduation ceremony had not been scheduled," Cruz noted. "When they announced the graduation date, we thought it might be a problem, but instead it worked out beautifully for everyone's schedules."


His wife is a Florida native and grew up in Tampa. She now teaches language arts at a private middle school after spending much of her career teaching at the elementary school level.

Cruz's mother, Aixa, also is a schoolteacher, while his father, Eric, is a food inspection supervisor for the U.S. Department of Agriculture. His parents along with his sister, Yarixa, currently live north of Atlanta, while his younger sister, Daniely, and her family are in the process of moving to Nashville, Tenn. from Washington state.



A longtime youth basketball coach for the YMCA, Eric Cruz was a forward on his high school basketball team.

A self-professed sports junkie, Cruz played basketball in high school and has passed along his love of the sport to his two sons, both of whom can call their dad by yet another name – coach.

"I've coached their teams for a number of years," Cruz said with a special sense of pride. "It's one of my hobbies and I absolutely love it. I wouldn't have it any other way. It's a real joy to be involved in our kids' activities." 



Eric Cruz and his wife, Julia, with their three children, Antonio, Katie, and Andrew.

Attorney helped keep 'Connection' humming

By Tom Kirvan

As an organization, Tampa Connection is focused on leadership development, relationship building, and community service in the Gulf Coast region.

Fittingly, the three elements align neatly with what Puerto Rico native Eric Cruz is all about, which became particularly evident when he served as chair of Tampa Connection's board of directors during the turbulent COVID years of 2020-21.

Committed to building "Tampa Bay's leaders of tomorrow," the nonprofit stresses leadership development, networking skills, and professionalism in all aspects of life, hoping to inspire its members to "directly impact their local community in a positive way."

The 38-year-old Cruz did just that in 2021 when he helped Tampa Connection remain as a relevant force after the pandemic put the brakes on many of the organization's programs and in-person activities during the lockdown year of 2020.

"It was a tough time with a lot of uncertainty about how we would function as an organization," said Cruz of the challenges involved while operating during the pandemic. "We were forced to get creative and to come up with ways to maintain our presence in the community and to keep our programs on schedule."

In a sense, Tampa Connection operates as a leadership academy, grooming area professionals to become change agents for the good of the community, motivating members to tap into the power of all and to enlist the collective genius needed to succeed as a society. Its goal, quite simply, is to annually prepare some 65 class members "to become active volunteers and leaders in the Tampa Bay community" by providing a three-fold "experience sought after by employers, employees,

and nonprofit agencies," according to its mission and vision statements.

As chairman, Cruz was determined to keep the leadership pipeline flowing in the wake of the pandemic.

"I was chair in 2020 when COVID hit," Cruz said. "As a result, we didn't have a program that year because it was rather frowned upon to gather in large groups once a month. So, the following year, it became my initiative to see how we could successfully plan a class while emerging from the COVID pandemic. We did agree to have a class starting in August of 2021, which at that point was right after the Delta variant while the Omicron variant happened later during our program year. Our goal was to have 55 go through the program, 10 less than usual, and we hit that number and were able to do the program entirely intact with some social distancing measures in place.

"We had our challenges, but by force, that really became my initiative that year – to get us back up and running and to become relevant again in the community," Cruz noted. "We were facing two challenges – how do we stay relevant when we don't have a class and how do we bring it back safely. Initially, we did some virtual programming and had a kayak social to keep our name out there so that people didn't forget about us. That became my calling that year. It was a good challenge and I'm proud of what we accomplished."


Now, Cruz indicated, the Tampa Connection is "fully back" to its pre-pandemic level and is even building a waiting list of future participants.

Cruz was encouraged to become involved in Tampa Connection by his law partner Bob Bivins, one of the co-founders of the Bivins & Hemenway, P.A. firm in the Tampa suburb of Valrico. Bivins is a past chair of the organization and has a history of

leadership involvement with the Brandon Regional Hospital Board of Trustees, Brandon Chamber of Commerce, the Tampa Metropolitan Area YMCA, and the Optimist Club of Tampa.

"In the grand scheme of things, we're one big community," Bivins said in a June 2022 profile appearing in the Primerus Weekly publication. "You can ignore problems and ignore people, but problems and people are still there in your community. If you want to make things better, you've got to get involved."

Those are words that Cruz has taken to heart as he prepares to join the board of the local YMCA this fall.

"I've been a volunteer basketball coach at the YMCA for nearly nine years, so I want to continue to give back by being involved at the board level, merging my interest in sports with my desire to be involved in community service work. It is one of my passions." 



Eric Cruz made a point to keep Tampa Connection in the forefront during his time as chair of the community nonprofit.

Say 'Cheese'

Specialty store helps lawyer stay true to her native state

By Brian Cox



Taylor Ambrosius
Attorney
Rosen Hagood

Law may be South Carolina attorney Taylor Ambrosius' bread and butter, but it's meat and cheese that represent her Wisconsin roots.

And a new business venture – aptly named Wisconsin Meat & Cheese – lets her bring a little taste of home to charming Charleston, where she is an associate at Rosen Hagood, a renowned law firm that marked its 75th anniversary in 2022.

On most Saturday mornings, you'll find her working at the specialty retail shop that she started with her partner, Casey Diederich, selling more than 150 varieties of cheese and upward of 50 kinds of meats to James Island residents and visitors on their way to the beach.

"It's nice to feel I have a little bit of home here," says Ambrosius, who grew up around dairy farms in a small rural town not far outside Green Bay. "I had a lot of cheese growing up."

Ambrosius' father actually had the original inspiration for the business. He had knocked the idea around for nearly a decade about selling Wisconsin meat and cheeses down in Florida where he lived part of the year, but the construction business he'd founded and built into an operation that spanned the Midwest and employed more than 200 people kept him busy.

"I would say my dad is definitely an entrepreneur," says Ambrosius. "He always has his brain turning with ideas."

When Ambrosius graduated from Charleston School of Law in 2022, her family came down to celebrate and her father brought the idea up again with her boyfriend, who decided to run with it.

"The summer I was studying for the bar, Casey was studying how to run a food retail business," says Ambrosius. "There's a

lot that goes into it. We were both on grind mode for three or four months.”

It soon became evident to the both of them that the grind was only just beginning.

Ambrosius and Diederich met at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh where she was studying political science with the thought of becoming a political analyst and policy advisor.

She found an internship with the Green Bay mayor’s chief of staff interesting and engaging, but she eventually concluded she would prefer to work in the private sector. As she considered other options, she realized law would offer a way to merge her personal interests in music and the arts with a career, possibly as an entertainment lawyer.

She and Diederich had been dating for about two years and had talked about moving somewhere warmer for a change, which is why law school in Charleston looked attractive.

“I thought, if I’m going to be in law school, which is going to be a stressful time in my life, I need it to be an enjoyable atmosphere,” recalls Ambrosius. “Going to the beach and being able to enjoy Charleston definitely helped me get through law school.”

It also helped that the school’s faculty and staff proved incredibly supportive.

The beginnings of her legal career are linked in time to Wisconsin Meat & Cheese. When she left to take the bar, Diederich was reviewing the store’s first lease. The

store was just opening when she was notified that she’d passed the bar.

“It was pretty crazy and exciting all at the same time,” she says with a laugh.

The store celebrated its first anniversary in November, before Thanksgiving. The holidays brought record sales of charcuterie boards, cheese and sausage party platters, and a mouthwatering array of brats.

“James Island and the surrounding communities have been very supportive,” says Ambrosius. “We’ve learned there are a lot of people from Wisconsin and other Midwestern states that live here. It’s been nice to meet people from there.”

In addition to a retail storefront, the business caters events and last summer



Rosen Hagood attorney Taylor Ambrosius and her boyfriend, Casey Diederich, launched Wisconsin Meat & Cheese in 2022. The shop offers more than 200 different cheeses, over 50 kinds of meats, and an assortment of charcuterie board necessities, including jams, crackers, mustards, pickles, olives, spreads, and sweets.

opened a kitchen that serves sandwiches and charcuterie boards, as well as beer and wine. Future plans include expanding into shipping.

Diederich manages the business while Ambrosius oversees the company’s social media presence and marketing.

If Ambrosius thought she knew a lot about cheese being from Wisconsin, she knows a lot more now. Last February, she took a 12-hour cheese course from Cheese State University and received a diploma that is on display in the store.

The store also affords Ambrosius a unique networking opportunity.

“A lot of lawyers come into the cheese store,” she says. “I’ve been able to

facilitate a lot of relationships with lawyers and paralegals. It’s a really good way for me to connect with people.”

Ambrosius clerked with Rosen Hagood during law school and discovered she enjoyed the challenge of litigation. Her practice primarily involves business and commercial litigation, probate litigation, personal injury, and construction law – which she finds a bit ironic.

“I always felt growing up that I had different career aspirations unrelated to my dad’s company,” she says. “Now here I am involved in construction law.”

At Rosen Hagood, Ambrosius says she feels she has found a second family.

“They treat their employees very well,” she says. “They do a good job of making people feel valued. It’s also nice to have the resources of other attorneys in our firm who have extensive experience in certain areas.”

As she works to navigate her burgeoning practice and balance helping Diederich grow Wisconsin Meat & Cheese, Ambrosius recognizes the importance of being personable, approachable, and engaging.

“I like to get to know and connect with people,” she says. “We have a lot of return customers who know us on a personal level. I think a good quality to have is being personable with people whether it’s with a client who is going through a hard time in their life or someone who is coming to shop for cheese.”



Attorney Taylor Ambrosius graduated from Charleston School of Law in 2022 and her family came down from Wisconsin to celebrate, including: stepsister Hayley Youngs, stepmom Roxann Ambrosius, father Steve Ambrosius, sister Ashley Ambrosius, boyfriend Casey Diederich, sister Nikki Ambrosius, mother Carol Ambrosius, and stepdad Guy Mommaerts.

Grand occasion

Awards ceremony proved to be a special cause for celebration

By Tom Kirvan



Juan Pablo Montiel
Partner
Magliona Abogados

It was a red-carpet moment for the team of attorneys at Magliona Abogados in Santiago, Chile last fall as the law firm stood squarely in the spotlight as a finalist in an awards ceremony to honor Latin America's leading law firm in TMT – Telecom, Media, and Technology – as chosen by Legal 500.

The 23-attorney law firm figured to be a long shot to capture top honors at the

annual awards event that celebrates “legal excellence” in Chile.

After all, the Santiago-based firm was competing against a list of legal heavyweights in the country, law firms with upward of 400 attorneys on staff, according to Juan Pablo Montiel, a partner with Magliona Abogados who admitted that “we were greatly honored to be just among the finalists.”

But that night, a sense of satisfaction suddenly turned into pure joy for members of Magliona Abogados when the firm was chosen as the 2023 winner in the TMT category based on the quality of the legal services it provided to such top tier clients as tech giants Microsoft, Google, and Amazon Studios.

“It was a very special moment for us, being named firm of the year in the TMT area,” said Montiel. “We didn’t expect to



Juan Pablo Montiel recently returned to his roots in southern Chile for a vacation with his sons, Alonso and Amaro. Also pictured are Montiel's mother and stepfather, Carmen and Wilson.

win because we were competing against some very large firms with 250 to 400 lawyers. It was wonderful to see that all our efforts and hard work paid off. It was a testament to the leadership and expertise of (Managing Partner) Claudio Magliona and his commitment to excellence."

Montiel said the law firm's culture is built on the standard, attributing much of its growth and success to a determination to attract top talent, particularly graduates of the premier law schools in Chile.

"We want to hire the best with the goal of making them even better," Montiel said. "That's what our clients deserve and have come to expect."

A native of the small town of Cochrane, located near the vast Patagonia region in

southern Chile, Montiel is a 2012 honors graduate of Universidad de Chile Law School, widely recognized as the finest institute of legal learning in the country.

His small-town upbringing gave him a yearning to taste big city life where successful careers can be charted in the legal, medical, and business professions.

"Being from a small town, it took time for me to get accustomed to a new reality, to new standards, and to a new form of discipline in order to succeed," Montiel said of his transition to life as a law student in Chile's capital city. "I treated law school as a job, studying long hours every day to do the best I could. I came to Santiago without any friends or connections, so I had to do well

academically to have a chance at getting a good job."

While in law school, Montiel worked at the Comprehensive Care Center for Victims of Violent Crimes. The job served as a stepping stone to an opportunity with the Magliona Abogados firm in 2012, where he has risen through the ranks over the past decade to become a partner.

"When I came here, there were just five lawyers, including the managing partner," said Montiel. "We were in a small office downtown, nothing like the office space that we have now. During that time, we had to learn how to do everything. It taught me the value and the privilege of learning from someone as talented and experienced as Claudio, and to develop

a mettle that I can apply to every task I undertake."

As his role with the firm has evolved from his early days as a corporate lawyer and litigator, Montiel has taken on greater managerial responsibilities, principally in the area of assessing client needs and assembling a team of attorneys to address them. It is a role that he has come to relish, in effect serving as the firm's chief "point person" for new and existing clients.

An introvert by nature, Montiel said he worked hard as a student to develop his social and language skills, viewing them as vital to any chance at career success.

"I'm very aware of the hand that God gave to me, and I feel very privileged to be where I am today," said Montiel, crediting his mother and stepfather for stressing the importance of education as a ticket to a better life.

One of three children, Montiel has two sons of his own, 7-year-old Alonso and 2-year-old Amaro. Much like their father, the two boys share a love for the outdoors. As a unit, the trio recently enjoyed a family trip to the Patagonia region where Montiel's parents reside and own a number of vacation cabins adjacent to a nature preserve.


"It was an opportunity to reset, and to go back with my kids to the land where I was raised," Montiel said of the precious vacation time. "It's a different way of life there, a place where you are surrounded by nature and beauty, where there is no pollution, noise, or crime."

In short, the perfect place for a busy lawyer to unwind, while also enjoying the chance to visit with his parents, Carmen and Wilson, who double as grandparents and family role models.

"They are entrepreneurs and taught me the importance of hard work and

developing relationships in all aspects of life," related Montiel.

Those lessons are ingrained in the culture of Magliona Abogados and have contributed to its rise, according to Montiel.

"Here, the biggest factor is the excellence," he declared. "We have a lot of lawyers who have similar backgrounds to mine that came from public schools but excelled during university to become first-generation lawyers. It's something that defines us, because most of our lawyers have gone through struggles at certain times in their lives and knew how to fight back, to show resilience even when going up against the elite firms in Chile and elite lawyers on the other side of the table. But because of our character, we were able to be at that table with no remorse, knowing that we are good and we are able to deliver on the highest level." 



A group of attorneys from Magliona Abogados celebrated a grand achievement last fall, winning the coveted TMT award in Chile from The Legal 500 organization. Pictured center is the firm's founder, Claudio Magliona.

A climbing close call turned into his real-life cliffhanger

By Tom Kirvan

Growing up in a southern Chilean town that is on the doorstep of the Patagonia National Park, Juan Pablo Montiel sported an adventuresome spirit from an early age, eventually displaying a special affinity for the joy and challenge of mountaineering.

The sport, of course, is not for the faint of heart and revolves around the high-stakes world of rock, snow, and ice climbing.

But as a young man, Montiel was of a mind to throw caution to the proverbial wind, testing his mountaineering skills against some of the most rugged peaks in Chile, including several in the wilds and wonders of Patagonia that encompasses the southern geographical region of South America.

"It is an activity that I have enjoyed for years and has been a sport where I've made many friends," said Montiel, a

Santiago attorney who began his legal career in 2012.

In fact, it was through a chance meeting with a mountaineering colleague after graduating from law school that Montiel learned about a possible job opportunity with Magliona Abogados, a small Santiago law firm that was beginning its ascent in the legal community.

"In one of those hikes, I met a colleague who thought I would be a good fit for the firm and its philosophy," said Montiel, who shortly thereafter was introduced to the firm's founder, Claudio Magliona. "It turned out to be a thing of destiny for me."

Over the next few years and as his work schedule allowed, Montiel continued to enjoy various mountaineering expeditions, including some that required dangerous glacier crossings and rock wall rappelling.

And then, a year before his first son was born and Montiel would soon become fully acquainted with the 24/7 responsibilities of parenting, he ventured out to the mountains with climbing friends for a particularly challenging ascent, the kind where ropes, harnesses, helmets, axes,

and crevasse rescue equipment are essential items.

The name of the mountain, in Spanish, is Diente del Diablo. In English, it carries a decidedly wicked and ominous translation: "The Devil's Teeth."

Montiel, while making his way up a particularly steep section of the 13,000-foot mountain, took a spill – and not of the ordinary slip-and-fall variety. In this case, he took a short tumble down the face of a glacier before he came to an abrupt stop, saved from a 1,000-foot free-fall by a series of sturdy ropes.

He was bruised and battered from the fall, but otherwise he escaped a potentially fatal outcome. The only complication was that he was left suspended in air, dangling


Brotherly love was exhibited by Juan Pablo Montiel's two sons before the family set out on a kayaking experience.



over the edge of the glacier before he was fully rescued by his climbing colleagues.

His brush with death lasted just a matter of seconds, but it served as a wake-up call for Montiel to reconsider his sporting choices.

"When I started to fall, it was not like the movies and my life flashed in front of my eyes," Montiel said. "I was just trying to hang on as best I could, using my ice picks to save me but I was falling too fast."

"But afterward, when I realized that at the end of that cliff there was my death, I decided that I could no longer do that kind of activity at the highest level," he said. "The risks are just too great. Now, I'm content to just do hiking and to enjoy other activities with my sons." 



Pictured among some of the most magnificent peaks in Chile, Juan Pablo Montiel has long enjoyed a passion for the sport of mountaineering.

A pathfinder, Lesotho attorney built practice from ground up

By Brian Cox



Albertus Kleingeld
Managing Partner
Kleingeld Attorneys

Albertus Kleingeld grew up surrounded by the imposing architecture of justice.

He was born and raised in Bloemfontein, the capital and largest city of the Free State province of South Africa. Also known as simply Bloem, the city is considered the country's "judicial capital" because it is home to the Supreme Court of Appeal, which is the highest court in the country in non-constitutional matters (the Constitutional Court is in Johannesburg).

Located in the heart of Bloemfontein, the Supreme Court of Appeal building is a massive sandstone structure with a red terracotta roof and four tall pillars in front. A manicured lawn, stone walkways, and sculpted shrubs accentuate the grounds behind a black wrought-iron fence.

"The buildings are quite imposing," says Kleingeld. "You can feel the weight of it."

The city also features a Magistrate's Court, a Regional Court, a High Court, and the University of Free State Faculty of Law.

"A big part of the Bloemfontein economy is legal business," explains Kleingeld. "We've got a very good legal fraternity."

It is perhaps not surprising then that Kleingeld got it into his head at an early age to become a lawyer.

His stepfather was an entrepreneur who at one time or another owned a butchery, a used car dealership, and various other businesses. He remembers his stepfather saying, "You can run out of money, but you can't run out of plans."

"I think that is where I got introduced to business because I was always going with him to business meetings and assisting him with meeting clients," recalls Kleingeld. "He showed me how to interact with people and how to listen to people."

If you're in business, you have to listen to people. There was always a deal to be struck when you were with him."

It seemed to a young Kleingeld that he should naturally go into commerce, like his stepfather, or into law. In high school, he chose to pursue a career in law and, after graduating, qualified to enroll at the University of South Africa, which is an open distance e-learning school.

When his ex-wife had the opportunity to work as a nurse in London for two years, the young newlyweds jumped at the chance to explore a new, cosmopolitan city. The planned two years turned into 10.

"London is a marvelous city," says Kleingeld. "We loved every minute of it. It's an experience that I will ever cherish."

While living in London, Kleingeld continued working toward his Bachelor's Degree in Law while also employed as a general office clerk with the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance at the University of Surrey. Once he earned his degree, he sought a position as an in-house legal advisor, dealing primarily with employment law matters. He also became well versed in immigration law – even as he was himself applying for citizenship in the United Kingdom.

His work as a legal advisor only served to whet his appetite to fulfill his ultimate goal of practicing law, which in South Africa still required him to complete two years of training as a candidate legal practitioner and to sit for admission exams.

"My idea was always to come back and become an attorney," he says.

Chomping at the bit to get on with his law career, Kleingeld and his ex-wife returned to South Africa at the end of 2009. They settled in a small town in

the Free State called Bethlehem to be close to his mother-in-law who was ill. Despite a tight job market in the wake of a global recession, Kleingeld found a position with Hattingh Marais Attorneys, a general practice firm where he could begin his practicals.

“I think the fact that I came from England with a different CV from someone else opened up doors for me to be able to get into a law firm,” he says. “It gave me the opportunity to qualify and to get into practice and I’m grateful for that.”

After two years, Kleingeld was ready to do more commercial law work. He came across an advertisement in a national magazine for lawyers from a law firm in Bloemfontein that was looking for a commercial attorney with several years of experience. Kleingeld knew he didn’t have the experience the firm was looking for, but he decided to “give it a go” and applied.

His boldness and audacity were rewarded when the firm made him an offer.

Kleingeld’s legal career, which he had dreamed of for so long, was suddenly poised to take off.

Webbers Attorneys is one of the oldest law firms in the Free State. In addition to its offices in Bloemfontein, the firm had operated an office in Maseru, the capital city of Lesotho, since 1979. Lesotho, which shares its western border with the Free State, is a landlocked country encircled by South Africa.

Kleingeld was placed under the wing of Denis Molyneux, a senior attorney who was highly competent, demanding, and exacting.

“He is an extremely competent and capable attorney and an exceptional mentor,” says Kleingeld. “He is just one of those individuals whose main passion is teaching law. He exposed me to commercial matters of quite substantial

substance and to an international client base. It wasn’t small matters we were dealing with. I was now in the big leagues.”

Kleingeld joined Webbers in April 2012 and made partner two years later, working between both the Bloemfontein and Maseru offices.

“The opportunities I had at Webbers I wouldn’t have had if I started with another firm that didn’t operate in Lesotho,” says Kleingeld. “This is what I wanted to do. I had the opportunity to do it and I’m doing it.”

In 2017, the Lesotho health ministry issued the first licenses to grow cannabis for medical or scientific purposes. Many anticipated the cannabis industry to explode in Lesotho and it was heralded as an economic lifesaver for the country. Some industry analysts projected cannabis to become a \$92 million business within a matter of years.



Many anticipated the cannabis industry to explode in Lesotho and it was heralded as an economic lifesaver for the country.

And Kleingeld was in the vanguard, pulling in bushels of clients anxious to get in on the ground floor of an emerging market.

“I had the opportunity from the onset to be part of that cannabis revolution,” he says. “Everyone from everywhere flocked to Lesotho, from dreadlocks all the way to suits. Everyone came in all guns blazing.”

Lesotho was widely seen as the next big cannabis economy.

“It has all the hallmarks of being a prominent cannabis supplier,” explains Kleingeld. “It’s got clean water. It’s got clean air. Most of the soil has never been cultivated before. The growing is at a high altitude so there are less pests.”

For the next two years, Kleingeld says he was working in excess of 18-hour days. He had no personal life and many days he didn’t see his house in the daylight. He

maintained a relentless pace and traveled extensively. In 2018, Google Maps showed that he had traveled 1.7 times around the earth in only half a year. That same year, he brought in the majority of the firm’s net profit.

Eventually, however, it was too much to keep up.

“I had to tell the partners, I can’t work like this. It’s just not possible,” recalls Kleingeld. “The fees are coming in and we’ve got good money on the table and everyone is smiling, but it is just not possible for me to work like this.”

He put forward an alternative proposal for calculating compensation, but the other partners turned it down, leaving Kleingeld with a difficult decision.

“I said, well, okay, I’ll go out on my own and see if I can make it,” he says. “It was a

difficult thing to do because I was leaving a firm that is 110 years old and had 65 staff and 20 fee earners and was saying goodbye to all that support and all of that history.”

At the end of September 2019, he resigned, and on the first day of October, he opened his own firm with an office in Maseru – Kleingeld Attorneys.

“I was very fortunate to have kept most of my clients,” he says. “I built strong relationships with them, and I’m fortunate to have very loyal clients.”

Not long after he branched out on his own, the frenzy over the possible fortunes to be made in cannabis began to fade.

“At its heyday in 2017, everyone thought cannabis would be the next big thing, the savior of the economy,” says Kleingeld. “But the main drawback is the Lesotho



Albertus and Henda four-wheel across the South African landscape with boys Aidan, Ivor, and Ewan.

The Katse Dam on the Malibamat'so River is part of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project, which will eventually include five large dams in remote rural areas of the African country.



government. You've got this exceptional natural environment to grow the product, but you have a government that is inept in every way."

At one stage there were nearly 100 licenses issued and granted, according to Kleingeld. Now, there are no more than five that are operational and those companies are struggling to export their product.

"They have these world-class facilities, but the government's red tape to get their product out of the country is just impossible," says Kleingeld, the frustration clear on his face. "The whole thing came down from a dizzying height and there's basically nothing left of it."

The cannabis industry in Lesotho is currently stagnant, says Kleingeld, who is

skeptical if the business is going to survive another five years.

"If I built my practice on cannabis," he says, "I would have gone bust."

In addition to the collapse of the cannabis industry, Kleingeld also had to face the devastating consequences of the global COVID pandemic, which shut down travel between South Africa and Lesotho when his firm was a mere four months old.

It was touch and go for a while, he says. He had no safety net and no piggy bank to raid because he had drawn on all his funds to open the firm.

"It was quite the nightmare. It was a challenging time, but I survived it and I'm here to tell the tale," he says. "What I took from it is that you need to keep your

operations lean. You don't need a lot of things to do business and make a success. It's hard work. It's not coming easy."

As a sole practitioner, Kleingeld has a broad commercial practice that involves diamond mining, insurance companies, and financial institutions. He advises on commercial and corporate matters, and his specialist legal services include computer and internet law, business law, and cannabis law.

He currently plans to train as an arbitrator, which will help him diversify and grow his practice in South Africa.

Kleingeld and his second wife, Henda, have a blended family. He has a daughter, Alanna, 20, and a son, Ewan, 12, from his first marriage, and Henda has two boys, Aidan and Ivor. Alanna is a third-year

engineering student at the University of Pretoria.

Henda teaches law at the Free State University Law Faculty. The two met by accident – quite literally – when she backed up into his car.


As he looks to the future of his firm, Kleingeld is optimistic about the business opportunities offered by the Lesotho Highlands Water Project, the second phase of which kicked off in 2022 and involves the construction of an intricate network

of tunnels and dams to divert water from the mountains of Lesotho to South Africa. The water will generate much needed hydroelectric power for Lesotho before it is exported to Johannesburg and possibly even Botswana.

Billions of rand are invested in the project and Kleingeld is already involved with some issues concerning regulatory compliance.

Despite having grown up in Bloemfontein and having worked for many years across

the border in Maseru, Kleingeld still marvels at the contrast between the two countries.

"It's a fascinating place," he says. "In South Africa, you will have farmers on the level of what you'll find in the U.S. South African farming is quite a substantial operation. As the crow flies, you can drive two hours into Lesotho and find someone still plowing with an ox. It's fascinating to see how different the two worlds are." 

Attorney Albertus Kleingeld and his wife Henda, who is also an attorney and teaches law at Free State University Law Faculty, with their blended family: Aidan, Ivor, Alanna, and Ewan.



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