

Better Business with Malvern: Equestrian Allies

July 29, 2021 by Hillary Dobbs

Let's conduct an experiment. I'm going to describe a professional to you—he's a friend of mine. He is a shareholder at [Greenberg Traurig, LLP](#), one of the most prestigious international and multi-practice law firms in the country. After I've told you a bit more about him, I want you to imagine the man you think you would encounter if you sat down at a Starbucks for a cup of coffee with him.

Clients and colleagues have described him as a “died-in-the-wool” trial lawyer. He has over 30 years of experience trying jury and non-jury cases in a variety of subject matter areas – including products liability, intellectual property, class actions, labor and employment, unfair competition, fraud, and contract disputes. He has been consistently recognized by organizations such as Best Lawyers in America, Super Lawyers, The Legal 500 United States, and others. He is his profession's version of an ultra-marathoner, given the amount of preparation, trial time, and pressure involved in a career spent in the courtroom.

OK, now comes the part where I want you to picture him in your head when he is not in the courtroom. Would you picture a super-casual guy in a tee shirt and jeans, with long and shaggy salt and pepper hair, who speaks with simple words of simple things, and muses about the genius of his favorite guitar player Jimi Hendrix? Well, that is the man you would see, and that is the man I have come to know. Sitting down with Mike recently for coffee, he wasn't wearing a Jimmy Hendrix tee, but he was in jeans, and his hair, while not quite the ponytail of his younger days, was still 100% uniquely “Mike.” We had a lively conversation as we had our weekly coffee at Starbucks, and I always learn something new about Mike and his journey that has led him here to Wellington.





Mike is here because he and several of his GT colleagues have launched the GT Equine Industry Group, composed of over 50 of top legal professionals in multiple practice areas. He's practiced law in many different areas, and now his focus is on the equestrian world. GT has identified a need in the community, from the industry's top owners to horse enthusiasts, for premium 360-degree legal representation. GT's EIG attorneys handle litigation and transactional matters that affect the day-to-day operations and livelihoods of equestrians, such as real estate, environmental, labor and employment, corporate and contractual matters, insurance and tax matters, intellectual property and branding issues, and government law and policies.

Why is he doing it? Why have Mike and his Greenberg Traurig colleagues formed this group. He is doing it because he has a deep passion for horses and the horse community. Mike's wife Natalie is an accomplished amateur horsewoman, and he has made himself into a student of the sport. Only able to do things with the precision and attention to detail of a top lawyer, he has greatly enjoyed learning the innerworkings of top barns, the comparative strengths of different training methods, and the finer details of what makes both the human and animal athletes tick. Perhaps appropriately, a particular element that's really enthralled Mike is the course walk, where the riders prepare for their pivotal moment in the ring. (It makes sense that this would resonate. He's made a career out of highly effective and highly precise preparation.)

I was impressed by the passion with which he has followed and immersed himself in the sport. And his attention to detail surprised me. Mike recounted a Hampton Classic win of mine almost blow for blow. He was there, and he remembered seeing me battle it out with a dear friend of mine in a nail-biting jump-off. His eyes lit up describing our very different riding styles but shared competitive spirit. He remembers it as well as I do—maybe even better.

That's how it often is in the equestrian world—there is professional and interpersonal overlap. There we were doing a blog interview, and we realized we had a shared history. And that's how business should be—shared interests enhanced by shared enthusiasms and shared community.

As we spoke, it struck a chord. Mike and I have the exact same reasons for being in this business. We love equestrians—the community, the sport. We live there, and we want them to have the highest level of professional legal and financial services at their fingertips—and we wanted those tailored services to be delivered by community insiders.

For both of us, providing those services is a personal calling in addition to a professional one. In Mike's case, the way he approaches his business allows him to live the ethical principles imbued in him by his parents and other key teachers. His Pops once told him, "Mikey, don't ever let anyone carry your bags. You carry them yourself, and help others carry theirs." He has taken his dad's lesson to heart. For the last 17 years, he has been a faculty member in the GT Litigation Academy, mentoring young lawyers and sharing his hard-won wisdom. "I want to give back to the profession that has given me so much," he says.



The more we talked, the more it was sounding like we had a lot in common... although, while I try to give back to my industry, I have work to do to catch up to Mike. I am proud to call Mike Nicodema a friend, and I can personally say, this is a guy you want carrying your bags.