

Legends

More than 10,000 attorneys are licensed to practice in Arizona, and hundreds, if not thousands, of those work in some capacity in the real estate industry.

Most dabble – shepherding just a few transactions over the course of their career – while others specialize in the field. Among those few hundred career real estate attorneys, only a handful command widespread respect

and admiration. Three attorneys sure to be included on anyone's list of the most influential and respected are Paul Gilbert, Larry Lazarus and Mike Tiffany. These legal lions have had a hand in dozens and dozens of the Valley's most significant real estate development projects, transactions and

business creations of the past 40 years.

What they have done has set the bar for how to go about creating a municipal master development plan, how to go about the entitlement process, how to win over a recalcitrant planning and zoning board and how to structure a business organization that lasts.



By D.J. Burrough

photos by D.J. Burrough
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of Law

Although they stand together at the apex of the real estate law field, each man got there in his own distinct fashion. One is a cowboy looking to wrangle unruly legal issues, another a community activist looking to balance progress with social responsibility, and another a family focused patrician with an unwavering sense of right and wrong.



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Mike Tiffany

Mike Tiffany is a header. ■ He is the part of a team roping duo whose job it is to secure the head of hard-charging steer so that his partner can rope the back feet. Like the experienced cowboy he is, Tiffany knows to start twirling his rope the second he leaves the “box,” and he knows not to pressure the cow but to keep just enough left of it so that it runs in a relatively straight line. He knows to throw his rope just when his horse (either Seven or Nugget) is even with the back end of the cow, and to aim for the far horn. He knows to dally the rope – that is wrap it tight around the saddle horn – before he pulls his horse away from the cow, so as to not jerk the steer and to avoid getting his thumb caught between the horn and a tightening rope, a misstep that has instantly amputated many a team roper’s thumb.

“Team roping challenges me,” says Tiffany, comfortably reclined in a pinto patterned, horsehair chair in his corner office at 24th Street and Camelback Road. “You have to know your horse. You have to know your partner. It’s very enjoyable, but you can always do better.”

The dedication, through preparation and intense focus that Tiffany brings to team roping are the same traits he has brought to the vocation he has been practicing for more than 42 years – law. Tiffany is the founder and managing attorney of Tiffany & Bosco, one the Valley’s most prestigious law firms. Over his career, Tiffany has established himself as one of the top real estate attorneys in Arizona; the no-nonsense guy you tap when you want to structure complicated business organization or complete sometimes contentious transactions.

“There are attorneys that over-

lawyer things, but Mike doesn’t do that,” says Chapin Bell, president of The P.B. Bell Companies, one of the largest apartment developers in the Valley, which has used Tiffany and his firm since its founding. “He

doesn’t let the lawyering get in the way of the business deal. Mike is a great negotiator. He has a very calm way about him, and a way of negotiating that keeps things on track. He has a very common sense way about his lawyering.”

It should come as no surprise that Tiffany finds enjoyment in team roping; he grew up on family property at Camelback Road and Central, then an outlying suburb of Phoenix. Dreaming of becoming a cowboy, Tiffany bought his first roping horse when he was 10 years old (from the former Arizona Governor John Howard Pyle). The straight path to becoming a cowboy was interrupted by the time Tiffany got into his teen years by the more traditional team sports: football, baseball and basketball. He was a letterman in football and track at St. Mary’s High School, where he still holds the record with three others who scored five touchdowns in one game. At Arizona State



University, where he majored in business, Tiffany played left half-back for the legendary coach Dan Devine. He also managed to be voted homecoming king during his ASU days. He spent his summers working in the family construction business, which, primarily, built roads and airport runways.

"It was often remote, but it was always hot," he says. "That's what kept me in school."

After graduation, in 1961, and a brief stint in the National Guard, Tiffany joined the family construction business fulltime, but found the work unfulfilling (the death of his dad the year before contributed, he says, to his malaise). His brother encouraged him to go to law school.

"He was okay with me leaving the business," Tiffany says. "He encouraged me and we knew that I wanted it."

Tiffany graduated from the University of Arizona's law school in 1966, spent the next year clerking at the Arizona Court of Appeals. The next year, he and a partner, Jim Cunningham, an upper classman from St. Mary's, started their own firm.

"A lot of times it was scary because I didn't know how to do things," he says. He quickly gravitated toward real estate. "I settled into it and loved it," he says. It was five years before he was comfortable as an attorney, Tiffany says, and another five before he lost the ever-present stomach butterflies. One of the earliest clients was The P.B. Bell Companies.

"He's such a good communicator," says Bell, whose father hired Tiffany. "You don't lose things in translation when you are in negotiations. People like working with him because they know he is going to be fair and trustworthy."

Because the firm never took on any debt, there was never any pressure to grow in any other way than from the demand coming from existing and prospective clients, Tiffany



says. "I learned business from my dad, who lived by the basic tenant to spend less than you make," and that, "good work bring in more work."

In 1995, the burgeoning firm (absent Cunningham, who had left earlier to focus on a personal injury practice) merged with a firm whose principals were father and son, Mike and Mark Bosco. The firm now has 35 attorneys, and a total of 180 employees. After financial services, the real estate division is the largest in the firm.

Tiffany says that early on he made up for his lack of experience by knowing as much as he could about the case or principals involved. "The advantage I had was preparation," he says. "When I prepared, I found I was on even ground before more ex-

perienced attorneys." His first case: a traffic ticket. While he has done his share of entitlement and zoning work, his bailiwick is in the area of crafting business organizations and transactions. Tiffany takes pride knowing that partnerships he helped engineer have thrived over the years, and now have second and third generation of leaders coming to him for work.

"I have to know what the business deal is to incorporate that deal into a contract that's simple, complete and fair," he says. "I see both sides of a transaction. I know who I represent, but I can relate to the other side and that helps the negotiations and to bring them together."

Prompt communications is an important part of the business, he says. He requires that his attorneys return client phone calls the same day. Leading a law firm is not unlike team roping, he says.

"We all have to get along and all have to respect each other and be honest and fair with each other," he says. "The rules are the same, I think."

One of the first transactions he worked on was a private offering to raise funds for development of Big Surf. Tiffany drafted the documents that formed and organized the corporation for the dozens of family and friends who invested in the then cutting-edge water park.

More recently, in 1991, he helped the members of a ranching family in northeast Arizona to form a limited liability partnership so that it could develop its more than 8,500 acres. Part of the transaction involved exchanging ranch land for federal acres, a deal that helped settle a

Tiffany and partner placed first at a roping competition in Flagstaff.





long-standing dispute between the Hopi and Navajo tribes. Over the years, Tiffany helped Spurlock Land LLC negotiate with the town of Buckeye to annex the parcel, to sell two large parcels, and the planning, zoning and entitlement of 2,800 acres to create a mixed-use master planned community called Spurlock Ranch, a complicated development made all the more so by regional water issues, an expressway alignment, a bridge over the Central Arizona Project

Canal, easements for electrical power lines, among other challenges.

Tiffany, who is a member of the Maricopa County Sheriff's Mounted Posse, practices team roping at least twice a week and competes in events about three times a month. Tiffany's energetic demeanor and trim profile belie his 70 years; he seems to be a man not well past retirement age but more like a man with years to go before getting a gold watch. Tiffany says he runs and lifts weights at least twice a week, and gets joy from spending time with his wife, Patsy, his children -- Christopher, Michael Jr., Paul and Michelle Georgeoff -- and nine grandchildren. The extended family members, who are all in the Valley, go on an annual hay ride and picnic and, of course, to rodeos.

Amid it all, he finds the most solace in the saddle, pursuing an unattainable perfection in a sport better suited to those decades younger.

Average times for top professional team roping teams are somewhere between four and six seconds; Tiffany says he's consistently between eight and 10 seconds (with a personal best of six seconds flat), good enough times to have won him a few of those highly prized oversized belt buckles (although his favorite is one his wife had made that featured his family's brand -- an upside down double T). Now, he has all his grandkids riding. His two-year old grandson wants to be a cowboy, Tiffany says with a smile.

"I really enjoy being with the roping people, they are the salt of the Earth," he says. "And I like my horses; they are fun to be around. I like to challenge myself. I still have that competitive drive even at my age. I don't think I'll ever lose that." ●

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magazine

Mike and wife Patsy and 9 grandchildren on a cruise to Alaska

