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MITCHINER LAW FIRM, PLLC

Honoring Values in All Aspects of Life

By Melissa Stewart

Faced with many people who harbor stereotypical notions, Joe Mitchiner, the founder of Mitchiner Law Firm, PLLC, has undertaken the task of merging Christian values with the business world. He wants clients to see that Christians are not inherently incompetent, and he wants other attorneys to know that it is possible (and permissible) to integrate personal faith into a professional practice.

"It's sad to say, but many consider 'Christian lawyer' to be an oxymoron," Mitchiner said. "However, just about all of the clients I have prayed with have found it refreshing and have openly thanked me. Some have even looked up afterward with tears in their eyes."

Two other people work in the firm: Amy Mitchiner, his daughter-in-law, and Jim Small, a recently licensed attorney. All three are committed to their faith. It is incorporated in their daily lives and helps to strengthen interoffice relationships. No one is ashamed to admit that God is the focus of their lives and is present in their work. Mitchiner attributes this office culture to his active participation in an organization of financial professionals and attorneys named Kingdom Advisors, the mission of which is to equip its members to integrate their Christian faith in their respective practices, including rendering sound advice and counsel based on biblical principles.

"When people ask about the members of my firm, I typically begin by saying that I have a senior partner who is a judge. His name is God," Joe said.

A lack of religious beliefs does not prevent people from coming to the firm or finding a welcoming atmosphere. "Our clientele is by no means limited to Christians," he said. "They run the gamut of faiths and even include those who profess no faith."

Mitchiner and his attorneys incorporate their faith into their practice, often praying with clients and with one another. While clients know that they will be working with a Christian, they by no means need to feel obligated to embrace that faith.

"I offer, at some point, to pray with all of my clients, often even before I know their own faith background," he said. "If they accept my offer, we pray; and I always close in Jesus' name, which is typical of Christian prayers. If they refuse my offer, we simply move on; I don't push my faith on anyone. But what clients who refuse probably don't realize is that prior to our meeting, I've already privately prayed for them and for God's help in whatever tasks are before us."

Mitchiner believes that a key component of the Christian faith is preparedness. The Mitchiner Law Firm focuses on estate planning. A quick glance at its website and one will be reminded of the gravity of life and death, as well as the importance of ensuring a legacy. However, there is no one-size-fits-all document or plan. Those at the Mitchiner Law firm know that each client's needs

and wishes regarding planning for the future will be different, so everyone gets customized services and fees.

Mitchiner says of his pricing method, "The bulk of my work is for flat fees, based on particular dollar amounts assigned to a particular stage in my process or to particular provisions for particular documents, so that as we move through the process, my clients always know what to expect before they commit; and when they do commit, it's because of transparency in how their fees were determined."

The benefit of having such a carefully planned out and individualized method of service for each client is tremendous. Mitchiner and his team are genuinely concerned with meeting their clients' needs. This heartfelt desire to serve, combined with his years of professional experience, has led to a high level of competence and a well-tested system that leaves negligible room for error.

"I have a system, from the initial contact, to the preliminary conference, to the design meeting, to the signing session, to the immediate follow up, all the way through anniversary reviews, that includes questionnaires and checklists at each stage to make sure that I don't overlook something," he said. "After all, the best thing I can provide for my clients is the peace of mind that we have covered the bases."

Mitchiner knows the importance of leaving a legacy for children and loved ones. He personally followed his father's footsteps in both profession and faith.

"My father was a tax, corporate and estate attorney," he said. "As a child, I saw very little that attracted me to the legal arena. But in my junior year of high school, I took a course in business law which captivated me. So, I moved in that direction and in 1978 became licensed in North Carolina and in 1979 in Florida, where my father had for a time a second office in addition to his North Carolina office."

Prior to entering law school, Mitchiner and his father had planned to practice law together. Mitchiner even got his private pilot's license so they could fly back and forth between North Carolina and Florida. Unfortunately, his father's health caused him to retire early, and they were never able to practice together.

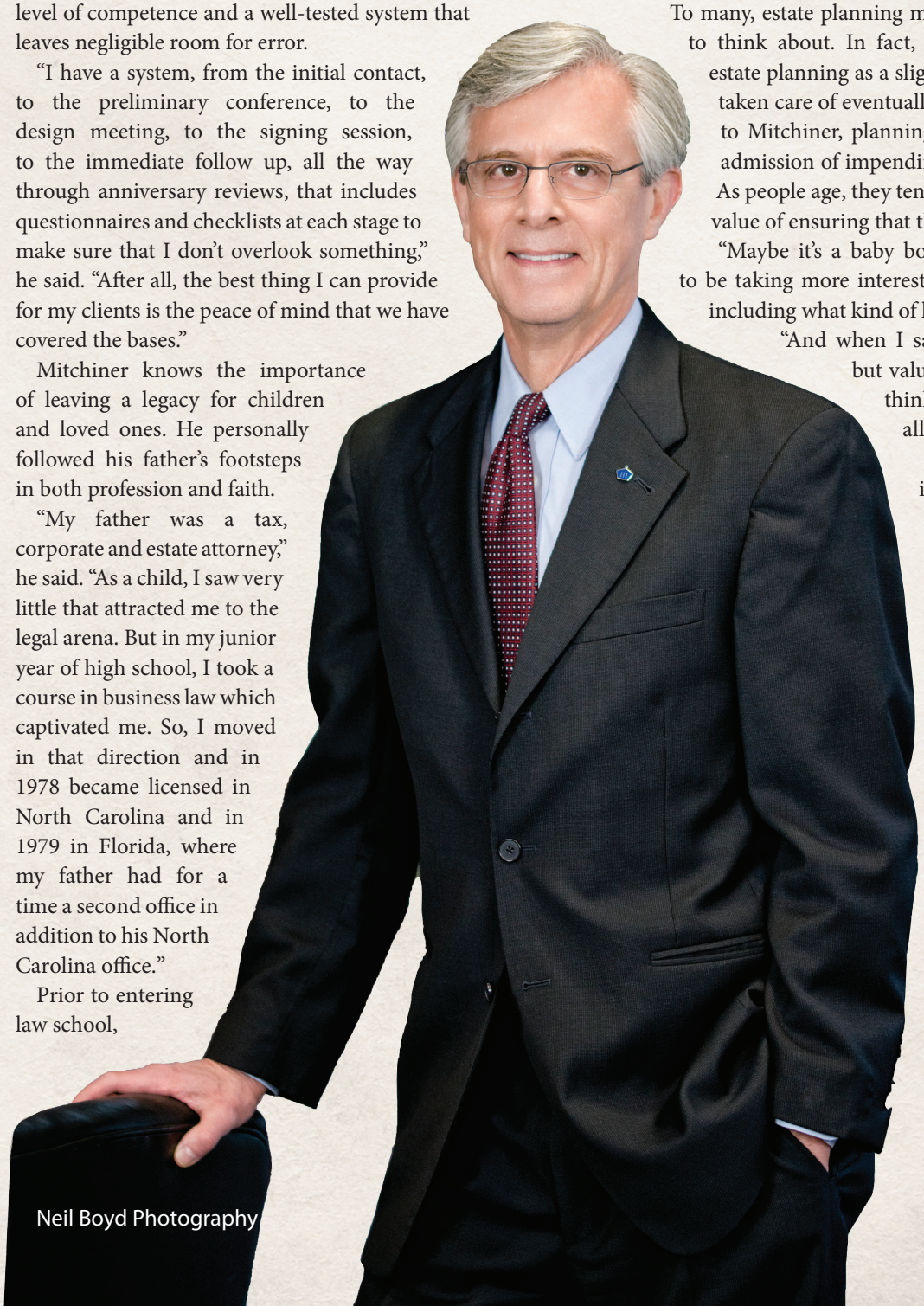
From his first years of practice until 2004, Mitchiner considered his being an attorney as a career. However, after some events that caused some serious professional soul searching, he shifted abruptly out of a practice that was heavy with the negative energy of litigation into estate planning that positively helps people and families to be better stewards of other people and the assets that God has entrusted to them. "That's when my being an attorney became a vocation, a calling, something more than a career," he said.

To many, estate planning may not be the most exciting thing to think about. In fact, some people may even think of estate planning as a slightly depressing task that has to be taken care of eventually, but not yet. However, according to Mitchiner, planning for the future is not some dark admission of impending doom; it is simply being smart. As people age, they tend more and more to appreciate the value of ensuring that their affairs are in order.

"Maybe it's a baby boomer thing, but people do seem to be taking more interest in what they do with their stuff, including what kind of legacy they want to leave," Joe said. "And when I say legacy, I mean not just assets, but values and principles. It excites me to think that I can help holistically with all of that."

Competence as a lawyer and integrity as a Christian are deeply important to Mitchiner and his team. While they do not overtly market the firm because of its faith underpinnings, they do not attempt to hide their faith. Competence and faith can couple beautifully and need not be considered as separate.

"I don't distinctly differentiate between work and life. It's been said that if you enjoy what you do to make a living, you'll never work a day in your life," Mitchiner reflected. "Work is part of living; so I try to do both in ways that glorify God. That way, I enjoy both."



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