



Busy in Buffalo

Joe Hanna is the hardest-working person in the room BY ANDREW BRANDT



Joseph Hanna

GOLDBERG SEGALLA

ENTERTAINMENT
& SPORTS

BUFFALO

Joe Hanna knew he wanted to be a lawyer by the time he was 6 years old—though he pictured the profession as more of a stepping stone than final destination.

“I used to go to the library, right down the street from our house, with my father; we’d read president books together,” says Hanna, who chairs Goldberg Segalla’s sports and entertainment group in Buffalo. “I thought that, in order to be the president, you had to be a lawyer. No father or mother is going to correct a son or daughter when they said they want to be a lawyer.”

While Hanna eventually realized you didn’t need a law degree to become commander in chief, he got one anyway, graduating from State University of New York at Buffalo Law School in 2005. He then became the first associate Goldberg hired directly out of law school, thanks to his mentor and managing partner, Rick Cohen. Hanna opened the firm’s sports and entertainment practice shortly thereafter.

The group now boasts nearly 40 attorneys representing professional sports teams, athletes, entertainers and musicians. And Hanna—a die-hard, life-long Buffalo Bills fan—gets to work with his favorite football team. “I interact with their general counsel, Gregg Brandon, on almost a daily basis,” he says. “Just the opportunity to interact with someone like him, day in and day out—it makes me a better lawyer.”

Hanna and the group were at the forefront of football’s concussion woes roughly five years ago when Hanna wrote one of the first comprehensive articles covering the NFL and its concussion-lawsuit history.

He’s been updating it continually, and has gone on to write articles about concussions and the NCAA, WWE, NHL, and youth and amateur sports.

Aside from his sports and entertainment law practice, Hanna chairs Goldberg’s retail and hospitality group. He says there’s a lot of synergy between the two areas: “We can represent a sports team on anything from an issue related to a vendor contract to a licensing issue to a fight in the stands.”

Hanna also oversees Goldberg’s diversity task force. He created Success in the City, a diversity networking event in Western New York, in 2008. “We bring the business community, government sector, legal community and education sector together to try to break down those barriers that western New York faces in terms of segregation,” he says.

His “icing on the cake,” however, is Bunkers in Baghdad, a nonprofit he founded in the same year. “We’ve collected and shipped 8 million golf balls and 600,000 golf clubs to our brave men and women in 65 countries, all 50 states and more than 150 VA hospitals,” Hanna says. The charity has worked with over 40 professional sports teams and received grants from the Buffalo Bills and the Buffalo Sabres; and one of its components, Bunkers Buddies, has students write letters and draw pictures that ship out with every package of balls the soldiers receive.

Chris Belter, a colleague at Goldberg, helped Hanna get the project off the ground. “He’s a veteran,” Hanna says, “so it’s been very nice to have his assistance in this.”

Since he chairs two law groups and a task force, and still packs golf balls for his charity, time management is always a concern for Hanna. “I’ll never be accused of being the smartest person in the room,” he says. “But I certainly am the hardest-working person in the room. There are only so many hours in a day.” **SL**



Thanks to Bunkers, soldiers like this one, based in Afghanistan, can blow off some steam at the end of the day.



U.S. Army members overlooking Baghdad, Iraq, sporting Callaway Golf equipment.