

My Miniature Livestock Farm Makes Me A Better Lawyer

By **Theodore Kobus** (November 20, 2025)

In this Expert Analysis series, attorneys discuss how their unusual extracurricular activities enhance professional development, providing insights and pointers that translate to the office, courtroom and beyond. If you have a hobby you would like to write about, email expertanalysis@law360.com.

The dream was simple.

I imagined a rural escape: a serene getaway from the bustle of life on Manhattan's Upper West Side, and the breakneck pace and technology-centric concerns of my duties as chair of a globally recognized digital assets and data management practice group.

As the leader of more than 100 attorneys and technologists who navigate high-stakes cybersecurity, privacy, advertising, data governance and emerging technology matters, I live life plugged in. I envisioned a modest plot of land, conveniently close to home, where I could disconnect and unwind.

My wife and I could raise chickens, I thought. Perhaps we'd get a donkey and a goat.



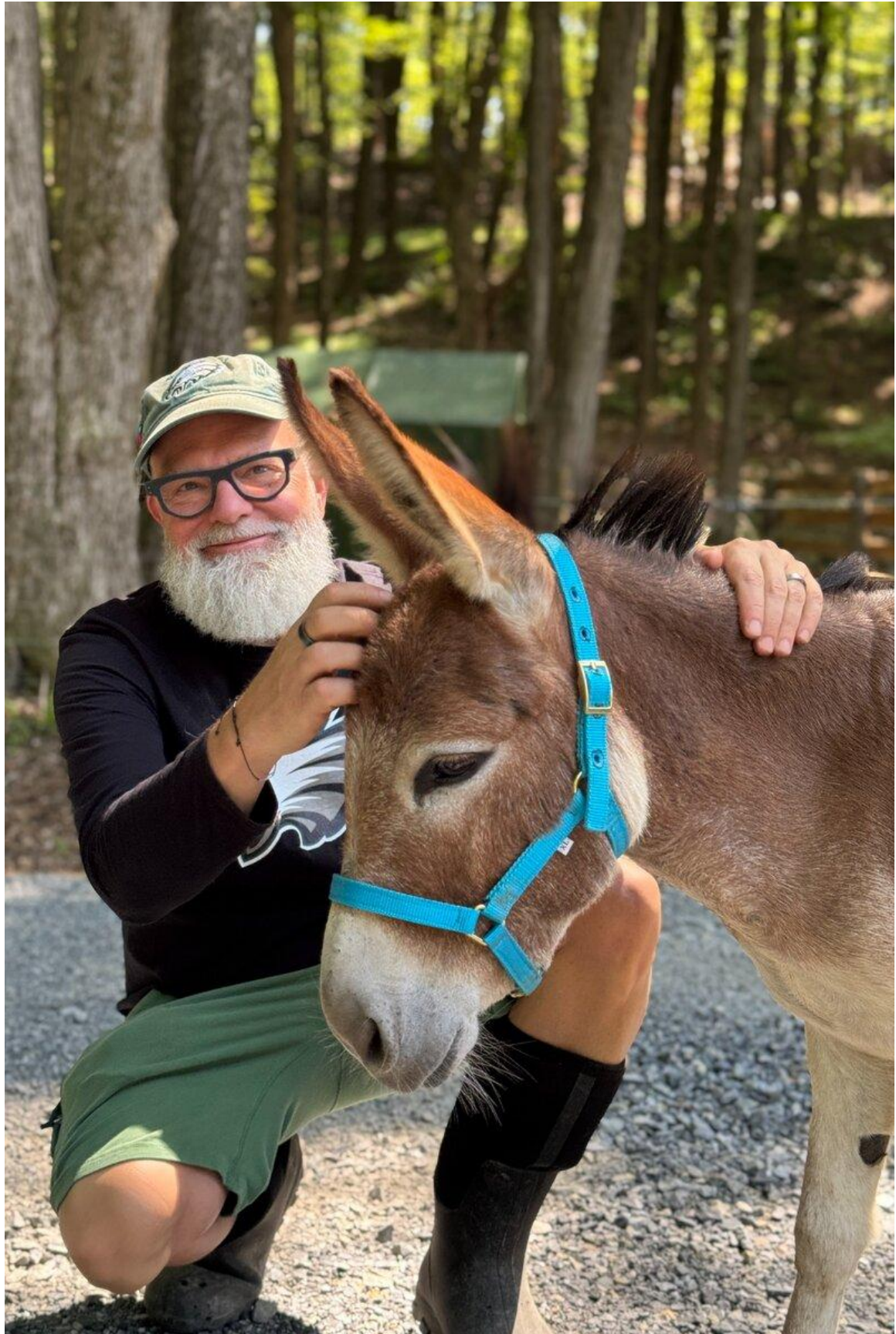
Ted Kobus

Four years and 33 miniature livestock animals later, the dream is fully realized as Ashley Hill Farm: Eighty-six acres in Old Chatham, New York, steeped in raw beauty and country living — and it is anything but simple.

It is also an unexpected source of inspiration for my leadership roles at the firm.

Growing up in the suburbs of Delaware and Philadelphia, I was far more familiar with highways than hay fields. Still, I've always had a soulful connection to animals and the outdoors. When I went to college to study chemical engineering and dormed with two roommates from farming families, it felt like kismet.

I'd occasionally travel home with them on weekends where I reveled in rising at daybreak to help with chores, inhaling deep breaths of country air while riding in the honey wagon. It was a welcome break from contemporary life.



Ted Kobus' unusual hobby involves raising miniature livestock on a farm in Old Chatham, New York. Annie is a very sweet 5-year-old miniature donkey who loves scratches. (Courtesy of Ted Kobus)

Ironically, after switching career paths and obtaining a law degree, I steered toward a practice area that was thoroughly modern. I have served as a leader, mentor and counselor in the digital risk space for nearly 25 years now, earning authority in the areas of privacy, data security and cybersecurity.

Clients have entrusted me and attorneys in the practice group that I lead with some of the most high-profile cybersecurity and privacy incidents that have occurred.

The space is dynamic, and it requires us to be innovative and knowledgeable about the latest advanced technology to identify trends, develop insights and aid clients in making healthy risk-based decisions to meet their operational goals.

My animals are unimpressed.

Fifteen chickens, eight Southdown babydoll sheep, six Nigerian dwarf goats, two Maremma sheepdogs, four miniature donkeys, two of which may be pregnant — the residents of Ashley Hill Farm could not care less about my credentials. Their sole concern is my ability to meet their basic needs. I think they view my fondness for showering them with affection as a bonus.

Elevating an appreciation for farming into a larger-than-life hobby sounds like a whimsical adventure, but the reality is that animals' lives are affected by my decisions. I learn new things every day from the farmers I consult and the caretaker who manages the property when I'm back in the city.

That experience has given me a fresh perspective on how new associates must feel entering the practice of law. They need a supportive environment to grow and succeed while facing numerous challenges in the legal field.

That doesn't mean they don't own a large piece of their success. It means that when mistakes are made, mentors and other more experienced attorneys must raise the issue directly and help figure out a course to correct them. That ability to learn and grow was reborn in me amid the pastoral landscape of upstate New York.

People are fascinated that someone who is immersed in technology and who interacts with prominent businesses on sophisticated issues is engaged in a pursuit that appears to be a polar opposite. After all, the locals in our area were still using dial-up when my wife and I arrived. We had to dig wells, run electricity lines and engage internet companies for service, in addition to designing and building infrastructure that includes a barn and year-round greenhouse.

I've discovered, though, that the two lifestyles benefit one another.

There have been plenty of opportunities to tap into my legal knowledge in service of my neighbors. As it turns out, fraud is rampant in farming and homesteading communities; the illegal activity around the purchase of miniature donkeys is insane!

I've had meaningful conversations with many locals about commonsense ways in which they can protect themselves, including suggesting that, if possible, they visit the farm from which they're making a purchase, reach out to the veterinarian for a reference, touch base with

others who bought from the seller, conduct a reverse search of the photo on the internet to ensure it wasn't lifted from another source, and engage in a FaceTime call that includes both the seller and the animal if the price seems suspiciously low.

However, my new environment has enlightened me, too. When I'm knee-deep in my chores — cleaning the chicken run and coop, tidying the donkeys' paddock area, feeding the sheep and goats their grain and hay, harvesting vegetables in the greenhouse, and so much more — I'm not wearing earbuds. I'm not listening to music or podcasts. I'm not checking my phone for emails. It is a quiet, almost meditative time during which I am fully present with the animals, while also giving my brain room to roam.

That period has produced some great ideas about the types of strategic opportunities that could benefit any attorney looking to strengthen bonds with colleagues and clients.

For instance, I've reached out to some clients who have children and invited them to a fun-filled day on the farm. I've also held productive meetings at Ashley Hill with my fellow firm leadership team members and attorneys in my practice group. We brainstormed initiatives as the pastures and groves served as our picture-perfect backdrop, then hiked the bucolic trails and played with the animals.

We all long to relate to each other on a personal level. Sharing your passion with others can create a connection outside of work, offering a potent way to bridge relationships.

I'm grateful that Ashley Hill Farm has allowed so many visitors a mental reset, just like me.

Within just moments of making the 2.5-hour drive from New York City to Old Chatham, I am greeted by bleating babydoll sheep with smiles that erase any stress. The dogs and donkeys cross the pasture, eager for hugs and scratches. The goats are always crazy; I can't help but laugh at their antics.

Those sights and sounds energize me. I return to work invigorated, ready to revisit juggling numerous responsibilities and motivated to tackle hard issues in new ways. Discovering a hobby where I could truly escape was important to me. I encourage everyone to take the time to explore a personal interest, no matter how minor it may seem, and to create a way to incorporate it into their lives. Activities that fulfill us away from the office not only make us more well-rounded, they reawaken a deeper appreciation for our work.

The farm — the once-small dream — offers everything I hoped it would. It provides peace of mind, a chance to indulge a passion for a simpler way of life. It has made me a better steward of the earth.

What I didn't realize is that, over 30 years into my career, it would also make me a better lawyer.

Ted Kobus is a partner and chair of the digital assets and data management group at BakerHostetler.

The opinions expressed are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of their employer, its clients, or Portfolio Media Inc., or any of its or their respective affiliates. This article is for general information purposes and is not intended to be and should not be taken as legal advice.