

BEYOND THE BAR: Attorney Jeffrey Glassman devoted to creating more forest for the trees with RainforestMaker



Photo by Jeff Thiebauth

Jeffrey Glassman, a Boston-based personal injury lawyer with his own practice, is striving to save the rain forest by replanting native trees. He has founded RainforestMaker to lead that effort.

by Jennifer Rosinski

In an attempt to relieve the stress of operating his own practice, Jeffrey Glassman discovered the depth of his lifelong love affair with nature and the environment.

Glassman credits his experiences communing with nature during “sacred passages” – solitary trips in the wilderness that last for days – to Mexico with helping him realize his passion for the environment. Those trips in 2001 and 2002 started Glassman down a road toward rain forest protection and reforestation.

“My goal is to plant two million trees. At first, it was one million, but I like the number two. I think it’s realistic. I think that I can plant more than that,” said Glassman, who runs a Boston personal injury firm bearing his name. “I haven’t put a timeline on it because it’s something I want to continue to do. I just want to keep growing back the rain forest.”

Glassman, who will turn 41 in late September, founded the non-profit RainforestMaker in December 2006 to give a name to his new venture. He bought three tree farms in the southern Pacific zone of Costa Rica two years ago

as investment properties and has planted 15,000 native hardwood trees, including 4,000 strictly for reforestation.

“I thought it was a great investment and I love being out in nature,” Glassman said. “I knew I could help the environment by continuing to plant trees for reforestation.”

The Needham native is involved in many Earth-friendly initiatives. He is one of about a dozen lawyers from across the state tapped to sit on the Eco-Challenge Task Force, a group that will write Green Guidelines for attorneys as part of President David W. White Jr.’s Lawyers Eco-Challenge. Glassman has also begun his own initiative, LATTE, or Lawyers Accountable To The Earth. LATTE asks for a reduction in the amount of paper used by lawyers, given estimates that nationally, on average, each lawyer uses a ton of paper each year.

“I am very pumped up about joining this challenge,” Glassman said of the Lawyers Eco-Challenge. “What we’re trying to do is ask lawyers to use easy, sustainable practices within their law practices.”

Glassman will also travel to Cuiaba,

Matos Grosso, in early September to meet with Blairo Maggi, Brazil’s “King of Soy.” Glassman will discuss ways of restoring devastated land in Brazil and preventing further destruction of its rain forest with Maggi, a soybean farmer and the governor of Matos Grosso. Greenpeace co-founder Patrick Moore, who sits on the board of directors of RainforestMaker, will accompany Glassman on the trip.

“Trees are the answer for a lot of things,” said Glassman, paraphrasing from an article written by Greenpeace co-founder Patrick Moore. “Without them, we wouldn’t have developed as we have. Rain forests account for 50 percent of the biodiversity of the planet. And, 70 percent of all cancer treatments come from the rainforest.”

A man of many interests, Glassman divides his time between his Earth-friendly pursuits and his other loves – tennis, golf, skiing and poker (a hobby that sent him to Las Vegas the past three years to play in the World Series of Poker, including making it to the Main Event in 2004).

Glassman’s lofty goals grew over time, sprouting from a childhood spent reading “The Giving Tree,” a classic book about the relationship between a boy and a tree written by Shel Silverstein. His favorite movie was 1985’s “The Emerald Forest,” about an American executive who searches the Amazon for his kidnapped son and realizes how a dam project is damaging the rainforest.

The oldest child of Rita and James Glassman – who ran a now defunct auto parts store in Cambridge dating to 1918 – was known by classmates at Rivers Country Day School in Weston for the Pink Floyd T-shirt he wore in one of his senior pictures. Then, his love for trees had not yet fully blossomed.

After graduating from Syracuse University of New York with a degree in finance, Glassman went on to Suffolk University School of Law. He had given up his dreams of working on Wall Street, but still had no intention of becoming an attorney.

“I was just going to law school to figure out how they were solving problems,” said Glassman, who is the first lawyer in his family.

Glassman went to work for a personal

injury law firm after graduating from Suffolk in 1991. He opened his own practice four years later, on Valentine’s Day, and soon realized he needed to find a way of relieving his growing stress levels.

The first step was meditation, then yoga, qigong, tai chi and acupuncture. Glassman then began to listen to meditation tapes and reached out to the author, John P. Milton, to find out more about his sacred passages.

In early 2001, Glassman signed up for one of the passages, a seven-day wilderness excursion in Baja, Mexico. Glassman made it two days before he hitched a ride back to the base camp. He tried it again, successfully, a year later.

Glassman credits that time alone with nature as part of what led to his environmental awakening. “It wasn’t a switch. It was more of a process,” he said. “I never got in touch before to turn that switch on.”

Now that Glassman is in touch with his love of nature, he is hoping to build his tree farms into a for-profit business that will help fund the non-profit. The organization has teamed up with the University of Vienna to grow trees near a biological field station in Costa Rica. RainforestMaker.org is now being fully funded by Glassman’s law practice.

RainforestMaker’s mission is to grow back the rainforests by raising money and awareness, encouraging balanced living and asking companies to replace the trees they have cut down. The Web site, www.rainforestmaker.org, asks for donations, lists eco-friendly products and includes a calculator to determine how many pounds of paper a business goes through each year.

Glassman said his meeting with Maggi, the soy plantation farmer, is a step toward saving the rainforest by helping businesses change their practices. The two men met for the first time in New York in May, just days after Glassman read about him in a *National Geographic* magazine article.

“He’s been really criticized for his practices. I think there are a lot of ways people should reach out to him to help him rather than judge him,” Glassman said of Maggi. “I’m willing to suggest solutions that make financial sense for him that mean prosperity for his region while also working to restore devastated lands. He’s open to it.”