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Russell Barr left a promising New York City law firm 17 years ago to open a law office in Vermont. Barr & Associates PC occupies a farmhouse near the foot of the Mountain Road in Stowe. Barr's broad practice encompasses corporate and transactional law, medical malpractice and personal injury, probate, and civil litigation, keeps an adjunct office on Park Avenue.

BARR CHART

by Will Lindner

This lawyer left "the job of a lifetime" for the lifestyle of a lifetime

Russell Barr was on a rocket ship, headed to the top of his profession in the most strategically important location for corporate attorneys in the known world: Manhattan. It was the coveted career path for ambitious, hard-working young lawyers.

That's why nearly everyone who knew him was shocked when he veered

radically away from that path in 1993 to move to a small community in Vermont — "Vermont, of all places! What kind of law do they practice in Vermont?" Barr says, paraphrasing the astonished colleagues he left behind.

Seventeen years later, he has an answer for them: corporate law, transactional law, medical malpractice and personal-injury law, real-estate law, probate, and civil litigation. And ironically, although it took a number of years to

develop and mature his practice, the work performed by Barr & Associates PC in Stowe also includes legal services for large, publicly held corporations — similar to the work he performed in New York. His Vermont firm keeps an adjunct office on Park Avenue, and the employer he left, Proskauer Rose LLP, sometimes contracts with Barr & Associates, which has two attorneys admitted to practice in the Empire State.

In some respects, though, Barr has

found legal practice in Vermont quite dissimilar to the world he knew before.

"Vermont presents a very challenging economic environment for businesses," says the 51-year-old attorney. "I think it's more rewarding to represent small businesses and individuals than large corporations, because you're actually helping people. You can see the impact of your work on people's lives."

Moving to the rural Northeast also opened up a distinctly non-urban clientele, the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe in the Mohawk Territory known as Akwesasne, in (but, importantly, not of) northern New York state.

"We've litigated in federal court for the St. Regis Tribe over a variety of issues, including their casino," says Barr, explaining that the connection originally was made by an attorney friend in Washington, D.C. Tribe members needed representation in Vermont in a liquor-seizure case. The relationship between the St. Regis Mohawks and Barr & Associates blossomed, in part because Barr and his associate Daniel Seff can practice in both New York and federal courts. It has given Barr no small measure of satisfaction.

"They're a wonderful group of people and a wonderful nation," he says. "They're the only tribe that straddles the U.S.-Canadian border, and a whole host of issues derive from that."

Nor do the complications end there.

"What you have is a sovereign nation that is within the geographic territory

of New York state. There's a federal regulatory structure that to some level regulates the Akwesasne affairs but on other levels does not. Then you have New York trying to regulate the affairs, to some degree, of an independent nation. Therein lie the interesting aspects of representing them."

Barr & Associates reaches not only into upstate New York and Manhattan, but also into other states. Associate attorney Jesse Goldfine is admitted to practice in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, and prior to joining the Stowe firm in 2008, Allen Horsley had a distinguished career in Boston and retains his membership in the Massachusetts bar.

The fourth associate (counting Barr, the fifth attorney at the firm) is Jennifer Lajoie, Barr & Associates' only native Vermonter. Originally employed as Barr's secretary in 1994, Lajoie "read" the law, completing Vermont's law-office study program and passing the bar exam 10 years ago — another thing they'd probably have trouble believing in Barr's old stomping grounds in Manhattan.

"It all makes for an interesting, boutique, small firm in Stowe, Vermont," says Barr. "That's what makes it fun. Here we are, running this practice on the Mountain Road and representing local businesses as well as larger businesses in New York and Boston. You can do that now a lot easier than 15 or 20 years ago; the ability to remotely represent clients in those centers makes this much more possible."

"The key to any business is attracting

the best talent," he summarizes, "and I have a great group. I would put my team up against any legal team in the U.S."

His wife, Toni, phrases it differently. "The people who work for him are gold," she says. "They make him a better man and a better lawyer."

That he would eventually assemble such a team could scarcely have been obvious to Barr when he swung from a path that was propelling him toward partnership at a world-class international firm (Proskauer Rose). A 1981 graduate of SUNY-Albany with a B.S. in economics and an MBA in accounting, the Long Island native earned his J.D. from the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law in New York City in 1985. He specialized in international tax law, working for two New York firms before ascending to Proskauer Rose — and then abandoning the job of a lifetime for the lifestyle of a lifetime.

"My dad thought I was crazy," he says.

Toni Barr did not. Their move to the Green Mountain State was carefully planned and assiduously executed. Toni had become uncomfortable as the mother of a 1-year-old — Hannah, the first of their three children — in New York City, and craved a safer, cleaner, more hospitable environment for raising a family.

Barr — a skier whose active lifestyle still shows on his lean, broad-shouldered frame — could think of worse places to live than the Green Mountains, where the couple would retreat for long weekends and holidays at a condominium they shared with friends at Haystack Mountain in Wilmington.

"It was our safe place," says Toni. "We were getting out of the city instead of doing the cultural things in the city. One day I looked at him and said, 'Let's move here.'"

They contrived a stealth approach in which they would give up their apartment at 62nd and Broadway to save as much money as they could, stay alternately with Barr's parents in Merrick, Long Island, and Toni's in Little Ferry, N.J., and spend every available moment house-hunting in Vermont. Their search took them to several communities around the state, and they even bid on properties in Manchester and elsewhere — bids, Toni says, in retrospect, "were luckily rejected."

Then, sitting one day in Mother's Deli in Stowe, Toni heard a woman calling after her daughter, "Come here, Hannah" — the same name as their own child.

"I said, 'That's it. It's a sign. This is where we're going to live,'" she recalls.



JEFF CLARKE

Attorney Jennifer Lajoie, the firm's only native Vermonter, joined the practice as Barr's secretary. She subsequently read the law, completed Vermont's law-office study program, and passed the bar exam 10 years ago.

