

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 2012

THE DAILY RECORD

Maryland Lawyer

News and analysis of legal matters in Maryland



MAXIMILIAN FRANZ



MAXIMILIAN FRANZ

Top, attorney Rebekah Damen Lusk and husband Steven Bright at their farm in Union Bridge. Above, fall sunlight on one of the barns.

Pasture perfect

Attorney combines practicing with helping to run horse farm

BY KRISTI TOUSIGNANT

Kristi.Tousignant@TheDailyRecord.com

Rebekah Damen Lusk and her husband get up with the sun every day. Lusk puts the teapot on and heads outside to feed 10 horses.

Then she goes for a ride for an hour or so before coming inside, sitting down at her desk and starting her day job as an attorney.

Lusk and her husband, Steven Bright, run **Windy Oak Farm**, a horse farm in Union Bridge, near Frederick. Lusk, an attorney at **Thienel Law Firm LLC**, balances her days between the legal realm and the animal kingdom.

"The point is you have to be very flexible about everything — with the legal world, with the barn work, everything," Bright said.

The couple takes care of 10 horses, four of which are theirs. The rest are boarders, which they house for extra income.

The two decided to move to the country two and a half years ago while living in Hyattsville. Lusk was working for a nonprofit in Washington and Bright had a home improvement business in the District, but the two were driving to Howard or Anne Arundel county, where they kept their horses, several times a week.

"We thought, 'Why are we living in the city when our horses are in the country?'" Lusk said.

The couple decided they were sick of city life after Lusk graduated from Columbus School of Law at the Catholic University of America in Washington. They looked at properties for six months. In August 2010, they bought Windy Oak, which had been vacant for five years.

"This place was perfect," Lusk said. "We just walked in at the right time."

Bright was still wrapping up work at his business, and it took a year to get the farm up and running, Lusk said.

From trot to canter

Earlier this month, Lusk stroked one of the boarder horses' noses as the animal stood in her stall in a barn. Her name is Laurel, and the plaque outside her stall reads: "A Princess Sleeps Here." Lusk and Bright call her the "people trainer" since she has been a riding horse for so many years and will refuse to obey a command unless a rider performs it correctly.

Riders come by on weekends to ride Laurel and the other horses for dressage lessons, which trainers come in to teach. Dressage is a competitive sport focused on the movements of a horse around a specified arena, sometimes referred to as horse ballet.

Lusk, who has been riding horses since she was 7, mostly participated in eventing, an equestrian sport that involves several types of riding, including show jumping. She switched to the calmer sport of dressage when the two bought the farm and she decided getting hurt was no



MAXIMILIAN FRANZ

Rebekah Damen Lusk has been riding horses since she was 7. For a while she participated in eventing, but she switched to dressage after she and her husband bought the Union Bridge farm.

Horses >> Practicing law, helping run farm all in day’s work for attorney

longer worth the risk.

The property has two barns, one of which was built in the late 1800s, and a two-story farmhouse where Lusk and Bright live with their two Norwegian elkhounds.

Lusk and Bright did and continue to do a lot of renovating on the farm, adding bars and mats to the barn and trimming back overgrown plants, Lusk said.

“

It’s more work than I even expected. It adds up very quickly.

REBEKAH DAMEN LUSK

“There’s lots of things we found,” Lusk said. “We are just going through piece by piece and fixing things.”

When Lusk and Bright wake up about 6 or 7 a.m., Lusk brings the horses in from the fields if it’s summer and feeds them (in the winter, she feeds them before taking them outside). She takes their blankets on or off depending on the season and gives them their medicine if they need it.

After riding, she comes inside and makes breakfast before starting work at 8 or 8:30 a.m.

“We feed everyone else, then we finally feed ourselves,” Lusk said.

While Thienel Law Firm is based in Columbia, Lusk mostly works from home. She practices business, real estate and landlord/tenant law, but 15 to 20 percent of her practice is animal law cases.

In the evening, they take the horses in when it’s dark, giving them hay and feed and blankets in the winter. In the summer, they take the horses out. If Lusk is busy, she will go back to legal work for a while. One of the two checks on the horses at 9 or 10 p.m.

“It’s more work than I even expected,” Lusk said. “It adds up very quickly.”

Throughout the day, Bright’s full-time job is to take care of the farm, cutting the grass and fixing what needs to be fixed. His most recent project is figuring out a way to convert horse manure to heat (their house does not have a heating system).

‘Keeps you honest’

The two used to muck the horse stalls in the barn themselves, but eventually hired someone else to do what was often a two-hour task.

“It keeps you honest,” Bright said.

Lusk said it is hard to balance the outside labor with her job as an attorney, and Bright sometimes has to do her morning chores when she must be in court.

And her clients who board horses can be almost as challenging as her



MAXIMILIAN FRANZ

Bright’s job is taking care of the farm, cutting the grass and fixing what needs to be fixed.

clients as an attorney, she said, calling her during the day with problems or questions about their horses.

“I have to balance the needs of others and the needs of the horses and the needs of my clients throughout the day,” Lusk said.

For Bright, the independence of life on the farm has been the key.

“I’m perfectly happy not going to work for somebody,” Bright said. “I am working for me. No one can tell me what to do today.”

Lusk partly chose a legal career because she would be able to work from anywhere, a lifestyle that would

mesh well with owning and taking care of horses.

“The fact is if you have a hard day with cases, to be able to come home and ride and just walk outside is really nice,” Lusk said.

And for both of them, owning the farm is a team effort.

“He saves me,” Lusk said. “It’s a lot easier when there is two of us.”

Reprinted with permission of
The Daily Record Co. ©2012