



Breakfast With: Troy Phillips of Glast, Phillips & Murray

The law firm's managing partner at his home away from home, Preston Trail Golf Club.

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No one's around when I walk through the door of Preston Trail Golf Club and find myself in a foyer decorated with a cigar-store Indian and portraits of middle-aged men in suits. I can see down a hall what looks to be the dining room, and so I head that direction, past the sort of environs you'd expect in a place like this—plenty of wood paneling and pictures of golfers on the walls.

The dining room feels spacious, thanks to floor-to-ceiling windows all around that peer down onto the practice green and holes Nos. 9 and 18 of the golf course. Only one of the many tables is occupied. There sits a tall man looking over some papers. I figure this must be Troy Phillips, 66, the managing partner of law firm Glast, Phillips, & Murray.

Preston Trail is an exclusive place. Membership is by invitation only, limited to 285 men (women aren't allowed, even as guests). Among the members are well-known athletes like Troy Aikman, Mike Modano, and Lee Trevino, and local leaders like Dallas Mayor Mike Rawlings. The club is something of a second home for Phillips, a scratch golfer who plays there a few times each week.

It's a Tuesday and a little early yet (8 a.m.), which explains why we're the only people in the place. I've not been in my chair 10 seconds when a server arrives to take our orders.

"We don't have a menu here. So just tell him whatever your favorite breakfast is," Phillips says. I hesitate, temporarily paralyzed by the potentially limitless possibilities. Phillips steps in to assist me: "The pancakes are wonderful. Everything else is pretty good."

"OK," I say. "I'll have the wonderful pancakes." At the server's suggestion, I add a side of bacon.

"Let me have the grapefruit and a bowl of Raisin Bran," Phillips tells the server. He's already drinking coffee.

“So, why law?” I ask, to get the conversation rolling. His father was a roughneck, and Phillips himself worked his way through school roughnecking. He knew it wasn’t what he wanted to do forever.

“Law was a commitment I made early on, and I never wavered from that. I don’t know, [because of] *Perry Mason*, maybe,” he says.

Glast, Phillips & Murray operates differently than most other firms in the industry. It doesn’t hire an army of young lawyers to train. Instead, it takes on only experienced attorneys it can trust to handle their own affairs. The result is lower overhead and a decentralized management in which committees don’t make decisions for the entire group.

“A committee has got to be the worst invention ever,” Phillips says.

Our food arrives, and I find that my pancakes are small but fluffy and light. “I’m enjoying your pancakes vicariously,” Phillips says. A sit-down breakfast of any sort is a rare treat for him.

“Breakfast is probably my favorite meal, and I almost never eat it,” he says. Usually each morning he just grabs a cup of coffee before heading to the office. “I’m not a health nut.”

When I raise the subject of the troubled times that major law firms have been going through in recent years, which have included cutbacks and layoffs in an industry that had rarely dealt with such measures before, Phillips is quick to argue that plenty of firms and lawyers continue to do quite well.

Still, given the surplus of lawyers in the nation today, would he advise a young person to enter the field?

“If I had it to do over again, I’d probably get an MBA, go to business school,” he says. “The practice of law is a very difficult profession. The work’s hard, the pressures are hard, expectations are great, and there’s an easy scorecard to see how you’re doing, whether you’re winning or losing. You’re not building equity. You start all over every year. You’re not building something you can sell. You’re not creating something you can leave to your kids. You’re being paid by the hour for services rendered. It’s a good hourly rate—you can certainly make a good living at it—but it has its limitations.”

These days Phillips handles a lighter docket, in corporate law and litigation, than he once did. He devotes some of his working hours to other business interests, including a title company. But he still spends some time in court on behalf of his clients. In fact, after our meeting, he’s headed to a hearing in Fort Worth.

“Still want to be Perry Mason?” I ask him. He laughs.

“I’m probably over that,” he says. “Perry had a very unique practice. There aren’t very many criminal lawyers who always get to represent innocent clients.”