

By: Daisy Cedeño

The Next Great Hispanic Attorney

6 am...alarm goes off. Hit snooze and get an extra ten minutes of sleep before it's time to get up and go running. And so begins the typical day in a hectic work week for John Leon, attorney and pride of Hialeah, Florida. "I'm preparing for Denali", he tells me. That's right, John, born of Cuban parents who migrated to New Jersey in the early 70's is preparing for an expedition up to the summit of the world's coldest mountain, Mt. Denali or as it is also known, Mt. McKinley situated in Alaska. Further probing of the admittedly still half asleep jogger reveals that Denali itself is practice for what John hopes is his early 2012 summit of the famed Mt. Everest located near Tibet in Asia. I've never met anyone who has ever said to me "I'm planning a summit of Everest." So, I asked why? In the typical whimsical, matter of fact approach John has become known for, he says. "Like George Mallory once remarked, because it's there". And so begins another day in the life of John Leon described to me by friends as an academic, musician, artist, philanthropist, adventurer, and oh yes, an attorney. These and other titles have been used to describe John Leon, the brash 37 year old Hialeah, Florida native who has in short order made a name for himself as a charismatic and aggressive young trial lawyer.

Whether it's painting, playing chess, competing in a triathlon, climbing a mountain, being the only student on an all faculty bio-ethics and genetics council, being a guest lecturer at Universities on esoteric political theories most have never even heard of, or even Chairing a "think tank" in his 20's, John's intellectual curiosity and mental drive have seemingly no end. When asked why he has delved into so many com-



pletely unrelated pursuits, John says, "I suppose I bore easily; I've always been a bit of a restless soul".

Mid-Morning: As we walk into the office suite that adorns his name, "The Law Offices of John Leon", I'm curious as to the novelty conference room and outer office that adorn the name of two of John's favorite musicians, Elvis Presley and Frank Sinatra. Sure enough in the conference room it's there, a life size Elvis Presley mannequin in full jump suit, as if we were walking into a private performance being held in the firm's conference room. Today, John is here for meetings with clients who have flown in to see him from the Caribbean and South America. His assistants tell me early on in his career he began representing clients throughout the U.S. and eventually South America. Those closest to him will tell you that his client base is a testament to his work ethic and determination to succeed. John's talents



were recognized early on having been recruited to clerk for some of the largest, most prolific state and national law firms, including Washington, D.C. based Verner, Liipfert, Bernhard, McPherson and Hand, who proudly named among its' partners Senators Bob Dole and George Mitchell, represented some 30% of the Fortune 500 and was ranked #1 by Fortune Magazine for lobbying firms in the United States. As impressive as the law firms he worked for is the diversity of areas John has practiced law. At one time or another, John has worked in the areas of medical malpractice defense, insurance defense, commercial litigation, employment, regulatory, family, corporate, commercial and residential real estate, administrative, governmental procurement, federal and legislative affairs, land use and zoning and general appellate work for some of the state's oldest and most prestigious law firms. John says that as a young lawyer he had an insatiable thirst for learning and emerged himself in as many types of cases as he could. John has already been in practice for himself since 2003 and has handled or assisted with several matters against or on behalf of several Fortune 500 companies. This probably accounts for why John, just out of law school, was among the most active young trial lawyers in Miami-Dade County, trying upwards of fifteen jury trials during the first eight months or so of his career. "When he walked into a courtroom you knew John had "it", whatever "it" was. His presence was large and filled the courtroom. I was just glad he was on

our side," says Thayer Musa, an attorney and early colleague of John's. Not one to rest on his laurels, John didn't wait long before opening the law firm that now bears his name. In 2003, John founded The Law Offices of John Leon, a civil litigation firm based in Miami Lakes, Florida and concentrating in the areas of real estate, corporate, personal injury, and family law. John has represented all types of clients, commercial and personal, all throughout Florida, the Continental United States, the Caribbean and South America.

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Still, John's professional interests aren't restricted to his law firm. In fact, John was founder and former Chairman of COPA; the Caribbean Organization for Policy Advancement, a progressive think tank that focused on social, political

and economic issues affecting the Caribbean basin. John has also worked as an adjunct instructor/professor, guest speaker and lecturer at local colleges and universities, on various topics from U.S. History, English, Mathematics, political theory, civil practice and legal ethics, to leadership in the 21st Century. In his mid 20's, John was even the host of a local television show that focused on current events. Years later, John is still making the rounds on local and national tel-



evision. In fact, a television news crew recently paid John a visit to interview him regarding the credit crisis and the national economy in an interview that aired nationally. "That wasn't a typical day for me, but it was certainly interesting", John remarks as he pours over files set aside for him to review while also trying to get through our questions.

Afternoon: John is on his way to a meeting with a state university whose foundation John is assisting with raising much needed funds during this time of budget cuts despite increases in student enrollment. As we walk, he explains that even with all of the responsibility that comes with running his law firm, John says his real passion and where he feels his biggest impact has been in his philanthropic work. John's charitable and philanthropy resume is long, going back to his early 20's when he was a political operative and governmental relations representative for the telecommunications industry. Most recently, John was on the Miami City Ballet Host Committee, Miami Symphony Orchestra Board of Directors and was founder and host of his highly publicized "Rock the Fashion," Fall Fashion Week Gala. The event was a rock and roll fashion themed red carpet gala for charity which benefited St. Thomas University's School of Law in 2008. "It was great, we had about 100 inquiries from the media, as well as professional athletes, politicians and celebrities in attendance" states John. We even had folks who flew in from other states and Europe that were in attendance. And oh, by the way, John was the lead singer for the rock band "Lithium Monday" that headlined the night's fashion show. When asked about his singing, John smiles and says simply, "I wasn't very good."

"I've never met someone so driven. It's like the guy never sleeps" says Miguel Radillo a friend and business associate. Case in point is that over the years John has become well known for his 4 am

...Named to the "40 under 40" list of Most Outstanding Attorneys...

emails to staff and business associates. "I'll get in to work in the morning and I'll check the times on the email to see whether John even slept the night before", says Christine, one of John's assistants at the law firm.

All those long hours have paid dividends for the young litigator. "What our law firm has given me and what I'm most thankful for is the opportunity to influence the development of our community. Miami is the capitol of the Americas and I have always aspired to contribute to its development. Whether through the charitable work we do here at the Firm, or the representation of burgeoning young companies, we feel as though we're helping with the development of South Florida economically, culturally, educationally and socially. It's all I've ever wanted and it's why I involve myself in Miami's various cultural, educational and economic entities." John's efforts haven't gone unnoticed. For his vast efforts and accomplishments, John was awarded "2008 Lawyer of the Year" by the organizers and sponsors of the "NYE" celebration on Miami Beach. John was also named a "Key Player" by a local publication for his legal and civic efforts in March 2009. Most recently, John was named among the top attorneys in Florida by two prominent publications, was the recipient of the Leadership Medal for civic and business leadership and named to the "40 under 40" list of Most Outstanding Attorneys by two of the largest charitable organizations in the U.S.

As for the future, John says he hopes to continue building a presence within the South Florida and Hispanic communities. "It's important that Hispanic professionals invest in their communities. As professionals we have the opportunity, responsibility and distinct honor of giving back and investing in our country's development and continued growth." As for his ultimate goal, "be a catalyst in Miami's development as capitol of the Americas".

Despite his lofty goals and all his accolades, John maintains that the firm's charitable work in the community and the legal work it does on behalf of its clients are his real rewards, and that with any luck, his story and that of the firm's, have only begun to be written. Well John, I guess we'll see you next year.