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Using his son's broken bat and a bottle of water, lawyer Andrew Zashin of Zashin and Rich takes batting practice in the firm's kitchen in the Ernst & Young Tower in the new Flats East Bank area. He says Clevelanders need to "be comfortable being Cleveland."

Attorney goes to bat for Northeast Ohio

Andrew Zashin says we should focus on the area's world-class amenities and 'find our inner cool'



Grant Segall

Lawyer Andrew Zashin is dashing through a tour of Zashin and Rich's ultra-modern office in the new Ernst & Young Tower in the new Flats East Bank area. "These are my alcoholics — I mean my acolytes ..." he says as the PA system plays Springsteen in the background. "These are functionless yellow things. People tell me they're nap couches ... This is our bar. It's for clients and lawyers. It breeds congeniality and teamwork ..."

Soon Zashin settles, relatively speaking, near a pair of original Jacobs Field seats and fields questions like Omar Vizquel charging grounders.

Q: Tell us about yourself.

A: I've been named a "Super Lawyer" for years now. [a rating given to lawyers who have attained a high degree of peer recognition and professional achievement.] I teach advanced family law at Case Western Reserve University. I practice locally, statewide, internationally. I'm on the board of the International Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers. The successful firms in Cleveland are reaching out beyond borders. We have an office in Columbus, and I'm licensed in Ohio, Florida, New York, D.C. and the federal courts. I travel overseas a lot.

We just tried a case that turned into a paper for Oxford University. A client in Tokyo hired a private eye in California and found his daughter in Columbus. Our argument was novel but ultimately accepted. The child was returned.

Q: How did you get into the field?
A: My brother and partner, Stephen, and I are third-generation lawyers.



Zashin with his Tribe gear and "hadass boots." Zashin says the Flats and League Park are cool, but tourism pitches like "Bellevue" aren't.

Dad put this firm together in '81, and it's been my only business.

Q: Your dad, Robert, was known for pacing courtrooms in his shirt-sleeves and socks.

A: I don't think they let you do that anymore. But he owned that courtroom. He was formidable.

Q: Do you like the Flats today?
A: This is Cleveland's best chance, maybe last chance, to have a sustainable urban area. I'm hoping this becomes the next Crocker Park. Taking advantage of the river and the lake makes sense.

I love our space. It reflects an edginess. I love the bright colors. There are places in our building and on the roof where you can host an event and have a magnificent view of one of the largest lakes in the world.

Q: What's family law like?

A: I usually see people at their worst. Next to death, divorce is the most traumatic thing. You fight about your children. And divorce is the greatest destroyer of wealth in the U.S.

Divorce isn't fair. Marriage isn't always fair. I don't do fair. I do results.

Q: What's our Domestic Relations Court like?

A: Domestic Relations Court in the past few years is getting better. There was a very bad vibe and culture. Now the practitioners are feeling much more positive energy here.

Q: How good are Cleveland's lawyers?

A: Our legal community offers the same legal services that you can get in Chicago or New York for less money with the same work ethic and integrity and quality.

Q: Where do you live and who with?

A: I live in Pepper Pike with five kids and a smoking hot wife, Lisa. I met her on the school bus. I must have been 11 or 12. Love at first sight. I wanted to baby-sit her.

Q: How do you work out?

A: I wrestle Aldo, my giant schnauzer. And I train with Joey Pavlovitch from Cleveland Heights. He's very disciplined. He's a machine.

Q: Where do you hang out?

A: The Velvet Tango Room. It's fabulous. I get the Moscow Mule cocktail. It's done perfectly, in a copper cup.

I love the new Armor Court in the Art Museum. Lake View Cemetery is magnificent, especially with the change of seasons.

Cleveland's environment is so lush and verdant. I love taking a Sunday drive. I just visited the islands for the first time — spectacular.

I have a customized BMW M3. I take it to Nelson Ledges and Mid-Ohio [Sports Car Course].

Q: You sound big on Cleveland.

A: Cleveland has been very good to me. But I have a problem with "Bellevue" and "Destination Cleveland" and, what was it, "Cleveland Plus"? This is silly branding.

We need to find our inner cool. There are things in Cleveland that are world-class. We should focus on those.

You know what's world-class? Our lakefront, which hasn't been developed. University Circle. League Park is older than Doubleday Park in Cooperstown. So much happened there, like the Negro League World Series. The Indians' Tris Speaker is a forgotten Cleveland hero. Never wanted to come to Cleveland. Became a committed Cleveland guy.

Let's be comfortable being Cleveland. Let's be comfortable in our own skin.

Q: Do you like Progressive Field?

A: Twenty years later, Progressive Field is still fantastic. How is it that we have such bad attendance when we're a contender?

Q: Because we're more of a football town?

A: So we built the Browns' stadium in the one place we could have had a new park on the lake, as if there were a shortage of space. We have an open-air stadium for eight miserable, cold Sundays and a Kenny Chesney concert.

Q: Also a basketball town?

A: And we've re-embraced LeBron. I hope we win championships, and I think we will, but I don't think we should forget the Decision. How do we unburn a jersey?