No Stone Unturned

How an attorney’s childhood curiosity turned into the collection of a lifetime.

STEP INTO THE OFFICE OF INGLESIDE ATTORNEY KEVIN SCHLEICHER AND YOU’LL BE GREETED WITH A DISPLAY CABINET HOLDING HUNDREDS OF ROCKS.

From petrified Texas wood to a turquoise egg out of Afghanistan, each unique piece in Schleicher’s collection holds a special significance. And yet those on display for clients represent just a fraction of his full collection at home—an assortment so vast its total size is unknown.

“I have rocks all over the house,” said Schleicher. “I have rocks in the bedroom, in the yard, in the garden. I have boxes and boxes and buckets of them.”

By definition, Schleicher is a rock hound. Whether he’s on vacation miles from home or just out for a stroll in his neighborhood, Schleicher is looking for rocks to add to his collection. It’s a passion he’s held since his youth, when he would gather interesting pieces and haul prize finds back to his house. “I usually had some sort of collection going, or just carried one in my pocket,” said Schleicher.

If you have a question about a rock, chances are that Schleicher has an answer or can at least help you find one. Although not formally trained, he has done extensive research on the subject, reading up and interacting with other collectors, and is well versed in the geological history of Texas.

As Schleicher moved around the state for school and other life events, he noted the changes in rock availability and distribution along the way. Now situated near the Gulf Coast, he says the assortment of rocks is limited, but he makes time to travel on field trips to hunt and gather. On an excursion to Sanderson, in West Texas, Schleicher unearthed ammonite fossils, along with limestone, sandstone, and melanite pieces. Another search west of Orange Grove, near Corpus Christi, yielded agate and petrified palm tree trunks, some still intact and upright. Schleicher says the latter find is likely the result of a volcano that took place in the Cenozoic Era.

Schleicher is not alone in his passion for rocks. When he discusses his hobby with others, he often finds that the person, or someone he or she knows, holds a similar interest. Schleicher has connected with fellow collectors online, through channels such as Facebook and eBay, and his hobby has piqued the interest of those he works with professionally. “I have clients who bring rocks to my office all the time.” While some want to know the value of pieces, others just want to share them.

Around 2006, Schleicher met with local enthusiasts through the Gulf Coast Gem & Mineral Society in Corpus Christi. His involvement has offered the perfect opportunity to impart his knowledge of rocks on others—and to learn new skills, including polishing and cutting. With more than 100 people who share an interest in earth sciences, from fossil history to lapidary arts, the society functions as a meeting space and place to trade information.

As a member and past president of the organization, Schleicher helped develop rock camps, where kids can earn badges in everything from collecting and identifying rocks and minerals to learning about earth processes. The camps, which first started as an initiative to deter aging membership in the group, now have more attentive students than the group can accommodate. “The first day of the first kids’ camp, when we got done, one of the kids came up to me and said, ‘This has been the best day of my life,’” said Schleicher. “I’ve had a bunch of them tell me that. Makes you want to cry.”

Though he’s held many hobbies in his life, Schleicher says collecting rocks has always stood out as a favorite. In a profession where some cases are never truly closed and issues can arise unexpectedly, Schleicher believes rock collecting allows him to have an outlet where he can see the finished results of his efforts.

“Doing law, you can’t really put your hands on your work. It’s hard to know whenever you’ve completely finished a case, like if you go to trial, there could be an appeal, things like that,” explained Schleicher. “When you’re polishing a rock, when it’s done, it’s done. You can hold it in your hand.”

HANNAH KIDD
Tweeting #Justice
How a campaign strategy transformed into a can’t-miss online presence.

Whether he’s quoting historical figures, commenting on current events, or cracking jokes, Texas Supreme Court Justice Don Willett has quite the following on Twitter. By balancing work and personal life, Willett’s digital connection with the public sets a precedent for other officials. Keeping a 140-character limit in mind, he answers questions about his social media successes.

Why did you join Twitter?
Mainly as a campaign comm tool. People consume info online, esp political info. It’s political malpractice not to engage via social media.

You’ve tweeted more than 6,400 times. Were those all directly from you, or do you have a helper?
For better or worse, it’s 100% me, which I think people find refreshing & authentic. (It’s tough to believe I’ve tweeted that much, though.)

What comments do people have about your use of Twitter?
Many folks (mis)describe me as the most interesting public official on Twitter—a bar so low it’s subterranean. I keep it light & positive.

Name three people everyone on Twitter should follow.
Besides me? Ace historian Michael Beschloss (@BeschlossDC). The genius observations of @HonestToddler. And for sports junkies, @TheFakeESPN.

How can an attorney benefit from Twitter?
Follow incisive folks across a range of views & areas—just to learn & laugh. As for boosting biz, info can ricochet fruitfully online.

You’re active on Facebook. Which platform do you prefer?
I enjoy both, but the quantity & content differs. FB = more personal & family-focused. Twitter = more current events & newsy, & more often.

What rules do you have for your account?
I don’t discuss issues that could appear before me or throw partisan sharp elbows. I strive to keep things witty, informative & interesting.

Have you ever had to deal with trolls?
I’ve only blocked 1 person, who committed the cardinal sin of saying rude things about my sainted mother. Nobody disses heroic Mama Doris!

How many tweets a day is too many?
I don’t follow folks who tweet w/ every breath. The volume is paralyzing. I tweet maybe 10-20x/day. It varies & depends on what’s happening.

To read the full Twitter-view, go to texasbar.com/willett.

Texas Supreme Court Justice Don Willett crafts clever tweets.

IN RECESS

TEXAS PEOPLE

Jaime Esparza
District Attorney, El Paso

Gibson Gayle
Norton Rose Fullbright, Houston

Dan Worthington
Arias, Hall & Rodriguez, McAllen

Victoria Garcia
Bracewell & Giuliani, L.L.P., San Antonio