



HART PHOTOS

Melissa Smith maneuvers around the pen to cut cattle with horse Tiny Bar Oak.

HORSE PLAY

A Marshall attorney finds a thrill in competitive horse riding.

GROWING UP A CITY GIRL, MELISSA SMITH ALWAYS DREAMED OF OWNING A HORSE. But the Los Angeles and Houston suburbs she called home kept her equestrian realities limited to rides at summer camp and stores with motorized ponies. That all changed in the late 1990s when Smith, a litigator with Gillam & Smith in the East Texas town of Marshall, purchased a Marion County ranch, complete with piney-wooded pastures and a century-old barn. “It was love at first sight,” she said.

And it wasn’t long before Smith had bought her first horse, a patient Quarter Horse gelding named Holly Jewel. With a history of working with inexperienced riders, Holly Jewel helped Smith learn the basics, and those lessons proved beneficial as she took on a new passion—competition cutting. In 2003, Smith attended a Fort Worth horse show with a friend. Although she appreciated the artistry and beauty of the Western pleasure class they went to watch, Smith found herself drawn to an action-packed cutting competition nearby. “No offense to my loyal old ranch horse back home,” she said, “but I had never seen such intelligent, strong, and well-trained horses. I was sold.”

The equestrian sport of cutting involves using a horse to separate—or cut off—a single calf from a herd. Working the reigns, a rider tells the horse which calf to split from the group, and the horse then moves to defeat the calf’s natural attempts to rejoin the herd until the rider signals to stop. The sport’s roots date back to the Old West, when the practice was used to separate different ranches’

cattle on cattle drives. During modern competition cutting, riders have two and a half minutes to show the horse’s skills. Judging is based on herd work, control of the calf, and degree of difficulty, which is determined by the behavior of the calf chosen to be cut. Penalties are given for mistakes such as a horse pawing or biting a calf, losing a calf, or holding too long on a cut.

Determined to try cutting for herself, Smith returned home from the event and started researching trainers. Preparing for competition was extensive and included numerous practice rides and even a rehearsal with a mechanical cow. “At times, the cow and the horse are moving very, very rapidly. That’s why you have to be a good rider.”

Smith finally reached a point at which she was confident—and good enough—to work with an actual herd. “When I cut my first real cow, I never looked back,” she said. “When you watch cutting done right, it looks so easy and beautiful, but when you are on the horse, it is not unlike driving a sports car—a complete adrenaline rush.”

Smith has found that the key to successful cutting is being in tune with the horse she is riding, so she regularly spends time with her most frequent competitors, Tiny Bar Oak and Playgun’s Angel, both American Quarter Horses. “You can send a horse to a trainer and the trainer can spend hundreds of hours working with the horse, but you can’t succeed as a rider until you spend time in the saddle with that horse yourself,” said Smith. “There is just no substitute for the trust that develops between horse and rider from hours spent together. It shows in the pen.” Bonding efforts have paid off for Smith, who has competed in shows across the Southwest, including the American Quarter Horse Association World Championship Show, as well as the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo. The highlight of her cutting career was a win at the San Antonio Stock Show & Rodeo in 2012.

Smith’s cutting and legal lifestyles manage to work well together—she has even used show pen examples during trial. Still, Smith relishes the fact that she can put legal work aside and come home to the ranch after a stressful week. Smith and her family have added more acreage and improvements to their property, including additional barns, paddocks, and a silo-turned-living space. They raise horses, as well as chickens and approximately 20 head of Texas longhorn cattle.

“We have weekends when we literally go through the gate and don’t come out again until Monday morning.”

HANNAH KIDDOO

Beating the Clock

How a Dallas attorney stays fit.

IN JUST A FEW MONTHS, KEN RAGGIO WILL OFFICIALLY BECOME A SENIOR CITIZEN. But this Dallas family law attorney isn't ready to slow down just yet. A longtime sports and fitness buff, Raggio can sprint, cycle, and climb faster than most of the younger lawyers in Texas. While some might think he is a bit obsessed with keeping in shape, Raggio thrives on winning awards in races around the country.

"I actually enjoy it," said Raggio. "I get the buzz of competing, and I'm pretty good at it. I have to drag myself to the gym. But having goals gets me to do it. Otherwise, I'd just be a couch potato."

Raggio's love of sports began as a child and grew stronger when playing for the Legal Eagles, the University of Texas School of Law student football team, and running intramural track. After graduation, he helped set up the Young Lawyers Football League in Austin. Raggio eventually moved to Dallas, where he practices law at Raggio & Raggio, and played on bar league teams throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

It was through staying in shape for his current Saturday football games that Raggio rediscovered his aptitude for running. He started participating in track and field meets for seniors and has experienced considerable success in

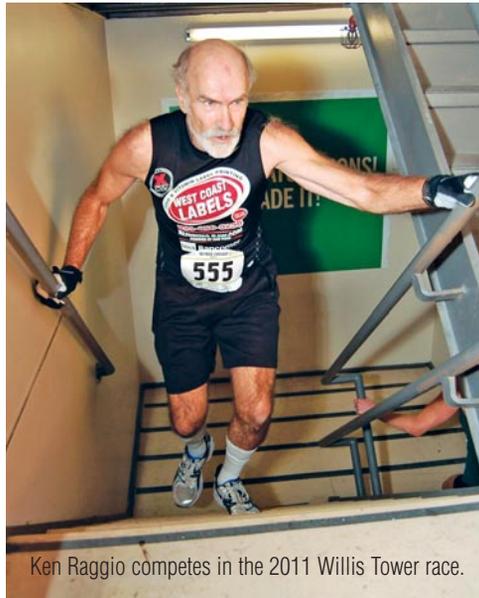
these events; in 2005, he won gold, silver, and bronze at the National Senior Games. "People regularly can do the 100, 200, and 400 because they're sprinters," he said. "Doing the 400, 800, and 1500 is difficult throughout any level of track—not just old guys. A reason a bronze wasn't a silver is that I tripped and had to crawl over the line."

Each year, Raggio typically runs in two or three 5Ks, as well as spring and summer track meets; cycles to the top of 12,000-foot passes in the Rocky Mountains (and enjoys "free wheeling" back down); and participates in three or four stair-climbing races. In the 2012 Empire State Building Run-Up, he finished the 86 flights of stairs in 15 minutes and 30 seconds, winning his division. He also took the stairs to the 103rd floor of the Willis Tower (formerly the Sears Tower), in which he placed second in his age group with a time of 19 minutes.

To compete in such a variety of physically demanding sports, Raggio amps up his training for about a month before an event,

sometimes making time for two workouts a day.

"Your job needs to be exercising six days a week," he said. "Because if you don't, you're telling your body to go into the slow decline mode. Genetically we're supposed to be animals trotting around the savannah. And when you sit around at the desk all day, you're just telling your body to die. That's a tangible reason for doing what I'm doing—not a warm, fuzzy reason—but I don't want to be one of those 'old' people." *LINDSAY STAFFORD MADER*



Ken Raggio competes in the 2011 Willis Tower race.

TEXAS PEOPLE



David L. Evans
48th District Court,
Fort Worth

Appointed as judge for the 8th Administrative Judicial Region by Gov. Rick Perry.



Maria Salas-Mendoza
120th Judicial District Court,
El Paso

Received the 2014 Texas Women Lawyers' Pathfinder Award.



Mike Burke
Peek and Toland,
Austin

Appointed to the OneStar National Service Commission by Gov. Rick Perry.



Michael R. Cooper
Michael R. Cooper,
Salado

Appointed to the Order of St. John, an Order of Chivalry of the British Crown.