

COLUMNS • a hammer & a nail

Mike Hamilton's new deck: a Larry "Ron" King exclusive

Ron Sussman **Law Office 101**



Great news! In recent months, more people have been reading **TMPeople** than ever before! The numbers are skyrocketing! In fact, mathematical projections indicate that by spring, **TMPeople** readership numbers might actually hit two figures!

I believe it was Edward R. Murrow, or perhaps Spiderman, who said, “With great readership comes great responsibility.” Turns out that includes the responsibility to provide accurate home repair information, crazy as that sounds. I am now told that the things I write have to “be accurate,” and “be within common construction industry standards,” and “not subject the USPTO to lawsuits.” Those quotes are of course, Chris Farley sarcastic air quotes. So, I

can either conduct rigorous research to ensure that the home repair information I provide is up-to-date and correct, or I can just interview someone else and not worry about it.

Mike Hamilton is the managing attorney of Law Office 103. He has worked at the USPTO since the early Reagan administration. Before that, he worked at Oblon, Spivak here in Northern Virginia. He is a graduate of the University of Kansas, making him a Jayhawk, whatever that is...is that like a Hoya? But I digress. Based on all of this, you might think Mike is a pretty bright guy, yet this past summer he decided to build his own deck. I talked to Mike about how it went. For purposes of this in-

terview, I’ll be taking on the persona of America’s finest interviewer, Larry King. Now, I’ve never actually seen Larry King on TV, but I have seen a Saturday Night Live skit that I’m sure was completely accurate.

Larry King: Welcome to Larry King Live. Our guest today is Mike Hamilton. If you only see one film for the rest of your life, make it “Welcome to Mooseport” starting megastars Gene Hackman, Ray Romano, and all-round class act, Rip Torn. Thoughts?

Mike Hamilton: What?

LK: Mike, this summer you decided to build your own deck. Is that because, like me, you suffered some serious head injury, or did you just lose a bet?

see **HAMMER NAIL** next page

HAMMER NAIL from previous page

MH: Neither, Ron.

LK: Call me Larry.

MH: Um, OK...Larry. I hadn't originally planned on doing the work myself. The husband of one of my wife's co-workers was an out-of-work contractor. My wife and I had been talking about a new deck and we thought that, by hiring him, we could get the deck built that we'd been wanting and help our friend at the same time. I had been planning on providing some "sweat equity" in order to bring down the cost. But then, before he was able to start, our friend's father had a stroke, and then the friend got a full time job, so he wasn't able to do the work. However, the friend and I had done a lot of the planning, so I had an idea of what I wanted the deck to look like, and how it might go together. Plus, my son was home from college for the summer so he could help too. Since I was planning on doing some of the work, why not all of the work?



LK: For my money Mike, there's no better writer than Shirley MacLaine.

MH: Did you ask me what my concerns were upon embarking on such a project? Well, first I was concerned about the planning. I had to visualize the deck in three dimensions, and I had

to figure out the proper order in which to do things because what work you do now affects the subsequent work. Even something that seems simple like a deck requires a great amount of planning. Based on what I knew I had to do, I figured I had the skill level needed, so that



wasn't a big concern. Of course, I could always use more skills, but I figured I had enough to do this.

LK: That's funny Mike. I wish Freddy Prinze was alive today so we could both laugh.

MH: The hardest part? Easy. Digging the postholes. Here in Northern Virginia the ground is nothing but rocks and clay. Even renting a power posthole digger, it still took my son and me all day to dig the five, two-foot deep, 18-inch diameter holes. Then I had to mix concrete, pour it in the holes, set the posts square on the concrete, and then more cement to hold them in place. That was the most physically demanding part of the project. After that, putting up the ledger board, joists, spacers, etc., just fell into place because of the planning.

LK: Here's my 2 cents. Best singer ever: Rick Astley.

MH: My advice for anyone taking on a big project like this is plan, plan, and then plan carefully. Draw pictures. Think everything through. You've heard the old adage measure twice, cut once?

Well, measure twice, three, four, five times, cut once.

And plan on the project taking longer than you think. Things come up and sometimes you just can't work, or you have to spend time doing something unexpected. For example, we had to take an unplanned trip for about a week, and when we got back, most of my joists had warped, crowning in the middle. So I had to use an electric planer to get them

all flat so that the deck boards would lie flat and not look wavy. That and the trip added a couple weeks to the project. I spent about 6 months, mostly weekends of course due to this pesky job I have, from beginning to end of this project.

But on the up side, I saved over 65 percent of what it would have cost me to have someone else do most of the work. Plus, it looks great, and there is a certain amount of pride in knowing that I did this. On top of that, I was able to buy several nice new tools that I needed to finish the job! So I would certainly recommend something like this to anyone who has the time.

LK: Why am I wearing these yellow suspenders? Are you a celebrity? If you are, I love you. Join me tomorrow on Larry King Live. Our guests will be the always fresh and innovative Captain and Tennille. Love the hat! Live! On CNN! **TM**