

# LIFESTYLES

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## How sweet it is: *serving the community keeps local man humming*



Photos provided by Rich Levine

BY STEPHEN KNAPP  
For Mountain Homes & Lifestyles

As a matter of décor, most offices tell you a lot about what their occupants do for a living. Rich Levine's office tells you about what he does when he's off the clock.

Step into his Southview Drive suite and you'll likely be greeted by "Abraham Lincoln," a spirited rescue dog who, since 2012, shares Levine's professional space as a loyal and near constant companion. "Do you call him Abe?" Nope, not "Abe," says Rich, he's "Abraham Lincoln."

Our 16th president seemingly has no greater admirer than Rich Levine, who's office has a historic photo of the late President, a copy of the Gettysburg Address, as well as a variety of books on the subject. President Lincoln, the Great Emancipator, inspired Levine's esteem by re-creating a nation with renewed commitment to equality. "Lincoln

Rich and his wife, Kim, a teacher at Bergen Valley, are both active in the community and in the wilderness.

### FEATURE OF THE MONTH

occupies a unique place in American history," says Levine, a Hiwan Hills resident since 1995. "He stands for so many important changes that transformed the government and the country." Abraham Lincoln inspires Levine's compassion for those too often left without the promise of equal inclusion.

When he's not greeting visitors or napping under Levine's desk, Abraham Lincoln may amuse himself with a little red ball, an unassuming piece of office equipment decorated with the familiar white Special Olympics logo. Levine is in the middle of his second 3-year term as board chair overseeing education, leadership and government relations for Special Olympics Colorado, and he's made it his entirely personal business to help Special Olympics provide every one

of the state's 25,000 lion-hearted Special Olympians with a fair start on a smooth track.

"Our commitment is much, much deeper than athletics," he says. "We serve an under-served segment of the community, and we're supporting their health and spirits in all kinds of ways, through athletic competition, health screenings, and educational support."

Painting and sculpture figure prominently in Levine's office motif. The works are neither bland commercial pap, nor extravagant beaux-arts baubles. They're beautiful to behold, certainly, and all the lovelier for being crafted by good friends and neighbors. Two of them are oil paintings created by an artist who, blind from birth, has never in his life seen anything at all. While profoundly inspired by the unimaginable and unimaginable human capacities those

**LEVINE**

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vaguely impressionistic images represent, Levine purchased them mostly because they're exquisite.

Rich met his wife Kim (a 3rd grade teacher beloved at Bergen Valley Elementary School) while in high school. Now married 27 years, they raised their three children here in Evergreen. A striking three-panel arrangement, bright and busy and charmingly primitive and created by Mimi, one of their children, hangs where it can be easily viewed from Levine's desk.

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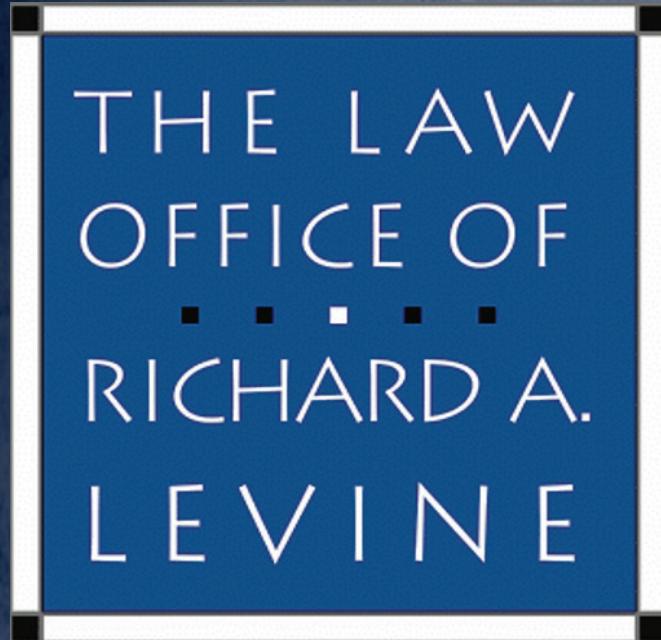
Although Mishie, Mimi and Jesse Levine are now grown and flown and pursuing destinies of their own, the striking triptych remains the beloved centerpiece of their dad's compact Evergreen gallery.

An attractive print in the hallway is signed by its maker, iconic American pop artist Peter Max. It was commissioned to herald the 1994 World Cup soccer championships, the only such event ever held in the United States. It was gratefully presented to Levine in small thanks for his essential service as the game-changing event's general manager and general counsel.



*Students at Congregation Beth Evergreen have a hands-on encounter with nature as they introduce honey bees to their new hive.*

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**LEVINE**

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Elsewhere in the office are reminders of his work with the artists and architects of the Korean War Memorial in Washington, D.C., and a small plaque smattered with tiny impressed fingerprints recalls his happy hitch as The Learning Center of Evergreen Preschool's first president.

A member of Team Evergreen's board of directors, Levine helps the hundreds of thousands of charitable dollar raised by the Triple Bypass bicycle race each year find their way to folks who truly need them, and he recently accepted a seat on the Evergreen Music Festival board to help ensure that his neighbors can always celebrate Independence Day to the boom of brass and cannon.

The truth is, if you find yourself in Rich Levine's office and want to know how he pays the bills, you'll probably have to ask him. He'll tell you he grew up in Southern California and graduated from the University of California, Berkeley law school in 1986. He'll tell you how he earned his legal spurs arguing maritime law in San Diego's federal court before settling in his Evergreen office as a civil attorney specializing in litigation, estate planning, personal injury and business law and disputes. Catch him in an expansive mood and he might talk about teaching courses at the University of Denver's bygone Women's College, or his current post at Colorado School of Mines instructing on the finer points of Constitutional and intellectual property law. He won't mention, though others will, that he is regarded among the state's most accomplished trial lawyers, and draws clients from across the US. But he'd seemingly rather tell you about beekeeping.

On a coffee table in Levine's office, where one might ordinarily expect to find dry trade magazines or glossy photo studies, rests a well-thumbed copy of the Beekeeper's Bible – a guide to understanding the many facets of beekeeping. It's not there for his clients' amusement, but rather for his own reference. Levine was president of Congregation Beth Evergreen in 2005 when its current accommodations were being built, and he's remained a vital member of that congregation. Last year while teaching a class of sixth and seventh grade Beth Evergreen scholars about the myriad marvels of the Earthly realm, he decided to add an object lesson to the curriculum.

"I wanted an activity that would allow our students to see their relationship to nature," Levine smiles. "Honey bees are vital to our own survival as a species, beeswax is remarkably useful, and honey and candles are used in celebrations across all cultures." One year and about 200,000 honey bees later, his students are harvesting the educational and alimentary bounty of five well-tended hives, all of them dangling from a cable stretched

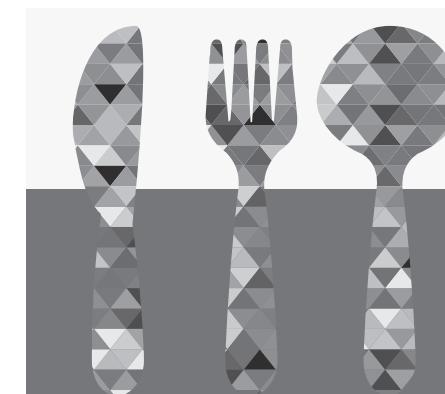


high above Levine's back yard, well out of reach of neighborhood bears with a hankering for honey.

Rich Levine's office may not have much to say about his profession, but it speaks volumes about his heart. If serving his clients legal needs puts bread on his family's table, serving his community nourishes his soul.

When asked what he thinks others would say about his role in the community, he says, quietly, "Perhaps that Evergreen is a more caring community, in small measure from our family having lived and worked here. I know we feel so grateful for having had the chance to enjoy so much our community has offered us." Perhaps?

... tomorrow is Friday, and as is his practice, without fanfare Rich Levine will be leading "chess at recess" for 3rd, 4th and 5th graders at Bergen Meadow where his wife, Kim teaches, and helping to build that caring community.



*Above Left: Rich Levine's office includes lots of local art, including this beautiful door panel by Evergreen Glass.*

*Above Right: Recently welcomed into the ranks of beekeepers, Rich tends the honey bee hives that hang in the trees above his Hiwan Hills home.*

*Center: Rich and his wife, Kim, a teacher at Bergen Valley, are both active in the community and in the wilderness.*

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