

Mark McCabe: Cracking corruption, counterfeiting

If you passed Mark McCabe in an airport – where he spends a considerable amount of time – you’d likely take him for a successful businessman with a lot on his mind.

Which is, in fact, true. What you would not suspect is that McCabe’s business involves international intrigue, protecting the lives of corporate executives and cracking international counterfeiting operations, among other things.

“Corporations come to us with problems and we find ways to resolve them,” says McCabe ’75 (criminal justice).

“We” refers to the 84-plus employees and an extensive network of resources that make up McCabe Associates, the private investigation and security consulting firm founded by McCabe in 1992. Company headquarters are a nondescript building in suburban Rochester, but the firm has offices in New York City and Miami as well as Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, Paraguay and Uruguay. These offices provide services to clients from Canada to the tip of South America.

These days, McCabe spends more than half of his time in South America, often in the infamous Tri-Border region of Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay. That area alone is a focal point for an estimated \$12 billion a year in illegal activities including counterfeit goods, trademark fraud, smuggling, money laundering and – according to the U.S. government – funding of global terrorism.

For security reasons, he’s not comfortable talking about all the specifics of his business, but he was willing to outline his company’s role in cracking international counterfeiting organizations. The counterfeiting of trademark goods costs corporations in excess of \$600 billion a year, according to the International Anti-Counterfeiting Coalition.

“Brand owners come to us for help, we access and develop an action plan to target and raid individuals and organized crime syndicates involved in the trade. We do all the investigative work ourselves,” says McCabe. “Once our plan is ready, we take our case to federal prosecutors, get search warrants, obtain armed police or military and execute the raids. Our objective is to knock out the organized crime networks involved by seizing and destroying the counterfeit product and filing criminal and civil actions so they lose money and are forced out of the business.”

Is the work dangerous? “Probably,” says McCabe. “But you’re paid well and surely never bored. You gauge your risk and adjust accordingly,” says the long-time law enforcement professional.

Before starting his own firm, McCabe was chief criminal investigator for the Monroe County (N.Y.) District Attorney’s Office, where he headed a team of 15 investigators. The direction of his private investigation firm came naturally. At the District Attorney’s Office, “We had been doing work with corporations, on internal fraud and corruption matters and they told me of the need for someone the companies could trust and had my skill set,” he says. “It sort of spiraled from there.”

McCabe first went to Latin America on behalf of Bausch & Lomb to investigate allegations of business irregularities reported by *Busi-*



Mark McCabe '75 has carved an unusual career as a private investigator.

ness Week magazine. The company contracted McCabe to access the situation and report findings to top management. Once working in the region, he was also asked to look into the counterfeiting of B&L’s Ray Ban sunglasses. Since then, McCabe has seized in excess of \$150 million in counterfeit goods for Fortune 500 companies including B&L, Motorola, Nokia, Sony, Canon, Samsung and others.

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Mark McCabe ’75, McCabe Associates

“Companies take their brand image seriously,” McCabe notes. “They turn to private investigators when local law enforcement can’t, or

won’t, crack down on counterfeiters.” McCabe’s team, which includes veterans of the FBI, CIA, DEA, U.S. Customs, U.S. military and other agencies, does surveillance, checks public records, manages networks of informants – basic investigation work that leads to discovery and seizure of bogus goods and apprehension of criminals involved.

“Brand protection is about 20 percent of our business in the Americas. The rest involves protecting the corporation assets,” says McCabe. Other important but seemingly less exciting services provided by the company include internal fraud investigations, computer forensics, forensic accounting, electronic countermeasures (checking for eavesdropping devices), security assessments and background checks.

“It’s a very high-tech field these days,” says McCabe, who regularly hires RIT students for co-op positions.

A native of Gasport, N.Y., McCabe was recruited to play football by former RIT coach Tom Coughlin, who now coaches the New York Giants, 2008 Super Bowl champions.

“Football helped me through college, gave me motivation and self confidence. The RIT criminal justice degree gave me the knowledge and determination I needed to get the job with the Monroe County District Attorney’s Office, and laid the foundation that helped me accelerate to the position of chief criminal investigator,” he says.

“I didn’t realize it at the time, but those years at RIT sure paid off.”

Kathy Lindsley