



GEORGIA ATTORNEY SERVING GEORGIA

By Jan Jaben-Eilon

Born in Atlanta at Piedmont Hospital on Peachtree Street, Ronnie E. Mabra Jr. grew up in Fayetteville and still considers himself a small-town Georgia boy, despite living and working in the big city of Atlanta. He's also totally committed to Georgia. Whether he's choosing to play football for a Georgia college, representing his home district in the Georgia General Assembly or representing Georgians who need his help with the legal system, Mabra puts Georgia and Georgians first.

"I want Georgia to be the best state in the United States," he declares. That's one reason why – despite opportunities to play football out of state – Mabra chose to attend the Georgia Institute of Technology where he wore the number 31 on his football jersey playing strong safety and special teams, while earning a business management degree. He wanted to follow in his adored father's footsteps and play for the Atlanta Falcons, but instead listened to

his mother's exhortations to study law or medicine, realizing that his grades overshadowed his football maneuvers.

He ended up attending the University of Georgia School of Law, intending to become a National Football League agent. "That's what got me on the path" to law, he said. However, his roommate, who played football for UGA, gave Mabra a different idea.

"He told me that I should look at personal injury law," said Mabra. "He said, 'with your background and personality, I could relate to a lot of people. He described me as friendly, energetic and outgoing and said that when people are going through tough times in their lives,' that's what they need near them. Still one of Mabra's best friends to this day, the roommate also quoted Maya Angelou to Mabra.

"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel," said Angelou.

That quote has stuck with Mabra as he founded The Mabra Firm in 2007 and has grown it into a firm with four attorneys and 16 staff, including an office in Tifton. In the next year, he hopes to add another

attorney or two and move the main office to a stand-alone building where the firm can hold other functions and events. Opening another office elsewhere in Georgia is also on his wish list.

In 2013 and 2014, Mabra's law firm was recognized as one of the fastest growing businesses in the country started by a University of Georgia graduate. In four years running, Mabra was selected by Georgia Super Lawyers magazine to rank on its Rising Stars list and six years running as a Super Lawyer.

Although Mabra was involved in the NFL concussion settlement, which will likely reach \$1.4 billion for retired NFL players – most of his firm's legal work revolves around car wrecks, and their aftermath.

"My biggest joy comes after a case is wrapped up and my client comes in with a big smile on their face. Of course, sometimes there's been a death and money doesn't replace a loved one, but knowing that we have helped the family and made a difference for them means a lot," he explains.

After a few years of following his father's strong work ethic, Mabra received a call from a Fayette County citizen, suggesting that he run for an open seat in the state leg-

islature. He already had a high profile in the area because the local press had reported on his career from high school to Georgia Tech to becoming a lawyer. "I had always discussed politics with my father, seeing it as a way to give back to my hometown, so I just jumped in." Mabra won two terms in the General Assembly.

In his first term as a legislator, Mabra passed House Bill 828, known as the Anti-Runner Bill (O.C.G.A 33-24-53), which increased protection for accident victims by restricting the release of their private information. His experience as a personal injury attorney certainly helped. He explains that after a person was in a car wreck, his or her personal information was sometimes sold to attorneys or doctors for financial gain. "This was a big problem. We stiffened the penalties to stop the selling of this private information so people could find their own attorneys and doctors."

Mabra loved the wheeling and dealing on the House floor of the legislature, but after two terms he decided to resign and instead, support his wife as she signed up for medical school. "My wife had put her medical school dreams on hold to support me in my law practice and politics," and now it was her turn. She's in her second year at Morehouse School of Medicine.

"I can always get back into politics later. I was good in politics," he said, suggesting that he could "possibly serve in a statewide position or represent Georgia in Washington, D.C."

Also not one to be dissuaded from his dreams, Mabra did become a sports agent for a while. He represented several NFL players including a player from Washington County who signed with the Green Bay Packers. "In his first year, he earned a Super Bowl ring," said Mabra, who didn't renew his sports agent license when he entered politics.

Mabra believes his football experience helps him run his law firm as a team. "We're a younger firm. We all went to law school about the same time," he said. "I set the tone and pace." For instance, he wants his team to answer the phone with smiles on their faces. "You never know what the person on the other side is going through." The sense of a team working together is reflected in the fact that his staff often stays late in the office and comes in early. "We're all in this together. We're only as strong as the weakest link."

Although his team has recovered millions of dollars to help injured Georgians in personal injury cases, the one case that stands out to Mabra isn't one of those. A homeowner's association in his district was being run by a Canadian company that was making all the operating decisions for the subdivision. "These were my neighbors, teachers, and coaches, and they couldn't make any decisions for themselves," he recalled. With his help, the residents took control of their homeowner's association and now it's run locally and is financially strong.

To show their appreciation, the homeowners are building a clubhouse and naming it after Mabra.

The father of a four-year-old son, Mabra is probably prouder, however, of a tradition he launched just after he won his first election. An uncle in South Carolina suggested that he needed a



AT A GLANCE

**Firm Name:**

The Mabra Firm, LLC
197 14th Street NW, Suite 200, Atlanta, GA 30318
Phone 404-344-5255
www.mabrafirm.com

Founder:

Ronnie Mabra, 2007

Firm Composition

4 Attorneys, 16 staff

Practice Areas:

Personal Injury

Community/Civic Involvement:

Leadership GA, GTLA, AAJ, ABA, NBA, Gate City Bar Association, NAACP, Fayette Chamber of Commerce, UGA Law School Alumni Council, 100 Black Men of Atlanta, Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc.

Education:

University of Georgia, J.D.
Georgia Institute of Technology, BS

Pro-Bono Activities:

Ronnie Mabra Foundation, Mabra Turkey Giveaway, Canaan Land Church

Awards:

Super Lawyers, Daily Report 40 Under 40, Atlanta Business Chronicle 40 Under 40, National Bar Association 40 Under 40, UGA 40 Under 40, Bulldog 100 Fastest Growing Businesses, Pelpac Lawmaker Of The Year, Clayton County NAACP President's Award, All-ACC Academic Honor Team, Atlanta Touchdown Club

Other Locations:

Tifton, GA

“signature event” to help people while raising his profile. He founded the Mabra Turkey Giveaway, contributing over 1,000 Butterball turkeys every year. The Giveaway was promoted on radio stations and by churches and non-profit organizations. Although the event was designed for his district, people “came from all over.”

He also launched the Ronnie Mabra Foundation to “provide a platform to help people.” This help can include assisting with rent money or help with a car payment or purchasing medicine. “We’ve helped hundreds of people,” he said.

Mabra also partnered with an elementary school fashioning a creative way to reward star students. “I wanted to do something special,” he said. He presents a stock certificate in major companies with which they’d be familiar, such as McDonald’s, Coca-Cola, Nike, Matel and Walt Disney. The certificates are placed in frames with the fourth- and fifth-grade children’s names on them. This serves two purposes: the gift isn’t cash that can be taken from a child, and the young people learn about investing.

Not surprisingly, Mabra is most challenged by the lack of enough hours in the day. “There’s always work to do, phone calls and emails to respond to. It keeps me on the go. I actually like it, though. It’s hard to sleep at night because I’m so excited about the next day. I’m a high-energy guy,” he says in an understatement.

When he’s not working, Mabra enjoys spending time with his family, watching football or working out. He loves running on the Beltline, and likes golf, but proclaims that he’s “horrible” at the latter.

In 10 years, he wants to see his firm being “bigger, stronger and faster. I want it to grow and be a bigger law firm, strong financially and be more efficient overall.”

Mabra unquestionably likes reaching for the stars. A number of years ago, he tried out for the American TV reality program, *The Apprentice*, in Atlanta. He was called back for a second interview and then was asked to produce a five-minute video about himself. He had

a week in which to produce it. He met the deadline, sent it in and a few months later, was among 25 males invited to Los Angeles – all expenses paid – to tryout for the final selection.

“We were sequestered from each other,” Mabra recalls. He also met program host Donald J. Trump – long before he became president. “I thought I had a good shot at being chosen, but I didn’t make it,” he acknowledges.

Maybe that’s a good thing. Getting “fired” on the TV program would have clashed with Mabra’s strong work ethic and reputation that he inherited from his greatest mentor, his father. “He’s no longer living, but all my life I looked up to him. He’d said he wanted to be a lawyer, but he never did. He was a superstar for me. He was an NFL player and small business owner, first with a restaurant and then a food distribution business. He even had a contract with the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta.”

Mabra recalls his father’s advice when he started his first job. “He said, work hard and never ask for a vacation in the first two years.” Mabra followed the advice and after working hard for 24 months, that first employer told him to take a vacation and paid for his trip to Hawaii.

Mabra has been working hard ever since.