

Top LV lawyer enjoys photographing the stars

By Stephanie Tavares / STAFF WRITER

John Mowbray is a top Las Vegas real estate, construction law and commercial litigation lawyer.

But when the sun goes down, the lawyer leads a different life far beyond the office walls and the glitz and glitter of the Las Vegas Strip.

The life-long Las Vegas has a passion for astronomy and photographing the night sky that began during a Cub Scout camp-out at Red Rock Canyon in the early 1960s.

"At about 1 a.m., I got up and the moon had set and it was like there was a black veil that had come over the canyon. There were just billions of stars," he said. "I stayed up for about 45 minutes just staring at the sky. That really sparked my passion for astronomy."

He took his first pictures of the sky as a child when he received a rocket with a camera attached.

Within days of receiving his first telescope, he was trying to find ways to take photos through

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JOHN MOWBRAY, Las Vegas lawyer

its lens.

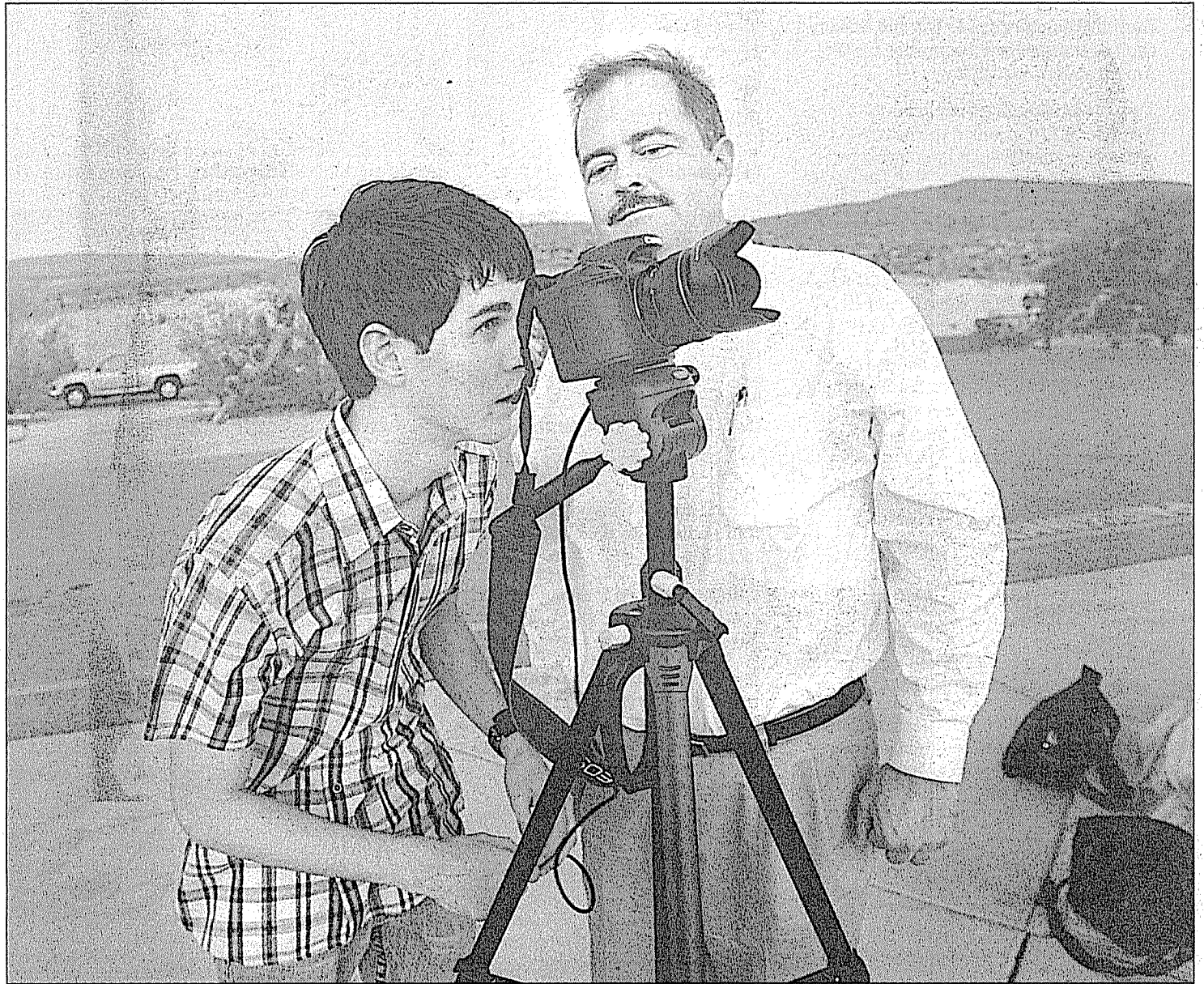
He has tinkered with the technique on and off for most of his life. "I've found that the most interesting photographs I've taken have been under challenging circumstances. Either the wind is blowing or there's cloud cover. So there's a lot of experimentation, a lot of patience," Mowbray said. "I guess if it were easy there would be a lot more of these photographs running around."

Mowbray has taken tens of thousands of images of stars, comets and planets from locations ranging from the Central Coast of California to Hawaii.

But he can be seen many weekend nights a little closer to home, photographing the stars from a scenic overlook at Red Rock Canyon. Even after all these years, it's still his favorite spot to photograph of the cosmos.

"At Red Rock you can see the footprints of evolution of the valley, at the same time you're seeing objects in space that are 1,700 years old," Mowbray said. "You don't get the definition out here you can get in other places, but the trade off is with all the light pollution you can pick up all this foreground. It's like having your own private studio."

Few Mowbray family vacations have not included telescopes and late-night stargazing. Before his son Justin left for college a few weeks ago, Mowbray took him along on many photo shoots as well.



John Mowbray and his son, Tyler Mowbray, get set up to shoot the Perseid meteor shower on Aug. 11 near Red Rock Canyon.

SAM MORRIS / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

The duo have gotten some spectacular images of shooting stars above the park's rock strata.

"This has been a good experience for myself and my son. When Hale Bopp was out we drove all over the valley," Mowbray said. "We've had some good times together. Some of his shots have turned out better than mine."

In recent years Mowbray has turned his hobby into something of a second career. He teaches an astronomy lab at the College of Southern Nevada and revels in the reactions of his students when they get out under the night sky. He also hosts monthly astronomy and astrophotography workshops at the park with the

Red Rock rangers.

"There's nothing like that first image through a telescope. I'll always remember that," Mowbray said. "When I teach my class, I always try to get the kids out under the telescope. There's nothing so rewarding as seeing them see a planet for the first time."

Quality time behind the telescope has been a vital way to counter the stress and strain of running a major Las Vegas law firm. (He's the managing partner of the Las Vegas office of Fennemore Craig).

"It's a good balance. I work hard for my clients in my practice, but I also pursue my interest in astronomy with the same passion," Mowbray

said. "Even with only two hours a day, it's nice to schedule a photography session with your son and have some real quality time. I don't go out as often as I'd like. With the demands of opening the Fennemore Craig office, I haven't been able to go out as much as I'd like. But soon I'll be able to throttle back a bit at work and put more time into this."

Stephanie Tavares covers utilities and law for *In Business Las Vegas* and its sister publication the *Las Vegas Sun*. She can be reached at 259-4059 or tavares@lasvegassun.com.

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