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May 4, 2005

Profile: Saving the planet, one camel at a time

Name: David Atkin, 53, Eugene

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Claim to fame: Atkin works exclusively on behalf of nonprofit agencies. His practice, Nonprofit Support Services, has about 750 active clients from around the world at any given time.

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The importance of smokejumping: Atkin grew up in the middle of timber country in Cave Junction. His environmental awareness grew when he worked 10 summers as a smokejumper to put himself through college and graduate school.



"That job allowed me to see up close and personal the extraordinary pace and scale of destruction of our natural ecosystems," he says. "You can't get that emotional feel from reading about it in books or seeing it from the road."

Why be a lawyer?: Atkin was already advising many nonprofit groups on how to comply with legal requirements and operate more efficiently when he figured he could be an even better advocate with a law degree. He went on to earn one from the University of Oregon in 1987.

Today, "I have the narrowest niche of any law office in the state. But if I wasn't doing this kind of law, I probably wouldn't be doing law at all."

Client list: Local clients include FOOD for Lane County, The Village School, Center for Appropriate Transport, Nearby Nature, Lane Arts Council, Four



David Atkin's work for nonprofits has taken him to such far-flung lands as Mongolia (10 times) and Thailand.

Photo: **Chris Pietsch** / The Register-Guard

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Winds Yoga and the Energy Outlet.
He's worked with thousands of
nonprofit groups around the world.

Traveled much?: Atkin has been to Mongolia about 10 times, helping the government there write a new system of environmental laws. He has traveled by camel in Mongolia and by water buffalo in Thailand. He's also worked with Mayan Indians in Guatemala. He speaks Spanish and Mongolian. Last spring, he lived and worked with Gobi Desert nomads in an effort to save the last herds of the endangered Asian camel.

"If you can't imagine your attorney going to a meeting on the back of a camel, you're talking to the wrong guy," he says.

Family time: Atkin and his wife, Lori Maddox, have two boys, Carson, 8, and Tye, 4. Atkin is an avid whitewater rafter and scuba diver.

Why he does what he does: "Life is short," he says. "I just don't feel compelled to work on things I don't love and personally believe in. My work is not lucrative, but if it's sustainable, that's all I ask."

- Jeff Wright

If you know someone who would make a great subject for a Register-Guard Profile, send your idea to Jim Murez at jmurez@guardnet.com or P.O. Box 10188, Eugene OR 97440.

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