

Overseas anecdotes sidebar

Going overseas to help train judicial and legal leaders in emerging democracies is not without its lighter, even surprising moments. For example, you occasionally encounter budding entrepreneurial capitalists in the most unexpected places.

Sitting in the lobby of one of the beautiful Marriott hotels in Moscow, I was having a cup of coffee and reading “Moscow Times,” the English language newspaper one morning as I awaited our group to head to the courts. An attractive young woman in a business suit came over and took the chair next to me and asked, “You want sex with beautiful Russian girl? Only \$100 American.”

Granted, prostitution exists everywhere, but it is startling to be hit on so openly in a stylish hotel and at that hour of the morning. For the record, I politely declined.

And during the training in Argentina, we left Buenos Aires for a trip to Mendoza near the border with Chile. When I was introduced to Mendoza’s mayor, he took great interest in the fact that I reside in Reno, Nevada. He proudly explained that Argentina’s once great heavyweight boxer, Oscar Bonavena, who fought Muhammad Ali, was from Mendoza.

“You know he was killed in Reno at one of your ranches,” the mayor offered.

It was an awkward moment because I didn’t know how to respond. It is true Bonavena was gunned down at a “ranch” just outside of Reno. But it was at the Mustang Ranch, one of the legal brothels in Nevada, and the reason was that

he was having an affair with Sally Conforte, wife of the Mustang's owner, Joe Conforte.

Not knowing if the mayor's understanding of the word "ranch" mirrored mine, I equivocated with, "Ah, yes, I recall that now."

Finally, if you ever get the opportunity to provide training, particularly in any of the former Soviet satellite nations, be prepared to drink. Every meal will be a nonstop series of toasts and your glass of vodka will never stay empty for long. Particularly for people like me who aren't overly fond of alcohol, this is a challenge. You don't want to offend your hosts by refusing to join in their tradition, but you also don't want to embarrass yourself by getting drunk or ill. So pace yourself.