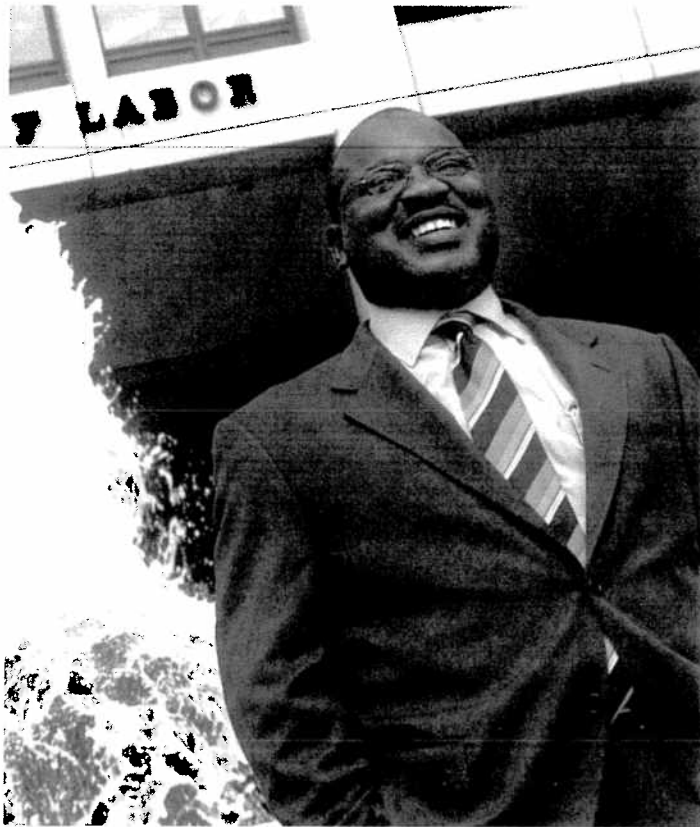


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Helping Small Businesses *and* Aspiring Athletes and Entertainers



Thomas B. Hicks Sr. '85

If the link between his regular job and his sideline business isn't obvious at first, that's understandable. By day, Thomas G. Hicks Sr. '85 is the supervising Small Business Regulatory Compliance Officer for the Department of Labor's Office of Small Business Programs, where he monitors the fairness of the department's regulatory enforcement agencies.

By night, so to speak, he is president and CEO of Sports and Entertainment Performance Managers of America, Inc. (SEPA, Inc.), a business he started in 1995 to represent athletes and entertainers. Where the two come together is in an emphasis on protecting the little guy—small businesses and the people who work for them on one hand, and young athletes and entertainers who can't afford expensive, big-time agents on the other.

Last year, Hicks received an award from the Small Business Administration's National Ombudsman for his "outstanding performance and lasting contributions" at the organization's regulatory hearings, where small business owners bring complaints about enforcement actions taken by federal

agencies. This award is given every year, but previously it had always been presented to an agency; Hicks was the first individual ever to be singled out for this honor.

Hicks was born in southern Maryland, but his mother moved her family—four other sons and a daughter, with Thomas being the youngest—to Washington, D.C., when he was just a toddler. "All I can remember is Washington, D.C.," Hicks says, "and how my mother was mother and father for me, putting me through a private high school and getting me ready for college."

When it was time to actually head out for Penn State Behrend as a freshman, though, he remembers driving from Maryland to Erie alone, piling his belongings into the car he had bought himself as a high school graduation present—with money he had earned working at a C.P.O. club on a military base, managing people who were three times his age. The car? A 1966 Mercedes-Benz 250S. "No one believed it was my car when I got to Erie," he says.

Already knowing that he wanted to be a lawyer, Thomas thrived in both his political science courses and student government at Behrend, serving as lower division SGA president. He enjoyed his time at Behrend so much, he says, that he first began to get involved with the Alumni Society right after graduating from the University of Baltimore School of Law, but the distance from his first job (also at the Department of Labor) made active participation difficult.

"I've been trying to get back to a reunion for the last five or six years," he says, "but now I have that weekend at the end of September/beginning of October blocked out, so nothing's going to keep me away. I'm especially looking forward to seeing Professor Zach Irwin."

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Once a self-proclaimed "crazy runner" who ran two marathons in the same weekend, Hicks still gets in plenty of miles for conditioning. His passion now, though, is golf, and he takes his clubs everywhere he goes. "I'm on the road 125 nights a year for work," he says, "and decided I needed a way to get a little enjoyment out of that.

A father of two, Hicks moved back to Baltimore from Washington, D.C., about 10 minutes from work to be near his children, Thomas Jr., 15, and Llaurnyn, 12. "They can walk from my ex-wife's house to my place," he says. "I talk to them every day and see them four or five times a week."

On the surface of it, Thomas has had more success at his "day job" than he has in the sports and entertainment management business, but he thinks that's just a matter of time, too. "I started SEPA, Inc. with friends from law school, doing all the legwork setting up the corporation and making the initial investment. We each cover different areas of the country, and they are all flourishing because they're doing it full-time. I just haven't been able to do that yet."

SEPA specializes in working with young athletes and entertainers, sometimes providing legal advice for the whole family for years before a breakthrough contract is written. They have music clients in country-western, gospel, and jazz, and are developing their own recording label, "Rhythm 4 All Records." "You need to be patient with young artists," Hicks says. "A lot of attorneys charge exorbitant fees, but we offer these kinds of clients very competitive arrangements."

Hicks' partners represent tennis players, minor league professional athletes, and successful entertainers. "We continue to look for the first round pick, but the sports representation business is very competitive," Hicks says. "I continue to tell them that my first pick will be found on the golf course."

Hicks has continued to diversify his sports and entertainment management business, and SEPA recently purchased rights to an athletic and casual clothing line. He has determined which professional golfers lack clothing-affiliated endorsement contracts and says he would love to see one of them sporting one of his shirts or caps around the tour. "I'm working hard to see that happen very soon," he says, "and I look forward to joining my partners on a full-time basis."

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