

# HIS CENTER IS HIS FAITH & FREEDOM

BY LISA M. BARNOTT

## MOST PEOPLE IN THE WORLD OF NONPROFITS KNOW STUART ROTH... OR AT LEAST OF HIS WORK.

He is the chairman, president and CEO of The Center for Faith and Freedom (CFF), headquartered in Lakewood Ranch, whose core program service is Salt and Light Productions. Salt and Light creates and produces multi-media presentation videos for other nonprofit organizations, enabling the charities to more effectively communicate their message and vision with the community. Some of the beneficiaries of the Center's work include Agape Flights, Easter Seals of Southwest Florida, Foundation for Dreams, Guardian ad Litem, Habitat for Humanity, Humane Society of Manatee County, Lakewood Ranch Community Fund, SMART, and the Stop Running Red Lights campaign.

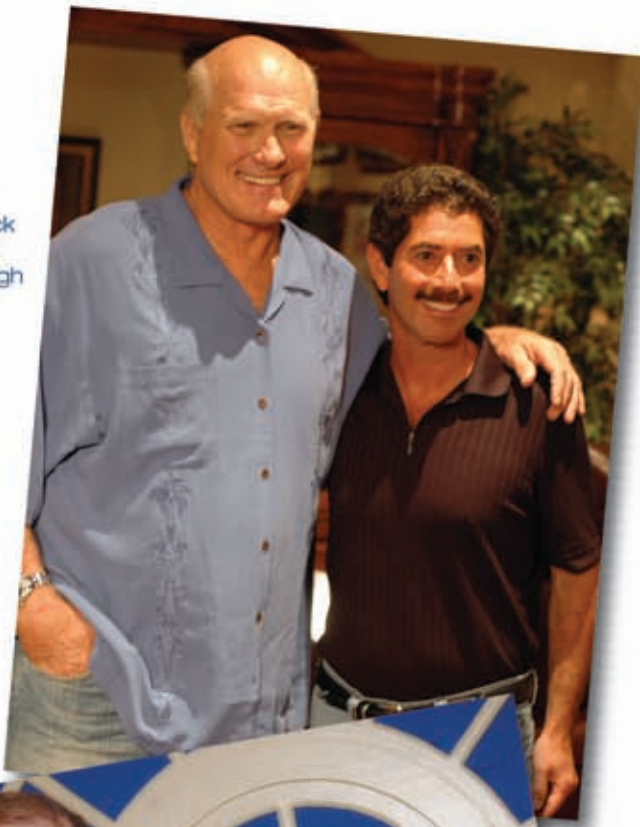
In 2008, Salt and Light was the recipient of six Telly Awards for outstanding video production as recognized by industry judges. Also in 2008, the Center sent its production team to Uganda, Tanzania and Russia as part of Roth's mission to expand CFF's humanitarian efforts globally.

Roth, a Lakewood Ranch resident, manages the day-to-day operations of CFF, including but not



Left: At home in his gourmet kitchen, Roth's epicurean accomplishments are a testament to the fact that he is as passionate about food as he is about his other avocations.

Roth in his CFF office with NFL Football great Terry Bradshaw, former quarterback of the Superbowl-champion Pittsburgh Steelers.



limited to, administrative, operational, managerial and financial responsibilities. He also works with the various program services of CFF on a daily basis to ensure their continued vitality.

But Roth has another identity. Since earning his juris doctorate in 1980 from Mercer University School of Law in Macon, Ga., he's been a practicing attorney and serves as senior counsel with the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLI), a Washington, D.C. based law practice with offices across from the U.S. Supreme Court. The firm's practice focuses on constitutional law in the areas of first amendment freedoms and religious liberties litigation.

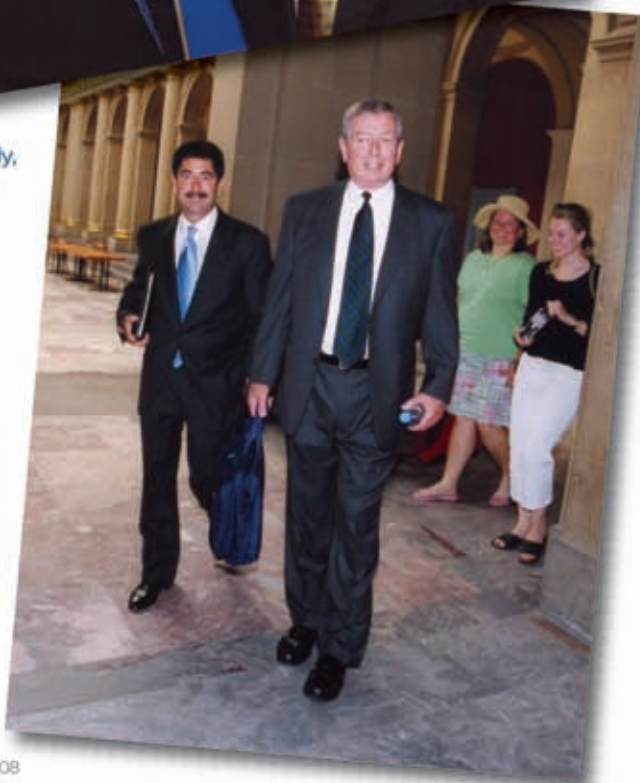
Initially, he did not have an especially ebullient calling for the legal profession. Growing up in Roslyn, New York, Roth's father was a professional pianist and then a furniture designer. "He wanted his children all to be professionals so I was given two choices – lawyer or doctor," he says. "When I was in my sophomore year at Florida State University, I made the decision to go to law school. It wasn't that I was sure I wanted to be a lawyer. I just didn't know what I wanted to do after undergraduate school and my parents told me that I needed to get a graduate degree. My father convinced me regardless of whether I wanted to practice law or not it was a great degree to have...he was right."



Roth with Bill O'Reilly, host of Fox News' O'Reilly Factor

Roth is a nationally known and recognized constitutional lawyer and over the years has appeared on hundreds of national television and radio broadcasts, sharing his legal analysis and commentary. Roth has appeared in cases before state and federal courts throughout the nation and has collaborated on 12 cases that have been argued before the Supreme Court. He did not start out in constitutional law, however.

Roth with former U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft, at the University of Strasbourg in Strasbourg, France.



He began as a staff attorney for Travelers Insurance and then started his own practice in Atlanta handling litigation, corporate, securities, taxation and other general matters. While in private practice, he and his law partner had the opportunity to get involved in a case that went to the Supreme Court – a religious liberties free speech case. After that, Roth says, they started getting calls from all over

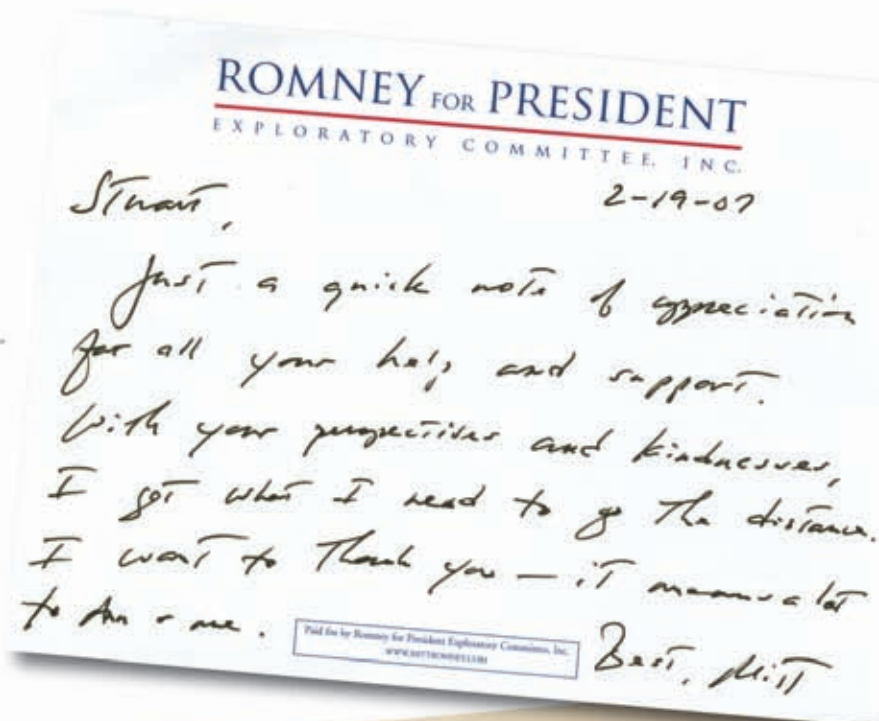
WHILE IN PRIVATE PRACTICE, HE AND HIS LAW PARTNER HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO GET INVOLVED IN A CASE THAT WENT TO THE SUPREME COURT – A RELIGIOUS LIBERTIES FREE SPEECH CASE. AFTER THAT, ROTH SAYS, THEY STARTED GETTING CALLS FROM ALL OVER THE COUNTRY AND STARTED A NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION TO HANDLE THESE CASES.

the country and started a nonprofit organization to handle these cases. "Our practice is issue driven, which for a lawyer is very unusual, but that is what makes the practice so fulfilling," he says. "We take cases that we believe in and represent people that have the courage to stand up for what they believe is right. For an attorney, that's as good as it gets."

Roth has not only represented citizens throughout the nation but has also represented members of the U.S. Senate as well as the U.S. House of Representatives. He works with law students at Regent University School of Law in Virginia Beach, Va., and has been instrumental in the development of the international studies and student clerkship programs.

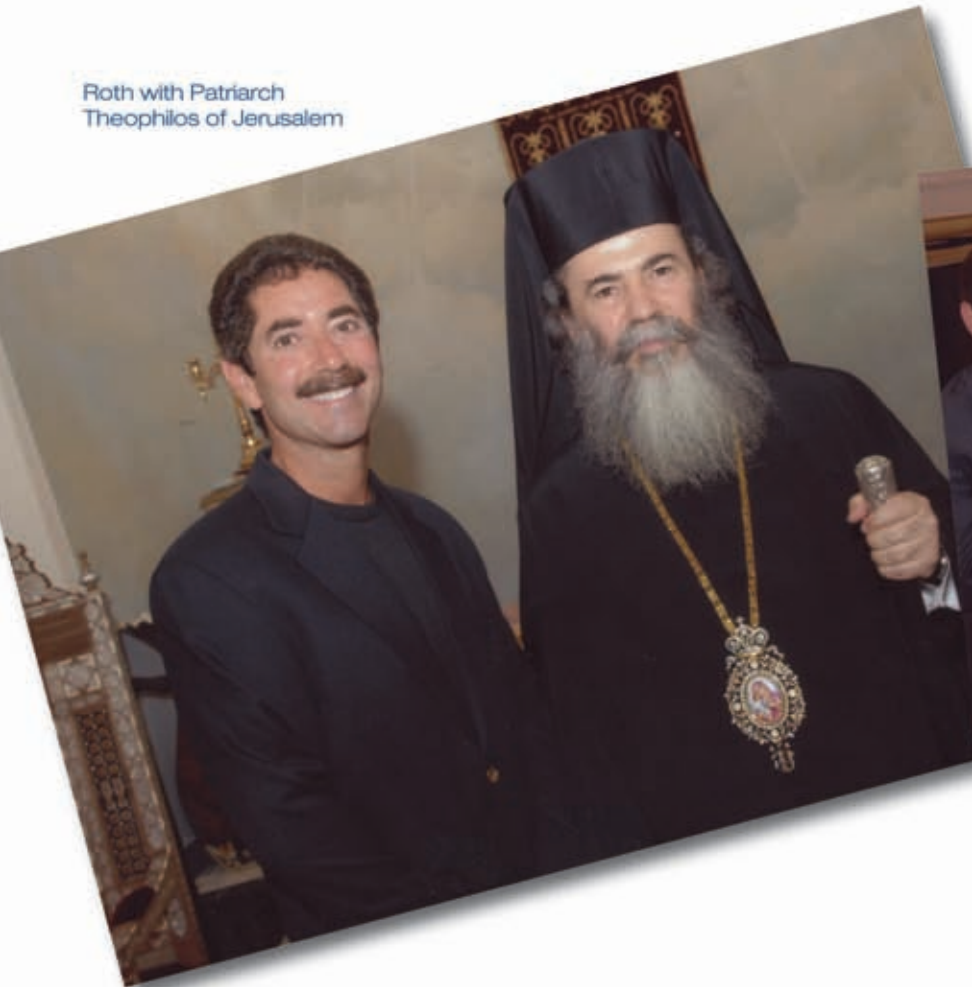
Roth also serves as senior counsel with the ACLJ's affiliate, the European Center for Law and Justice (ECLJ) with offices in Strasbourg, France and Moscow. The mission of the ECLJ is to promote the defense of religious liberties, foster human rights and democratic freedoms worldwide. The ECLJ handles cases that appear before the European Court of Human Rights and was recently awarded NGO status at the United Nations. NGOs – or non-governmental organizations – are representatives of independent citizen organizations and are increasingly active in policy making at the U.N. They are voices for the concerns of ordinary people in the international arena.

The character and caliber of Roth's work has brought him in contact with many well-known and well-respected people, both nationally and internationally, including heads of state, sports figures and other media "stars." What is it like traveling in such circles? "I am drawn more to people who are dedicated, committed, passionate, humble, loyal, productive and honest. Most of those traits usually describe people I have the chance to meet everyday as opposed to 'celebrities,'" Roth explains. "When I do meet someone who is well-known and who possesses those traits,



A personal note from Gov. Mitt Romney to Roth during Romney's run for the Republican Party's nomination for President of the United States. Roth worked with Romney's presidential campaign.

Roth with Patriarch  
Theophilos of Jerusalem



my admiration for them is based on character traits as opposed to their celebrity. Probably when I was younger I was attracted to their 'celebrity' status, but now I just try to learn from them. Most of these well-known people have the ability to persevere through tough times and continually 're-invent themselves,' which is a quality that I also admire."

Roth has been through something of a reinvention himself. Raised in a Jewish family, having been bar mitzvahed, he woke up one morning some 20 years ago after a late night out, looked in the mirror and realized he was spiritually "dead."

"That started me on a spiritual journey, wherein I started to do a lot of soul-searching, etc.," Roth says. "At the suggestion of a friend I started reading the Bible, both the Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament. When I was reading the New Testament I was amazed that it was a book written almost exclusively by Jews, about Jews and for Jews. The book inspired me, the words came alive and I started to make a sincere effort to develop a relationship with God. Messianic Judaism as a direction and vehicle to seek God fit me perfectly because being Jewish is an important part of who I am. The messianic part, which is the most controversial in the Jewish community, reflects my personal belief that Jesus (Yeshua) is the Messiah that was prophesized in the Old Testament."

## THE DUALITY

The Stuart Roth one sees pictured in photos – photos that adorn the walls of his CFF office, and are scattered occasionally throughout his house – is sharply and immaculately dressed. His fine suits, silk ties and polished shoes are all part of an impeccable presentation that punctuates his mission, and his professionalism. Although he wears those flourishes with ease, as he does with his occupation – or avocation, as the case may be – one cannot help but think that those who know him in Washington, in Israel, in Russia, don't really know him at all.

Roth's house, predictably, is flawless. The interior is masculine, but not in a bachelor pad sort of way. There are swaths of leather and stone, tapestries and richly colored rugs. Artwork and collectibles – wordlessly telling of Roth's personality – adorn shelves, walls, nooks and cabinets. His things are beautiful, but you feel like it's permissible to touch them. It's comfortable. And it's Roth.

"I enjoy my house because it is my home," Roth says. "It took a lot of effort and expense to build it. I designed and decorated it, and have a lot of items here from all the places I lived and traveled... it's me." When he lived in Atlanta, about 25 years ago, they had some really great antiques markets, Roth says, which at that time were very affordable. Some of his favorite pieces include a breakfront from the early 1920s, an antique French inlaid burlwood vanity and a variety of restored pieces. He collects



Roth, left, and his law partner Jay Sekulow, middle, at the Jerusalem residence of Israel Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, far right.

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of Lladro, Murano glass from Italy, silver sculptured pieces from Israel, and salt rocks from the Dead Sea.

He traces his sense of style to his father – the furniture designer. He grew up in a home where there was a lot of attention to design elements. As he grew older, Roth says, his interest kept growing and getting more refined. "I've decorated every home I ever lived in...and also a few friends' homes and offices. When I'm not watching Food TV I am usually on Home and Garden TV."

His home is a showpiece, but also a refuge. "I enjoy sharing it with others," Roth says. "But I also really enjoy my time alone – it gives me the time to think and recharge my batteries. I enjoy the freedom I have to spend time alone whenever I want – that is also one of the gifts of my life – I think it's very important to get a lot of what I call 'me-time.'" For Roth, not traveling and just hanging out at home is a vacation, he says. "Despite all my travels, I am really a homebody."

The Stuart Roth who answers the door at his home is wearing jeans. A quick nosing around reveals that he has Ore Ida Crispy Crowns and Publix mint chocolate chip ice cream in the freezer. The run-of-the-mill stuff belies the true culinary Roth, whose interest in cooking began when he was about 10 years old. "My mother went back to school to get her masters degree," he explains. "My sister, brother and I had to help out with dinner and I took a liking to cooking. Growing up in an ethnic home, food is a big deal. You are eating dinner one night and discussing what you are going to be eating the next night for dinner. I started cooking more for myself in college and then law school and then over the years really took it to more of a gourmet level. Cooking for me is a great way to unwind." And a great way to share.

He enjoys cooking for friends, insisting on doing everything himself, from planning to purchasing to the actual production of the dishes. He prefers to have his guests sit back and enjoy, while he delivers the fruits of his labors to their plates. He



Roth with former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, who currently serves as minister of defense; and law partner Jay Sekulow.

certainly could afford to pay someone to do any or all of the steps for him...but he doesn't.

"I'm really not sure why I am like that, but I really do like serving and taking care of people, so I guess that is a personality trait – maybe I'm compensating because I don't have children," Roth says. "I'm much more of a giver than receiver, which is why when people do things for me, 'recognize' me at events etc., I am somewhat uncomfortable."

With Roth, in most aspects of his life, it's all about everyone else.

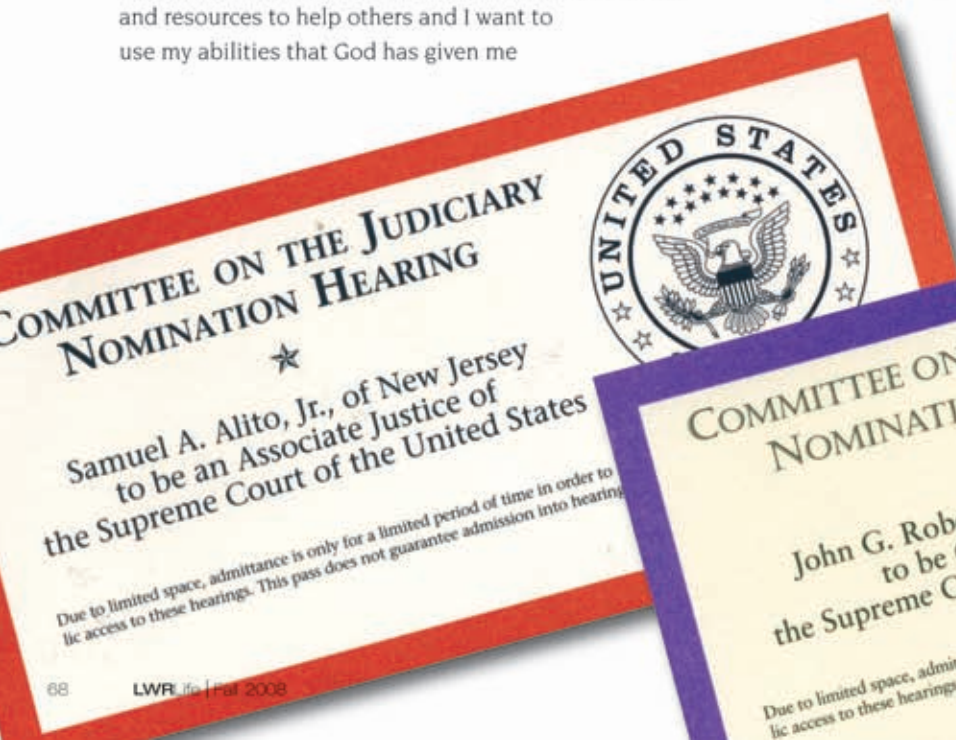
"I do what I do because I believe I am 'supposed' to or 'called' to...that's kind of a God-thing with me. I believe everyone has certain 'giftings,'" he says. "God has given me gifts and resources to help others and I want to use my abilities that God has given me

in a manner that is most effective. I just signed up to be a mentor with Take Stock in Children, which I know will be a really great experience for me because I will be able to impart some of the things I know into a young man and hopefully encourage and inspire him.

"There are a lot of people, especially in this town, who want to be recognized – I'm the opposite. I just like to do what I do and hopefully help someone get from point A to point B," he says.

Roth, who is in his 50s, says this has been the best decade of his life, by far. Married and divorced twice, he says he doesn't miss the bond of matrimony at this point. "My life has never been more fulfilling in terms of work and my personal relationships," he says. His productivity has never been greater, which is very important to him because he spends most of his waking time working. "Both my careers are extremely rewarding," he says.

Roth attended the senate confirmation hearings for Chief Justice of the Supreme Court John G. Roberts, Jr., and Associate Justice Samuel Alito, Jr.



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He doesn't blame his work for his lack of romantic involvement, however. "I do travel a lot and put in long days, but I can squeeze 25 hours out of a day if I need to," Roth explains. "I think making a relationship work today for anyone is extremely difficult because people are looking for the wrong things. I don't think a relationship or marriage can work unless two people are 'best friends.' A lot of people get married because they are 'in love'...well, it's pretty easy to 'fall in love' and it feels nice, and it's a good starting point, but unless you are best friends, the chance of sustaining that relationship is slim. When you see a lot of people that have been married for 40-50 years, you can see that their friendship has enabled the relationship to endure. Most relationships are unsustainable not because of work- or money-related issues but because of bad choices. Bad choices = bad outcomes."

In a strange way, Roth's unsuccessful marriages make him more approachable, more human, if you will. He might otherwise be almost too perfect, with an international legal career defending the rights of others, an organization that helps other charities to flourish, and a network of friends and acquaintances that spans the globe as well as most socio-economic groups.

And he is nothing if he is not real. Roth asks questions of his friends that allow for the possibility that he might have the same human frailties as the rest of the population. He'll be the first to admit that he doesn't have all the answers, and that he's still asking the same questions as everyone else. Even with the keenest of political minds, he will talk politics and convey his strongly-held conservative beliefs without making anyone who differs with him feel slighted. He's proud of who he is and what he does, but is charmingly self-deprecating. His enthusiasm and conviction are contagious.

"My personal 'theology' is that life is a precious gift and I am going to enjoy every day, wherever I am and whatever I am doing," Roth says. "Each day I get up I am thankful and really try to have a good time whether at work or play. What's really great at this point in my life is that I don't take myself too seriously. I take what I do seriously, in terms of my commitment to excellence in whatever I am doing, but I really don't take myself too seriously...I'm much more interested in being a good friend than a 'who's who' in town."

"I really feel like I am helping people and making a difference. I think I am doing what I am "supposed" to be doing. The Bible says that 'to whom much is given, much is required,' and I know that I have been really blessed, which I never take for granted. Personally, I now have the freedom to devote myself to my 'calling,' which has enabled me to push my creativity to the limits in all areas of my life. Life is not so much a mystery as when I was younger, as I can see situations developing and pretty much know how it's likely to turn out, based on experience. I'm also comfortable 'under my own skin.'

"I know who I am, but equally as important, I know who I'm not, and that gives me a lot of peace." **LWR**



THE FRENCH HONNIE FAMILY COOK BOOK

Paul Prudhomme