New VP of Membership believes it's the relationships that are key to help Primerus' members thrive



By Brian Cox

Growing up with a father in the diplomatic corps taught Mike Fleming the benefit of reading a room, the value of treating people with respect, and the importance of building genuine relationships.



Mike is an avid traveler who has visited nearly 70 countries, including Peru (pictured here).

He brings those key lessons to his new position as Vice President of Membership (North America) at Primerus where he'll be responsible for recruiting new law firms to the society.

"I try to lean on relationship building," says Fleming. "I steer away from what I call transactional sales and focus more on the relational aspect of sales. I believe you need to be genuine about it, and you need to build relationships first."

Originally from Houston, Fleming is the son of a Scottish father and Vietnamese mother. His father, Alexander, initially worked in the oil and gas industry before joining the U.S. State Department as a diplomat. The career change took the family far from Texas, with assignments in Shanghai, Guangzhou, Hong Kong, Tunisia, Vienna, London, and Washington, D.C.

The family moved approximately every 2-1/2 years, each time adapting to new surroundings and new communities. For a young person, that kind of upbringing can be challenging. Friendships were often temporary, and life abroad came with security precautions and a degree of unpredictability.

But it also offered an education that few people receive.

Fleming learned to be open to different cultures and personalities, to think on his feet, and to adjust to the people and circumstances around him. His family encouraged exploration, and travel exposed him to ways of life well beyond his own experience.

At diplomatic functions, Fleming might find himself seated across from ambassadors or elected officials. Elsewhere, he could be working alongside people experiencing homelessness. It taught him to treat everyone with respect regardless of status.

"You have to learn to think on your feet and be quick witted but also be able to ingratiate yourself to different cultures and different personalities," Fleming says.

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He has honed those skills over the years, and they have proved valuable in a career that depends on establishing trust with people whose priorities, personalities, and professional ambitions vary widely.

Fleming's upbringing also helped cultivate a competitive streak, and one of his earliest ambitions had little to do with business. Baseball was his first great passion.

At age 8, he was introduced to the sport by his mother, who wanted to put his energy to good use and took him to the neighborhood baseball diamond in Texas where she signed him up for Little League.

A coach gave the young Fleming a mask and put him behind the plate. His love of baseball was born.

When he was 16, Fleming's family was stationed in Switzerland, where the schools had no baseball programs. So, Fleming chose to return to the United States to attend Wyoming Seminary College Preparatory School, a boarding school in northeastern Pennsylvania where he could play ball.

He continued playing baseball at Fairfield University in Connecticut and later at Mary Washington College in Virginia, where he studied international affairs and political science. An injury during his first year at Fairfield interrupted his playing career, though he eventually played semiprofessional baseball in Woodbridge, Va., while working as a sales manager for Defense News, an international website and newspaper focused on the politics, business, and technology of national security.

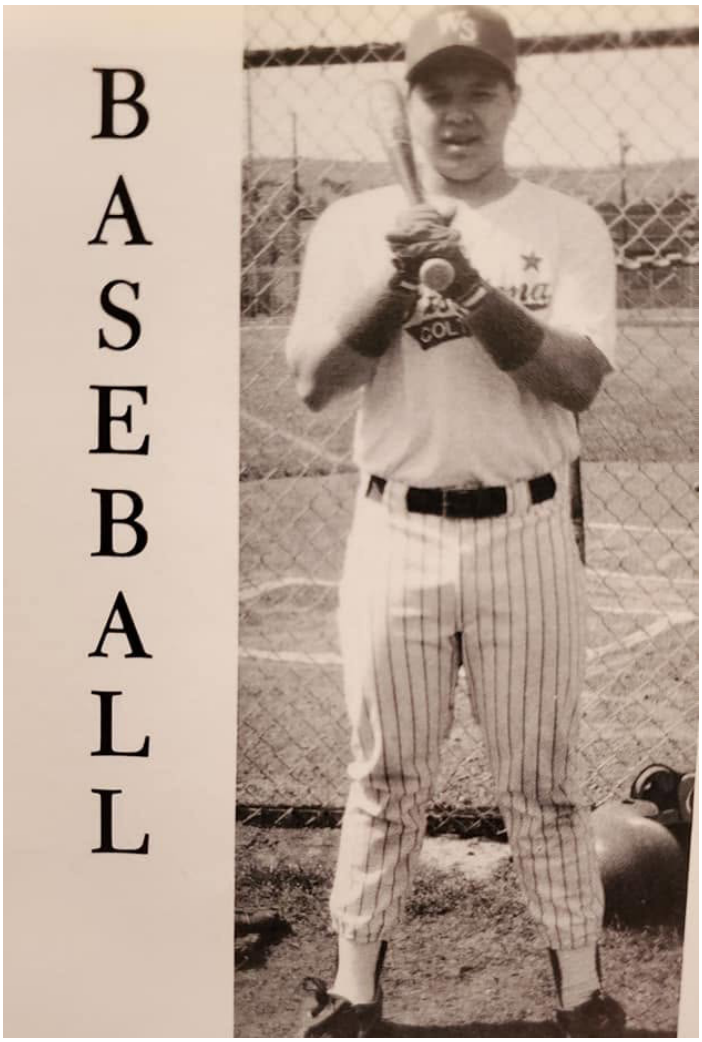
As a catcher, Fleming welcomed the challenge of facing the action and understanding the game as it unfolded to help manage the team on the field.

He sees a connection between that experience and his professional life. Baseball is a game of failure as much as success, requiring players to move forward after a setback and remain focused on results.

"You do need to get out there, and you do need to produce," he says. "It's more than just a game. It really is."

After college, Fleming pursued a career that combined his interest in international affairs with his desire to work directly with people. He double-majored in political science and international relations, eventually earning a master's degree in international relations as well. He also completed internships in Tunis, Tunisia, and Shanghai, China, experiences that reflected his longstanding interest in the diplomatic world.

Sales offered a different way to put his interests and personality to work. He was drawn to the opportunity to meet people, travel, and build a career in which performance mattered. His first position was with Jane's Information Group, a globally-focused British defense publication. He subsequently worked in



Mike followed his passion for baseball to Wyoming Seminary College Preparatory School where he was named to the state's All-Star team as a catcher and was MVP of the All-Star game. He later signed to play for Fairfield University.

international sales at Defense News, followed by positions with Thomson Reuters, Economist Intelligence Unit, and Council for Advancement and Support of Education.

His experience selling Westlaw products at Thomson Reuters introduced him to the legal profession. Later, a position with FindLaw brought him directly into the law firm marketplace, selling digital marketing and advertising services.

That experience also clarified the kind of salesperson Fleming wanted to be, reinforcing his belief that a successful business relationship must be built on more than just closing a deal.

When Primerus came calling, he saw an opportunity to bring his sales experience and his ability to connect with attorneys into an organization whose values aligned with his own.

Since joining Primerus in June, Fleming has been working alongside CEO Christian Stegmaier to expand the organization's North

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American membership, with a particular focus on identifying strong candidates in the top 75 metropolitan areas in the United States.

Fleming and Michael Whitehead, the VP of Membership (International), are working to ensure that prospective members fit the organization and can coexist and collaborate with existing members. That means listening to current members, considering their perspectives, and carefully vetting potential additions.

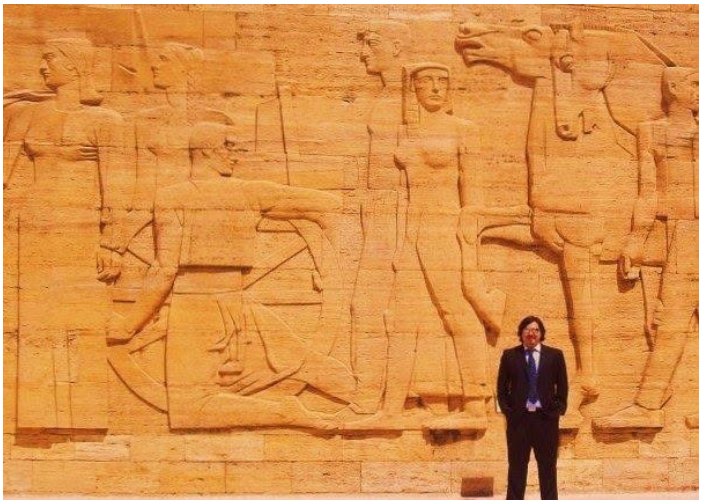
For Fleming, that approach reflects the same relationship-first philosophy that has guided him throughout his career. Growth matters, but the quality of the relationships within the organization matters just as much.

He also recognizes that building those relationships takes time. Much of his early work has involved virtual meetings and personal outreach by email. He hopes to meet more members in person as opportunities arise, because he believes face-to-face interaction remains the best way to establish trust.

Away from work, Fleming's curiosity about the world remains evident. He has visited 69 countries, enjoys exploring new cuisines, and plays guitar. He is also an accomplished musician, having studied classical viola for 13 years and performed with an orchestra in Paris and New York.

And baseball is still very much part of his life. He is just nine Major League ballparks away from completing his goal of visiting every stadium, a pursuit that combines his love of the game with his enthusiasm for travel.

These interests offer members plenty of potential conversation starters when they meet Fleming. But his larger objective at Primerus is to help members discover the value of the relationships they can build with one another.



On a trip to Turkey, Mike visited Anitkabir, the mausoleum of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk in Ankara.



Mike has traveled to France, visiting the Louvre and seeing the Venus de Milo.



He believes the organization offers something more meaningful than a network of professional contacts: a community of accomplished attorneys committed to shared principles, professional development, and service. His role is to help identify firms that will strengthen that community while ensuring existing members feel heard and valued.

Ultimately, Fleming believes membership is only the beginning. The benefits come from what members do with the opportunities available to them.

"It's like a gym membership. It's not going to do you much good unless you actually go and work out," says Fleming. "It's the same with Primerus. You've got to be engaged, and you've got to network, and then you will see the return."