This real estate agent leads a double life as a wrestling villain

Daniel Harnsberger had only been a Re/Max agent in the Richmond, Virginia, area for a few weeks when he started to go viral. But it wasn't for his properties, or his listing photos, or anything else related to his day job.

Instead, it was for his side career as a Hillary Clinton-loving, Trump-bashing professional wrestling villain dubbed the "Progressive Liberal."

"My broker was not happy about it," Harnsberger, 38, told Inman about his wrestling career getting picked up by MSNBC in mid 2017.

Though Harnsberger's broker had reservations about his politicized second job, he persisted, traveling up and down the East Coast and through deep red Appalachia. His fame grew as more and more media outlets caught wind of his anti-Trump persona. And he became a kind of bizarro world foil to the president even as he spent his days showing houses and scouring multiple listing services (MLS).

Harnsberger's life, in other words, has turned into a one-of-a-kind convergence of real estate, Trump-era theatrics, and his personal philosophy that "your whole life can't only be work."

Harnsberger began wrestling in 2003 after graduating from college. He spent years going by names like "Dynamite Dan Richards," but never hit on anything that stuck with people.

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Then in 2011 he experienced a kind of political awakening. Harnsberger was traveling in Cambodia and saw a news report about the debt ceiling and political fighting in the US. Curious, he read up on the topic and gradually came to a realization.

“I thought, you know, the Republicans are always sounding like assholes,” Harnsberger remembered thinking. “And it’s gotten way, way worse.”

The experience eventually turned Harnsberger into a political progressive, and finally in 2015 he decided to bring politics into the ring. The crowd at the match was small, but it struck a chord.

“I said, ‘I hope Trump doesn’t build a wall around Mexico, I hope he builds a wall around this town so you people can’t infiltrate the population,’” Harnsberger said. “I got palpable heat for that. I had a guy come out from the crowd who wanted to fight me.”

And thus the Progressive Liberal, a villain to red state wrestling crowds, was born.

Harnsberger said that after introducing the persona he realized it “had legs” particularly in the days as Trump rose through the Republican primary and ushered in an era of endless conflict and showman-like politicking. Perhaps as a result, Harnsberger has been a hit with the media; over the last several years he has been covered by MSNBC, *Sports Illustrated*, *USA Today*, the BBC, local media, and most recently *The Los Angeles Times*, among others.

Asked if he is bothered by being booed and heckled, Harnsberger said that he didn’t mind because he actually believes in being a progressive liberal.

“When I come to a town to wrestle, they’re going to pick a guy to like and a guy to dislike and lot of times I’m in the latter role and that’s fine,” he said. “It’s fun to be cheered. No doubt. But I have no problem with being booed if I’m standing up for the right things. And the fact that these people are so easily trolled, they get so worked up over saying such simple things, I get a kick out of it.”

Harnsberger during a match. Credit: Daniel Harnsberger

Harnsberger explained that wrestling is especially popular in many politically conservative states, and he continues to lean into his political persona. During matches, he sports a Speedo emblazoned with “#RESIST” — a reference to fighting Trump — and Ghostbuster-like knee pads displaying the president’s face. He plays up his status as an outsider, saying he’s from Washington, D.C., and liberally insults both Fox News and conservatives in the crowd. He has appeared on stage wearing Hillary Clinton shirts and other clothing meant to evoke his liberal politics — and to provoke spectators.

“I think wrestling is the right place to sort of step up with politics,” he added. “It’s not like when I go up there I’m giving a policy speech. Politics is my hook but at the end of the day it’s still pro wrestling. I’m not talking about Betsy DeVos or Stephen Miller or anything like that.”

(function(d, s, id) { var js, fjs = d.getElementsByTagName(s)[0]; if (d.getElementById(id)) return; js = d.createElement(s); js.id = id; js.src = 'https://connect.facebook.net/en_US/sdk.js#xfbml=1&version=v3.2'; fjs.parentNode.insertBefore(js,

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> Posted by The Progressive Liberal Daniel Richards on Tuesday, October 2, 2018

Harnsberger generally tries to keep his wrestling separate from his real estate practice. He doesn't bring it up with clients, or post about it on his personal social media accounts (he maintains a separate Facebook page for fans). Still, clients do Google him and find out, though so far it hasn't hurt his business.

"Even if they're of a different political affiliation they're like, 'well, that's really cool,'" he said.

However, Harnsberger was frank about how wrestling has taken a toll on his real estate career in other ways. He described bringing his laptop on the road to matches, working on listings and paperwork between bouts, and squeezing in showings while he's back home in Richmond.

"It just adds so much and makes it that much harder so I'm working nights and weekends constantly," he said.

Harnsberger primarily works with investors who are looking to flip or rent properties, and he has what he described as a third career as a property manager. The workload is significant, but he plans to close out 2018 with around 20 real estate transactions — 15 are already done and several more are in the works. It's a number he said was okay, but not great.

"I think I could be doing much better if I was not wrestling because I don't think you can have another job and be a really successful agent at the same time," he said. "What if I wasn't going away every single weekend? Usually I'm gone Thursday, Friday, Saturday. I think it'd be a different ballgame because I could be that much more into it."

So why does he keep wrestling?

Harnsberger said that it's the thing he most enjoys, and he wants to do it while still relatively young and physically able.

“I’m not going to be able to wrestle when I’m 60 years old but I will be able to work as an agent,” he said. “My body’s definitely taking a horrific beating. My knees are shot. My wrists are shot. I’ve got all kinds of problems. So what do I have left? I’ll always have my mind.”

Harnsberger with Abigail Spanberger in Richmond earlier this year. Credit: Landon Shroder // Daniel Harnsberger

And for now, he has his fans too. Though Harnsberger typically plays the villain, he does sometimes wrestle in liberal cities where spectators are more receptive to him as a hero.

A shift showing support for Harnsberger at a match in Richmond earlier this year. Credit: Daniel Harnsberger

His politics and growing fame have also led him to rub shoulders with politicians, including Abigail Spanberger and Richard Ojeda, both Democrats and US House candidates from Virginia and West Virginia, respectively.

Perhaps most surprisingly of all, some of Harnsberger's fans are also his fellow RE/MAX agents. Though there was some hesitation about his wrestling at first, he recalled a Richmond match in May where his co-workers actually showed up to support him.

"About half the agents at my brokerage came to it and they had made t-shirts," he recalled. "I was cheered at home."

Email Jim Dalrymple II

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