

Compiled by Christy Simo
Profiles by Stan Awtrey and Lindsay Thomas Jr.

According to the American Bar Association, there are nearly 30,000 practicing lawyers in the state. We asked Georgia's attorneys who they think are the tops in their field, and the result is our 13th annual Legal Elite.

This year's list represents more than 250 law firms in more than 30 cities across Georgia in 14 practice areas: Bankruptcy/Creditors' Rights, Business Law, Corporate Law, Criminal Law, Entertainment Law, Environmental Law, Family Law, General Practice/Trial Law, Immigration Law, Labor & Employment, Personal Injury, Public Finance/Bonds, Real Estate & Construction Law and Taxes/Estates/Trusts.

This year, we asked some of our top vote getters what makes them tick. You'll see their profiles throughout the list.

To compile this listing, attorneys submitted their nominations via our website at www.georgiatrend.com. Any attorney who is a member of the state bar and lives and practices in Georgia was eligible to vote and to be voted onto the list. Respondents were not allowed to vote for themselves. They could, however, vote for members of their own firms only if they voted for an equal or greater number of attorneys outside their firms.

The names of those with the most votes appear in the following pages in alphabetical order. They are listed in the categories into which their peers voted them, although some may practice in more than one area.

The listings are determined solely by lawyers' votes; places on the list are not for sale. The names of attorneys who are advertisers appear in blue type. Ballots were tallied and names verified by the *Georgia Trend* editorial staff.

If you are an attorney practicing in Georgia and would like to nominate someone for the 2016 Legal Elite, the online ballot will be open Monday, May 2 through Friday, July 29, 2016. For more information, go to www.georgiatrend.com/nominate.



BANKRUPTCY

WILLIAM A. ROUNTREE

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Age: 42

BACKGROUND: Born in Milledgeville and grew up in the Florida panhandle. Bachelor's degree from Emory University and law degree from the University of Florida. Joined Macey, Wilensky & Hennings in 2001.

WHY BANKRUPTCY LAW?

I had a professor in law school who was from a small town in Mississippi, and his parents had a 'buy-here pay-here' used car lot. He used to tell all these crazy stories about self-help repos and that kind of cowboy stuff. He made secured transactions and bankruptcy sound interesting.

WHAT I LIKE ABOUT PRACTICING IN GEORGIA: When I clerked in Florida it was more of a New York-type environment. I think the people in Georgia are much more collegial, especially in bankruptcy when the finger-in-the-eye litigation tactics don't really work. There's a defined amount of money and assets that are left and everybody is going to take a haircut, so it's like let's sit down and be reasonable. The gentility of the Georgia Bar is something I appreciate.

MOST MEMORABLE CASE: You have to be quiet when you're a bankruptcy lawyer. It's a chapter your clients want to forget.

HOBBIES: I like playing golf and hiking as much as most guys, but I've got three daughters and most of my free time revolves around them. - SA



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BUSINESS LAW

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Age: 43

BACKGROUND: Bachelor's and law degree from the University of Florida. Practicing law since 1997.

MOST MEMORABLE CASE:

As a seventh-year lawyer, I worked for a large firm that represented an injured plaintiff. After a defense verdict, we got a new trial on appeal, and a partner said, "You're going to be lead counsel on the retrial." To be given that kind of responsibility at such a young age was a memorable experience, and we got a plaintiff's verdict on the retrial.

FAVORITE VIEW OF GEORGIA: I'm a pilot, so I fly all around Georgia. It's a beautiful state to see from the air. I like flying in the mountains in fall when the leaves are changing, and I enjoy flying over downtown and Buckhead. It's an escape from the daily grind to see things from a different perspective.

FAVORITE BOOK ABOUT THE LAW: *Devil in the Grove* by Gilbert King. It chronicles the rise of Thurgood Marshall and a case he handled as a young lawyer, and a lot of it took place 60 miles south of where I grew up in Ocala, Fla. - *LT*



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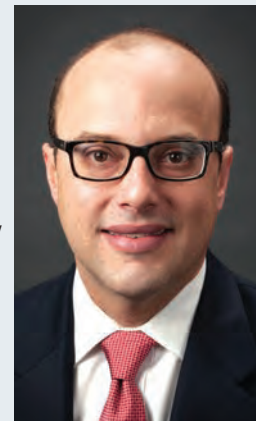
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Age: Mid-40s

BACKGROUND: Bachelor's from Tulane University, law degree from Georgia State University. Practicing law since 1996.

WHY LAW? With the types of clients I have, I'm interacting with a business owner. Most of these men and women have put their entire lives into their business. And when things are tough for them, you're in the trenches with them. You've got to be. It's very satisfying when you see one of these individuals who's worked so hard to build a business be able to go out and sell it or be incredibly successful. You're not just the lawyer. You become a part of the team. That's what brings me a lot of enjoyment. I've gotten to be a part of a lot of different teams.

FAVORITE LAW TV SHOW OR MOVIE: That's a tough question for a transactional lawyer. Nobody watched *L.A. Law* and wanted to be the tax guy. Frankly, I have always enjoyed *My Cousin Vinny*. - *LT*



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Age: 38
BACKGROUND: Grew up in Marietta. Bachelor's of science in international affairs from Georgia Tech; law degree from Georgia State University. Practicing law since 2006.

MOST MEMORABLE CASE: When I first graduated from law school, I worked for criminal defense lawyer David Wolfe. We represented a gentleman named Mr. Garza, who had been convicted of kidnapping and other charges, and we appealed the conviction all the way to the Georgia Supreme Court. David let me write the brief, and we actually got the state kidnapping law overturned on constitutional grounds. I was invited by the Georgia Defense Lawyers Association to testify to the Senate and House Judiciary committees to make a proposal as to how to fix the statute. I was two years out of law school, and to have a huge victory like that was very exciting.

FAVORITE LAW MOVIE: I was sworn in at the Jasper County Courthouse in Monticello, where *My Cousin Vinny* was filmed. It was perfect, because I love that movie. - *LT*





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Age: 46

BACKGROUND: Bachelor's degree from Colgate University and law degree from Emory University. Practicing law since 1998 and started the Sidman Law Firm in 2010.

WHY ENTERTAINMENT LAW?

I'm a recovering musician. I started off playing in garage bands, like many of us do. I realized I didn't have the chops to do it professionally, but I loved everything about music. In college I played in bands, wrote the record reviews for the school newspaper and booked all the bands. It was something I was bound and determined to be around.

HOW I BECAME INVOLVED IN REPRESENTING CHEFS: The world of good food is something I had been interested in for a while. One of my former bandmates from Colgate asked if I did cookbook deals. Turned out it was a cookbook for chef Grant Achatz, who has three Michelin stars and is the most influential American-born chef of his generation, and his business partner Nick Kokonas. Having them be your first clients in the world of chefs and restaurants would be like being a sports agent and having a young [Hank] Aaron as your first client.

THE BENEFITS OF REPRESENTING CHEFS: It gives the phrase "Will work for food" a whole new meaning. - SA



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ENVIRONMENTAL LAW

DOUG HENDERSON

Troutman Sanders
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Age: 54

BACKGROUND: Grew up in Albany. Bachelor's degree from George Washington University, master's degrees from Georgia Tech and University of Michigan, Ph.D. from Michigan, law degree from University of Kentucky. Joined Troutman Sanders in 1993.

WHY ENVIRONMENTAL LAW?

I decided I like solving and working on real environmental problems. That's why law and litigation fits for me. I get to work on things I love, and I get to work with great clients. I actually believe in the law and protecting the environment.

THE GROWTH OF ENVIRONMENTAL LAW: Environmental law went from focusing on clearly identifying the issues and now shows up in every aspect of society, whether it's chemicals in food, stormwater runoff when it rains or people developing property.

WHAT IS THE MOST CRUCIAL SKILL TO HAVE? I enjoy translating environmental law to judges and juries and regulators and administrative law judges. I like simplifying the facts and getting to the key issues. Environmental law can be very complex and the requirements are overwhelming, but when you look at what your goals are, simplifying helps get to the real reason of the law, which is to protect the environment.

HOBBIES: I've got an old motorcycle I ride around. I enjoy that. - SA



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FAMILY LAW

RANDALL M. KESSLER

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Age: 53

BACKGROUND: Bachelor's degree from Brandeis University and law degree from Emory University. Founding partner of Kessler & Solomiany LLC in 1991.

WHY LAW? I was 3 years old and my grandfather, who was a cab driver, told me I was going to be a lawyer. I thought I wanted to be an international lawyer because you get to travel all over the world. But I realized international lawyers usually worked for a big company and stay in that big office.

WHY FAMILY LAW? Family law is rewarding. You're helping solve social issues, family by family, and it feels good. Like when you get a woman child support they've been owed for 10 years. It wasn't just the money, but that they could stand up to the high-powered guys who always got their way.

MOST MEMORABLE CASE: A lady won the Georgia Lottery, and the next day her boyfriend proposed. Four years later they got a divorce. He wanted part of the lottery winnings as part of the divorce. The court gave him \$1.5 million of the \$15 million she won, and I asked her if she was upset. 'I'll never forget, she said, 'I'm too blessed to be stressed.' I bought her a baseball cap that said that. - SA



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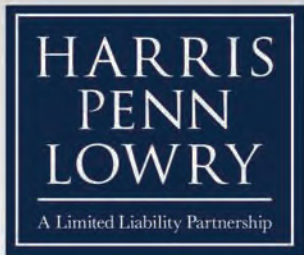
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Continued on page 68



The lawyers at Harris Penn Lowry LLP have secured more than \$750 million in verdicts and settlements. Specializing in taking complex cases to trial, the firm's partners are considered to be among the leading plaintiffs' lawyers in the Southeast, often featured for their trial work by media both in Georgia and nationally.

While impressive results have been delivered year after year, the partners at HPL have remained true to the boutique feel of their practice as well as their unwavering commitment to fighting for those who have been significantly harmed by the actions of others.



Pictured L to R are HPL Partners: Steve Lowry | Jed Manton | Jeff Harris | Darren Penn

LEGAL ELITE

Three of HPL's partners were named to *Georgia Trend's* 2015 Legal Elite.

#1 VERDICTS

HPL is the only Georgia firm to secure #1 verdicts in five different categories - Products, Business Torts, Premises, Nursing Home and Medical Malpractice - in the last 10 years.*

8-FIGURE VERDICTS

HPL has obtained more eight-figure verdicts than any other firm in Georgia over the last 10 years.*

2X HALL OF FAMERS

HPL is the only firm to be inducted twice into the *Daily Report's* Georgia Verdicts Hall of Fame.

*Results as reported by VerdictSearch.

Lloyd N. Bell

Practice Areas:

- Wrongful Death
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Accidents
- Medical Malpractice
- Spinal Cord Injury



Lloyd Bell is a highly respected trial lawyer with over 20 years of experience representing people who have suffered serious injury or wrongful death. Lloyd has achieved record verdicts in courtrooms throughout Georgia in cases ranging from medical malpractice to tractor trailer accidents. Known for his passion, creativity and tenacity, Lloyd is a frequent guest speaker at trial lawyer conferences around the country. He is also an active member of The American Association for Justice, the Georgia Trial Lawyers Association and the American Board of Trial Advocates.

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Christopher T. Graham

Christopher T. Graham founded The Private Client Law Group ("TPCLG"), a boutique tax, private equity business, and private wealth planning law firm, in 2008. Prior to establishing TPCLG, Mr. Graham began his career in the mid 1990's with the Family Wealth Planning Team at Arthur Andersen. He then ran the Advanced Tax Strategy team of a regional law firm before joining Carlton Fields to run their Atlanta office tax practice. Mr. Graham sits on the board of Prometheus Capital in Chicago and Astral Health and Beauty in Atlanta. Mr. Graham serves as the Chairman of the Board of Crown Capital Investments, a private equity advisory firm, and as Co-Manager of Emerald Acquisitions, a conservation easement fund. He earned his Bachelors of Business Administration in Accounting from the University of Michigan. He then went on to earn his J. D. at Wake Forest School of Law with a focus in tax in 1995.



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Jason N. Wiggam, Esq.

Practice Areas:

- Tax Controversy
- Tax Minimization
- Business Planning
- Asset Preservation



Jason Wiggam is an Associate Attorney with The Private Client Law Group ("TPCLG") in Atlanta, Georgia. Mr. Wiggam's practice focuses on representing individuals, businesses, officers, directors, shareholders, and partners in matters before the Internal Revenue Service, the Georgia Department of Revenue, and other state tax departments. Prior to joining TPCLG, Mr. Wiggam began his career representing taxpayers at the Phillip C. Cook Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic. He earned his Juris Doctor, magna cum laude, from Georgia State University College of Law in 2010 and obtained an LL.M. degree in Taxation from New York University School of Law five years later.

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- Mergers & Acquisitions
- Securities Regulation



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Practice Areas:

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- Criminal Defense
- White Collar Crime
- Civil Litigation in State and Federal Courts
- Appeals



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- Business Formation
- Corporate Law



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Practice Areas:

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- Real Estate Litigation
- Securities Litigation



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Anthony C. Kalka

Practice Areas:

- Personal Injury
- Accidents
- Wrongful Death
- Nursing Home Abuse
- Defective Products



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Practice Areas:

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- Corporate Law



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Practice Areas:

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 - Child Custody & Access
 - Child Support
 - Guardian ad Litem
 - Legitimation/Paternity
 - Maintenance/Alimony
 - Nuptial Agreements
- Guardianship & Adoptions



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Practice Areas:

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- Prosecution and Defense of personal injury and wrongful death
- Business Disputes



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Practice Areas:

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- Trucking Accidents
- Head & Brain Injury
- Premises Liability
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Practice Areas:

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- Trademark Prosecution
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- Technology and Outsourcing
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Practice Areas:

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- Personal & Serious Injury
- Tractor Trailer Collisions
- Auto Collisions
- Wrongful Prescription
- Nursing Home Negligence
- Medical Negligence



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Look for the next Legal Elite in December 2016



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Age: 47

BACKGROUND: Bachelor's degree from Indiana University and law degree from the University of Missouri. Joined Caldwell, Propst & DeLoach in 1999.

MOST MEMORABLE CASE: One of the first cases I worked when I joined the firm was a multi-million dollar trust and business dispute that involved a Southern California cult and some claims of breach of fiduciary duty and undue influence. The facts of the case were fascinating, the legal issues were as complex as they come, and the key witnesses were straight out of central casting. I knew from my involvement in that case that this was the area of law that I wanted to focus my practice.

WHY LAW? My undergraduate constitutional professor was tough but very respected. I did particularly well in his class. We met for beers one evening, and he told me that he thought I would be a good law student and asked whether I had ever considered going to law school. It was around this time that I saw Roy Black defend William Kennedy Smith [on TV]. His cross-examination of the key witnesses was masterful. My mind was made up. I remember looking at it and saying to myself, 'I want to do that.'

FAVORITE LAW MOVIE: *My Cousin Vinny* -SA



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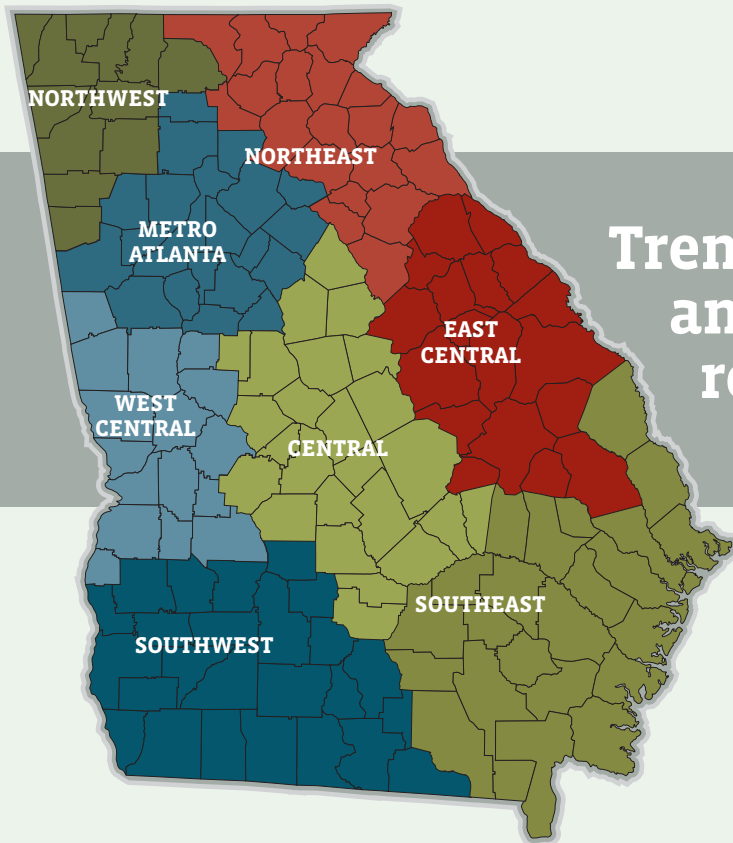
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IMMIGRATION LAW

IAN MACDONALD
Greenberg Traurig
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www.gtlaw.com
Age: 45



BACKGROUND: Born and raised in England. Bachelor's degree from The New School and law degree from American University. Joined Greenberg Traurig in 2014.

WHY LAW? I'm a second-generation immigration lawyer. My father is an immigration lawyer in the United Kingdom. So the apple doesn't fall far from the tree.

THE GROWING NEED FOR IMMIGRATION LAWYERS: Right now immigration is definitely a key election issue. I think immigration law, with the global economy growing, is going to be just as needed as tax advice when moving people from country to country.

THE DIFFERENT DEMANDS OF HIS JOB: It's about constantly being available for your clients. In a practice like immigration law, where you're not moving nuts and bolts, there are people at the end of the service. They need access to their lawyers 24/7, and you're going to have clients on the other side of the world in completely different time zones.

WHAT'S GOOD ABOUT PRACTICING IN ATLANTA? Since the Olympics, Atlanta has had a dramatic increase in its international business. I would put Atlanta as one of the top three places in the country to practice immigration law. My ability to service clients out of Atlanta is top rate. - SA



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Age: 57

BACKGROUND: Bachelor's degree from Dartmouth College and law degree from the University of Georgia. Practicing law since 1983.

WHY LAW? I was interested in the law as a system that creates order out of

chaos. Everyone is equal before the law, so the underdog, the person who has been wronged in some way, has recourse.

MOST MEMORABLE CASE: In terms of impact in the law, *Caley v. Gulfstream* recognized the ability of employers to require arbitration as a means of dispute resolution instead of a lawsuit and a jury trial. I've had lots of memorable cases, but a lot of my successes are behind the scenes. They are no less rewarding, because I know I helped not only the company but that employee. I helped the two of them get through a difficult situation, and there won't be a lawsuit, and it won't be in the newspaper. That is a true success for everybody involved.

FAVORITE BOOK ABOUT LAW? It's probably cliché, but both the book and the movie *To Kill a Mockingbird* are favorites of mine. - *LT*



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Age: 47

BACKGROUND: Law degree from Pennsylvania State University. Practicing law since 1992.

WHY LAW? I grew up the son of lawyers. My middle name is Lawson. Growing up, I generally rooted for the underdog. As I watched my parents, I came to understand that the law is a career where you can make a difference in people's lives.

MOST MEMORABLE CASE: *Martin v. Six Flags*. It is a case I've been working on since July 2007. In November 2013, a Cobb County jury returned a \$35-million verdict for a young man who suffered a serious brain injury when he was attacked by Six Flags employees. It is a case that demanded we communicate the law clearly and the extent of the brain injury and its impact on the client's life. Today, we are still fighting to defend the jury's verdict in the Georgia Court of Appeals. - *LT*



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PUBLIC FINANCE**JONATHAN B. PANNELL**
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Age: 38

BACKGROUND: Born and raised in Savannah. Bachelor's degree from the University of Georgia and law degree from Georgia State University. A founding partner of Gray, Pannell and Woodward in 2008.

WHY LAW? I'm a third-generation lawyer. The majority of my family, my uncles and cousins included, have law degrees. You had to go to law school so you could fit in at holidays. So maybe it was lack of originality.

WHY PUBLIC FINANCE? You get to see the tangible results of your practice. I went hunting with a friend, and on the way back we were driving through the middle part of the state, going through those small towns, and I tell him, "We financed the high school there," or "We financed the city hall there or the wastewater treatment plant there." We finally got to Jesup and he said, "Is there anywhere you have not done a project?" That's the rewarding thing - helping these communities and local governments finance these projects, and you get to see the results at the end of the day.

WHAT IT IS LIKE TO PRACTICE WITH HIS FATHER: It's been great. I think we would have known in the first few months if it wasn't going to work, and now it's been 10 years. Having my dad [James L. Pannell] and Tom Gray, who I've known since I was a kid, as mentors and learning from them has been great. They've been great teachers and great people to learn from. **-SA**

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Age: 44

BACKGROUND: Born and raised in Dallas, Ga. Bachelor's degree from Georgia State University and law degree from Mercer University. Joined King & Spalding in 2001.

WHY LAW? From a young age I always wanted to be a lawyer. I can't explain why, other than seeing the lawyers in my rural county work. I always found it fascinating.

WHY BUSINESS LITIGATION? I enjoy helping my clients resolve issues. The construction field is fraught with dangers that those who don't participate in the process are unaware of. I can tell my clients that I've been through it before, so let me help you avoid some of the problems you're not even aware of yet.

MOST MEMORABLE CASE: The most public was the DeKalb County school litigation case. I represented the county and its construction program. It turned into a six- to seven-year lawsuit that had many advocates and many critics. - SA



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Age: 41

BACKGROUND: Bachelor's degree from the University of South Florida and law degree from Georgia State University. Joined MendenFreiman in 2012; practicing law since 2002.

YOU WERE A CPA. WHY PURSUE A LEGAL DEGREE?

I was always interested in estate planning and wills. The CPA work isn't quite as creative, so I was drawn to the legal work. Compliance work is hard. Legal work is hard. It's just a little different.

WHY TAX LAW? I like to help people. When I do some transaction work or estate planning or when someone dies, it's usually a major event in someone's life. It's nice to help people when you have the experience to guide them through a hard time.

WHY DO YOU ESPECIALLY ENJOY HELPING WIDOWS? You can help them understand what their husbands have set up and help guide them through it. A lot of times the husbands were the ones working and doing all this, and I'm able to help. People are grieving and it literally shuts down one part of their brain, so it's really a tough time to deal with all this stuff. - SA



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