The changing tune of law
LARRY CHILDS HAS A BEAT ON THE EVOLVING BHAM LEGAL SCENE

Clients put their trust in our firm, and I never want to let them down.

What is the best professional advice you have ever received? “What goes around comes around.” If someone plans to practice a profession for a long time, he or she cannot afford to damage his or her reputation by shady practices or sharp elbows. The person who is pushed around today will remember it tomorrow.

You have a great deal of experience working with the banking industry. What do you see as the most significant trend in the industry moving forward? The sweeping Dodd-Frank Act and other regulations enacted by the federal government since the great recession have made banking more expensive and less profitable. As a result, the number of banks still in business has been drastically reduced and it will also be more difficult for new banks to be chartered in the future.

What advice can you give to young attorneys entering the business? Start networking on day one. A broad network helps grow your practice, and more resources mean you can deliver better value to your clients.

Would you say Birmingham is headed in the right direction as a city? In order for Birmingham to reach its potential, we need better statesman-leadership both at the city and county level. It will take several years of positive efforts to recover from the damage done by Jefferson County’s repudiation of its economic development commitments in the county’s bankruptcy. Overcoming racial polarization is also a major barrier to growth and prosperity.

Your firm is based in Nashville, but has a strong presence in Birmingham. How does the firm plan to increase its footprint here in Birmingham?

We have been very deliberate and patient in seeking to hire lawyers who can contribute to our client service for the long term. We would like to develop additional depth in our present concentrations of health care, financial institutions and government investigations practices, which are nationally recognized, and we would welcome additional lawyers with skills in corporate, finance and bankruptcy fields.

Reporter Michael Seale conducted this interview. Reach him at mseale@bizjournals.com.

In addition to his accomplished legal career, Larry Childs is also a musician.

After close to four decades practicing law in Birmingham, attorney Larry Childs can speak rather intelligently on the legal and business scene in the Magic City, and he is not shy about doing so. Childs heads up the Birmingham offices of Waller Lansden Dortch & Davis LLP, a Nashville-based firm that has been operating in Birmingham for 10 years now.

After clerking for U.S. District Judge Seybold H. Lynne, Childs started practicing law in Birmingham, and has now for 38 years. While his practice currently deals primarily in financial services, Childs’ law career has taken him through an interesting array of practices and experiences, and one can accurately say he has somewhat “run the gamut” as far as litigation is concerned.

He has been involved in cases involving consumer class actions, embezzlement cases, lender liability suits, assisted hospitals in contractual disputes with medical providers, industrial accidents, criminal allegations against company executives and a host of other cases. In essence, Waller has in Childs the legal equivalent of a renaissance man, so to speak – and the fact that he is also an accomplished musician just adds to that resume.

Most recently, Childs led Waller’s litigation team in the Jefferson County municipal bankruptcy case, one of the largest in American history.

Childs vast legal experience in Birmingham has given him a unique perspective on the city and state, and the local law firm scene. The BBJ recently spoke with Childs on his opinions on the city he has lived in for decades, the profession he loves and why he has never wanted to be anything but a lawyer.

What fields do you practice in most now? Most of my work is complex litigation with an emphasis on representing financial services companies. Litigation is not completely specialized, however, and we get involved in a wide variety of matters, such as representing the trustee of Jefferson County’s defaulted sewer bonds and representing state officials in prison litigation.

Being a veteran attorney here in Birmingham, how have you seen the legal industry change in Birmingham over the years? Computers and email have brought revolutionary changes. When I started as a lawyer, we might be required to finish a pleading two days early to provide time to have it manually typed and driven to a court for filing. Now, of course, we can make changes at the last minute and electronically file briefs almost everywhere. Additionally, marketing, which was considered unethical when I began my career, has radically changed the business of law practice.

What keeps you motivated to come to work each day? A great blessing of being an attorney is having clients who put their trust and confidence in our ability to guide them through crises and disputes. I am tremendously honored and motivated whenever

LARRY CHILDS

Title: Partner, co-practice group leader, litigation and dispute resolution, Waller Lansden Dortch & Davis LLP

Education: B.A. University of Alabama; J.D., University of Virginia

Hobbies: Playing trumpet at weddings and funerals, matching wits with my grandchildren, ages 1-8

Family: Married with three grown children and five grandchildren