

# PORTICO

JANUARY 2015

+LEGACY LAWYERS  
BUILDING AN ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM  
BACKYARD BBQ INVITATIONAL

portico 10





# PORTICO 10

COMPILED BY PORTICO STAFF  
PHOTOS BY MICHAEL BARRETT AT PIX-CAPRI THEATRE



Lindsay Thomas Dowdle, Aafram Y. Sellers

Meet our 5th annual selection of up-and-coming attorneys in the Jackson area. We received nominations from local firms, past winners and members of the community. A panel of local judges then selected the winners.

## Lindsay Thomas Dowdle

**Firm:**  
Jones Walker LLP

**Years in Practice:** 6

**Primary area of practice:**  
Labor and employment

**Education:**  
Appalachian State University, B.A. psychology *summa cum laude*  
University of Mississippi, master's in counselor education  
Mississippi College School of Law, J.D., *magna cum laude*

### Greatest achievement:

Fairly early in my career, I had my first success at the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals in a Title VII and age discrimination case for a large gaming client. While this may not be my greatest achievement in my practice, it was certainly a memorable one that came at a very pivotal time in my career and encouraged me to dig in and stay at it.

Outside of my practice, I have had the pleasure to serve as the President of Jackson Young Lawyers (JYL) this year. I am very proud of the organization and the pro bono work and community service initiatives that we have accomplished, including Lawyers in the Library and the community outreach grant program. I am grateful to have worked with many talented young lawyers through JYL and am happy with the work that we have done for the community.

### Path to leadership:

My path has been a combination of many things – hard work, determination, a supportive family and the guidance of mentors. My father instilled in me that that I can accomplish anything, but being successful will require diligent preparation and hard work. I have also had the privilege of working with many outstanding lawyers, and I have learned from them every step of the way.



## Aafram Y. Sellers

**Firm:**  
Sellers & Associates, Attorneys at Law

**Years in Practice:** 13

**Primary area of practice:**  
Criminal defense and personal injury

**Education:**  
Hampton University, B.S. business management (1997);  
University of Mississippi School of Law (2001)

### Greatest achievement:

In 2007, I represented a young mother charged with the murder of the father of her kids. For years he had physically abused her. One night after being brutally attacked, she shot him in self-defense, unfortunately killing him. Sadly, this abused woman was charged with murder. She came to me to represent her. She told me she didn't have much money, she had three kids and she needed my help. At that point in my legal career, I had never handled a murder case. The District Attorney made her a plea offer to serve 20 years in prison. Knowing she could not leave her kids without a mother, she decided to go to trial. I told her I could not guarantee she would be found not guilty but I promised her I would work as hard as possible on her case. I represented her at trial and a jury found her not guilty. This was my first criminal jury trial. It was during this case that I realized that being a lawyer was more than my profession; it was my calling to help people. It was in that fight for her freedom, for her kid's future, and for justice, that I found my passion. This lady put her trust in a young, inexperienced lawyer and I promised her I would do my best. Since then, I have represented hundreds of clients in all kinds of matters. Although, I can never guarantee a result, I can and I do guarantee that I will approach every case with the same attention and passion that I gave that mother, wrongfully charged with murder. I believe my clients need and deserve it.

My greatest achievement outside of this one case has been being blessed with the opportunity to do something I love every single day and making my parents proud along the way.

### Path to leadership:

When asked by my college professor why I wanted to be a lawyer, my immediate response was, "to help people." This desire to help people is deeply rooted in my upbringing and childhood experiences where I often found myself standing up for people I felt were being mistreated. My mother always told me, "to whom much is given, much is required." My law practice and path to leadership is a reflection of that principle.







From left to right: Nakimuli Davis-Primer, Kathleen Shields O'Beirne, Lawrence M. Coco, III



## Nakimuli Davis-Primer

**Firm:**  
Baker Donelson Bearman Caldwell & Berkowitz, PC

**Years in practice:** 5

**Primary area of practice:**  
Labor & Employment and Insurance Defense

**Education:**  
Canton High School 2001, Valedictorian  
Mississippi State University 2005, B.S. computer science & engineering,  
*magna cum laude*  
The University of Mississippi School of Law 2009, J.D. *magna cum laude*

### Greatest achievement:

I am grateful to be in a position to provide pro bono and community service, to work with notable corporate clients, and to have been recognized as a Super Lawyers Rising Star for 2014. However, my greatest achievements as an attorney are: being a judicial law clerk to the Honorable Leslie H. Southwick of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit (2009-2010) and receiving the Jackson Young Lawyers' Outstanding Service Award (2013). It was a great accomplishment to obtain a federal judicial clerkship and to learn from and assist Judge Southwick. Moreover, community service is very important to me. I consider it an honor to be recognized by JYL for some of my service work as well as by the Jackson Public School District as a Volunteer of the Year for Dawson Elementary School in 2013. I hope that my efforts inspire

others to take an active role in improving their community and helping those who are less fortunate.

### Path to leadership:

I believe that my journey has been affected by a number of things including my faith, integrity, perseverance, and internal drive and desire to positively impact those around me. Reflecting on my childhood, I recognize the traits of a leader in my choices. After losing both of my parents as a teenager and having to forge ahead as a young adult without their guidance, I embraced those traits and realized the importance of setting goals and striving for excellence. Those losses also taught me how critical it is to enjoy each day and be thankful for each opportunity. I know that I am extremely blessed, and I make every effort to be a blessing to others. Further, I am fortunate to have family, mentors, and friends who believe in me, want to see me succeed, and encourage me personally and professionally. I am very thankful for and humbled by their support.

## Kathleen Shields O'Beirne

**Firm:** Bradley Arant Boult Cummings, LLP

**Years in practice:** 7

**Primary area of practice:** Financial services litigation

**Education:**  
Davidson College and University of Mississippi School of Law

### Greatest achievement:

My family – my husband, Ryan, and our sons, Thomas and James – is by far my greatest achievement. I've been fortunate to have some professional successes along the way, primarily winning cases before the client has to endure the expense and risk of trial. But no professional experience could ever compare to the sense of pride and gratitude I have for my family.

### Path to leadership:

I think to be a good leader you have to care about what you are doing and the people you are doing it with, but you also have to remember not to take yourself as seriously as you take your work. I've been fortunate to work with more senior lawyers who are pleasant to be around, even when the work we are doing is far from pleasant. Those are the people I want to be in the trenches with. The ones who want to win and are going to work long and hard to do it, but who also realize there's room for a sense of humor, and there's usually no need to be a jerk.

## Lawrence M. Coco, III

**Firm:** McCraney, Coco & Lee, PLLC

**Years in Practice:** 13

### Primary area of practice:

I have a general litigation practice, working in a wide variety of areas including commercial disputes, insurance coverage issues, construction litigation, personal injury, criminal law as well as a general chancery practice, including family law and estate matters.

### Education:

University of Mississippi 1996, B.A. English and History  
University of Mississippi School of Law 2001, J.D.

### Greatest achievement:

In my personal life, my greatest achievement has been my marriage to Rebecca Thomas Coco for the past sixteen years, along with the raising of our three children - Mary Robinson (11), Thomas (8) and Edward (4). In my professional life, my greatest achievement has been the establishment of my law firm, McCraney, Coco & Lee, PLLC, since 2011. Both of these aspects of my life have required much love, time, hard work, and dedication. However, the rewards from both my family and my firm have been enormously fulfilling.

### Path to leadership:

In my experience, the path to leadership begins with the team that you have around you and, more specifically, the teamwork that is required for any successful family or business. In my family life, this team begins with my wife, Rebecca, and now has extended to our children. Both Rebecca and I have emphasized to our children, and often to each other, that we are a team, and we have to work together to achieve our goals. Rebecca and I are partners and lead our family together, leaning on each other's strengths to raise our children in a loving, safe, environment. Our goal, like every spouse and parent, is to have a strong, loving family and to raise our children in a manner that teaches them to be good people and allows them reach their fullest potential.

I have taken this same approach in my professional life, in that I have two outstanding partners, Patrick McCraney and Stewart Lee. We all have very different law practices and strengths but, through teamwork, respect and friendship, we have combined these traits to build a solid and productive law firm. The teamwork has required leadership from each of us, as we have each taken on leadership responsibilities in different aspects of our firm. However, leadership is easier, and much more effective, when you have a great team and everyone is working together for a common goal. I am proud to be a part of both my family and my firm.





From left to right: Rusty Comley, Jennifer Riley-Collins, Cable Frost

## Rusty Comley

**Firm:**  
Watkins & Eager

**Years in Practice:** 8

Primary area of practice: Product Liability – Defense

**Education:**  
University of Mississippi 1996, B.S. business management, *cum laude*  
Mississippi College 2006, Juris Doctor, *summa cum laude*

### Greatest achievement:

Personally, my greatest achievement was convincing my wonderful wife, Ali (Allen) Comley, to marry me and have a family. Ali and I were married the same day I graduated from Ole Miss and was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Army. Our adventure over the next 18 years took us through flight school in Alabama, service in Germany where our daughter, Kyleigh, and son, Briggs, were born, and then ultimately back to Mississippi where Ali supported me through law school while we raised two pre-schoolers.

Ali is a school teacher. She also has the biggest heart of anyone I know. Her perspective on my cases is always humbling because no matter how strong I believe my side of a case to be, she always sees the other side. I tease her that she would give anyone money for anything.

Professionally, my greatest achievement is becoming a member of Watkins & Eager. It is my good fortune to work with and be mentored by some of the best trial lawyers in the country. Their mentoring and friendship have been invaluable. Trial work, examining witnesses, and arguing a case, just being an advocate, are the most enjoyable moments of my work. Equally rewarding is the counselor side of my practice—helping clients make the tough decisions.

### Path to leadership:

It is difficult for me to consider myself a leader in the legal profession, especially when I compare myself to so many others in our community. However, any path I have had to leadership began with the values my parents instilled in me—work fiercely hard, treat others with respect, guard your integrity, and love to learn. The Army reinforced those values and also gave me the opportunity to put them in practice in tough situations. The Army also taught me that the only way to effectively lead is by example. And that you are never too important to laugh at yourself. I strive to apply these same values and lessons in my law practice. In other words, I hope to never forget there is always something to learn or work to be done to help ensure a positive result for a client, and accomplishing both with humor and respect goes a long way.

reflects a different aspect of sharpening me for my ultimate life's purpose. I am honored today to lead the ACLU of Mississippi, an organization dedicated to standing guard in defense of our constitutional rights and advancing civil liberties. I have been equally privileged to stand in defense of freedom as a Military Intelligence Officer in the United States Army. I was recently selected for promotion to the rank of Colonel. Being selected as a Fellow of the W.K. Kellogg Leadership Network Fellowship is yet another opportunity with which I have been favored – through this fellowship I am experiencing, both personal and professional, development which will allow me to have greater impact on behalf of Mississippi's most vulnerable. If I have to say one great achievement – yielding myself to be led so that I may lead.

### Path to leadership:

I believe my steps have been ordered. Psalms 37:23 states the “steps of a good man [or woman] are ordered.” From youth throughout adulthood, I have been afforded opportunities to lead. I cannot necessarily say that all of the opportunities have been sought nor are they what I think I would have necessarily chosen for myself but they are what was intended for me. I believe that to each is given a set of talents, it is then our responsibility to learn and develop the skills needed to put those gifts into play for a greater purpose. From my involvement in student government associations in high school and college, through tenets of leadership sharpened in the military, to professional development as an attorney and advocate, my path has led me toward governance and development of those people and projects with which I have been trusted. I try very hard to lead from a position of service not from position of being served.

## Jennifer Riley-Collins

**Firm:**  
American Civil Liberties Union of Mississippi

**Years in practice:** Almost 15

**Primary area of practice:**  
Constitutional and Civil Liberties Law

**Education:**  
Alcorn State University 1987, B.A. political science *magna cum laude*  
University of Central Texas 1993, Master's of criminal justice  
Mississippi College School of Law 1999, J.D.

### Greatest achievement:

My greatest personal achievement has been as the mother of three wonderful sons, Joseph Tracy Collins (an educator in the Clinton public school district), Jonathan Taylor Collins (scholar at Alcorn State University) and Joshua Riley Sampson (student and athlete at Clinton High School), and grandmother of Travis Michael Collins. They are the best of who I am and ever will be.

There is not one greatest professional achievement to which I can point. I have been blessed to achieve many successes. Each of them

## Cable Frost

**Firm:**  
Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell & Berkowitz, PC

**Years in Practice:** 12

**Primary area of practice:**  
Business, product liability and construction litigation

**Education:**  
Mississippi College School of Law, J.D., 2002, *magna cum laude*  
University of Mississippi, B.A., 1997, *cum laude*

**Greatest achievement:**  
Being the best leader and father possible to my children.

### Path to leadership:

I think the path to leadership starts with humility and an honest assessment of one's strengths and weaknesses. Willingness to listen to others and encouraging a team approach is inspiring and, ultimately, provides a platform where innovative ideas and creative solutions are possible. Without humility, you are unable to learn and a wise leader knows that there is always room for improvement.



## Robert Walker

**Firm:**  
Baker Donelson Bearman  
Caldwell & Berkowitz, PC

**Years in Practice:** 12

**Primary area of practice:**  
Products Liability and  
Transportation

**Education:**  
Millsaps College 1999, B.B.A.  
University of Mississippi School  
of Law 2002, J.D.

**Greatest achievement:**

I'm not sure I can point to one "greatest achievement." Certainly, making partner at Baker Donelson was a great achievement and, of course, my family, but it is the little things that all add up to great achievements: every time I get a good result for a client, that is a great achievement; teaching my young daughter how to ride her bicycle or throw a ball the correct way, likewise are great achievements.

**Path to leadership:**

I try to focus my energy on what is really important to me and where I can make the most impact. Right now those things are my family, my church, my law practice and the Jackson community. I try to always treat others with respect, even the occasional annoying opposing counsel, and work hard to do my best in all that I do.



## Kelly Blackwood

**Firm:**  
Bradley Arant Boult Cummings LLP

**Years in practice:** 15

**Primary area of practice:**  
Environmental

**Education:**  
University of Mississippi, 1995  
Mississippi College School of Law,  
1999

**Greatest achievement:**

My greatest achievement has been finding a healthy balance between my practice and my family. I work hard to satisfy my clients, but family is a priority. It is not always easy in this profession to strike the right balance, but I have been privileged to work with a firm that allows me to set a schedule that works for me.

**Path to leadership:**

My path to leadership was through perseverance. Fifteen years ago I set out to have a career in environmental law. This field is not always easily accessible to new law graduates. However, my parents taught me at a very young age to believe in myself and to never give up. I also had the benefit of some amazing mentors who helped open doors, provided needed guidance, and showed me what it takes to become an effective lawyer. I am proud of the work I have done over the last 15 years, and I hope to one day be able to share these life lessons with other young professionals, particularly my children. ○

