

Working on Results

By Nancy Moore

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“Hey, did you hear the one about the lawyer who...?” Ah, yes, lawyer jokes. Everyone knows at least one lawyer joke. Even lawyers know lawyer jokes! Lawyers are stereotyped and seemingly larger than life, whether in fiction: Perry Mason and Matlock; or nonfiction: F. Lee Bailey, Johnny Cochran, and Howard Cosell (yes, Howard Cosell). People have preconceived notions about lawyers, both positive and negative. Mark S. Jetton, Jr. and Eric S. Meredith are Charlotte attorneys whose goal is to change people’s negative perceptions of their profession.

Changing of the Guard

If you’ve ever hired a lawyer, you know that it can be difficult to speak with him or her directly. They are either in court, with a client, or ‘unavailable’. Waiting for the return phone call can be just as frustrating, if not more so. Mark and Eric understand the importance of keeping clients up-to-date on what is happening with their case. In doing so, they speak with clients directly as often as possible, so that questions can be answered and procedures explained. In many cases, clients have Mark’s and Eric’s cell phone numbers.

The Men Behind the Change

Mark Jetton is a Charlotte native whose family can claim Mecklenburg County as their home since the mid-eighteenth century, Mark attended Providence Day School and received a football scholarship to Clemson. After two years of playing for the Tigers, Mark transferred to Elon University in Elon, NC where he earned his bachelor’s degree in business administration.

Mark is still involved with competitive sports and enjoys playing flag football and softball. He also enjoys snow skiing, quail hunting, and working out at the YMCA. While in college, Mark was a Vincent DePaul Draddy trophy semifinalist. The Draddy trophy, now known as the William V. Campbell trophy, is sponsored by the National Football Foundation and is awarded to the American college football player with the best combination of academics, community service, and on-field performance. Mark knew at an early age that he wanted to work in a profession that helped people. His competitive nature and ‘want to win’ attitude were a perfect fit in becoming a lawyer. He continued at Elon, earning his law degree in 2009 – the inaugural class of Elon University’s School of Law.

Surrounded by his family, Mark’s mother is a nurse at Presbyterian Hospital and his father is a general contractor. His sister, Natalie, works for the Charlotte Checkers.

Eric Meredith was born and raised in High Point, NC. A graduate of T. Wingate Andrews High School, he attended NCSU (where he had been recruited to play golf), and earned his bachelor’s degree in political science. After graduating from NC State, Eric entered the Elon University School of Law.

Since childhood, Eric has wanted to be an attorney. His mother managed a law firm and he tells the story of being three years old and meeting an attorney. Eric extended his arm and they shook hands.

The elder attorney, who takes the credit for Eric becoming a lawyer. Said that Eric was the only three-year old he'd ever known to offer to shake someone's hand.

An only child, Eric's parents reside in High Point. His mom manages a dental office and his dad is retired from K-Mart and the textile industry. When he's not visiting his parents, Eric enjoys being outdoors and stays in shape with golf, basketball, and softball. If he's not exercising outside, he's at the YMCA.

Craziness Pays Off

Mark and Eric met in the second semester of their first year of law school. They were members of the same cohort – a group comprised of peers and mentors. They began studying and socializing together and realized that they had the same ethics, methods of preparation, ideas, etc. They became great friends and took every class together.

In 2008, the year before graduating, they decided to open their own firm. They had both worked in law firms throughout high school and college, and had received offers from other firms, but they wanted to be on their own. "You're crazy!" was the typical response from friends and family. With approximately 45,000 law students graduating every year in the US, making your mark, especially on your own, can be a very daunting experience. Many large firms have downsized because of the economy and hanging out one's shingle is expensive, time consuming, nerve wracking, and not always the best way to start out.

Mark and Eric weren't intimidated by the prospect and moved forward with their plan. After researching other areas and realizing that the legal industry was changing in their own backyard, they chose Charlotte. For almost one year prior to graduating, they visited the city every weekend and met with lawyers, law clerks, and judges to build up contact base. Together they studied for the bar exam and in July 2009 passed on the first try.

Why Jetton & Meredith?

In September 2009 Mark and Eric opened the doors to their firm. Practice areas had been decided upon earlier. The team would focus on family law (divorce), personal injury, criminal defense, traffic (DWI/DUI), civil litigation, wills and estate administration. Thanks to advance preparation, they had clients and client referrals lined up. They were in business!

The relationship Mark and Eric strive to develop with their clients are based on trust and confidence. Being available to their clients, including nights and weekends, and the way they make each client feel like he is the only one are the exceptions in law firms. Mark and Eric know the importance of their clients – without clients, they wouldn't be in business. They fully understand this and don't take it for granted.

Within his first six months of practicing law, Mark settled a case for \$100,000. As the saying goes, success breeds success. Mark and Eric are at the courthouse virtually every day of the week. When they are not in the courtroom, they are putting in long office hours, ensuring that each client's needs are being met. Thanks to their hard work and dedication to their clients, the firm grew quickly, and Mark and Eric found themselves in a position to bring an associate attorney onboard.

Growing Pains

Kelly Dees, a 2010 Elon School of Law graduate, joined Jetton & Meredith in February 2011. Kelly does some criminal and civil, but the majority of her practice is personal injury and worker's compensation. Kelly is from Gibsonville, NC, a small town between Greensboro and Burlington, and a neighbor of Elon. Kelly graduated from Eastern Guilford High School in Gibsonville and attended the University of NC where she majored in journalism/mass communication and minored in political science.

Inspired to become an attorney by her grandfather, the late Julius Dees of Greensboro, Kelly fondly recalls the influence he had on her career choice. She remembers spending time with him in his office and watching how he worked. After passing the bar, her family presented her with all of his law books – some of which contain his handwritten notes in the margin.

Kelly is a great addition to the firm, sharing Mark and Eric's philosophy of putting the client first. She explains that, during the initial consultation, they spend as much time as is needed with the client, understanding the client's needs and anticipated outcome. They review strategies and review customary timeframes. (Unfortunately, lawyers are often at the mercy of the court; what appears to only need a few days can actually take a couple of months.)

When she's not at the firm, Kelly enjoys reading, playing tennis, taking her beagle, Miller, to the dog park, and spending time with her boyfriend, Ryan Valente, also an attorney.

First Impressions

The friendly voice you hear when you call Jetton & Meredith belongs to Tasha Beard. Tasha's been with the firm since September of 2010. She's married and has two daughters, McKinley and Greyson.

Community Involvement

Jetton & Meredith are involved in the community on a professional level; i.e., State and County Bar Associations, as well as a personal level. Mark is a member of the Elon University Young Alumni Board, the Elon University Phoenix Club, and volunteers with the Salvation Army through the NC Bar Association Young Lawyers Division. He is often seen at Butler High School as a guest speaker sharing stories about his profession. Eric is a member of the Elon University School of Law Alumni Association, the Charlotte Junior Chamber of Commerce, and Kiwanis International. In addition to the workload and community involvement, Mark and Eric make the time to sponsor bowling tournaments and Little League teams.

Contacting the Firm

If you find yourself in need of a lawyer, don't hesitate to call Mark, Eric, or Kelly. The office is located at 216 N McDowell Street in Charlotte – right across from the post office. The telephone number is 704-333-1114. You can also reach them via email at markjetton@jettonmeredithlaw.com ericmeredith@jettonmeredithlaw.com and kellydees@jettonmeredithlaw.com .

A Final Word

If you are a regular reader of South Charlotte Living Magazine or Matthews Living Magazine, you may notice that I take a special interest in all of my cover subjects. With a nod to each person's individuality, I sometimes share that individualism with you. Eric offers a fun perspective on uniqueness.

It can be difficult standing apart from the masses (or sea of suits) in the courthouse, especially when you're the 'new kid on the block.' Sometime last year, Eric began wearing two-tone wingtip shoes (sometimes called spectator shoes). What began as one pair, soon turned into buying five more pairs and earning Eric the reputation as, "The attorney with the shoes."

So, when you visit Jetton & Meredith, look down when you meet Eric. He won't be insulted.