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On The Rise: J. Matthew "Matt" Maguire Jr.

By Greg Land, Staff Reporter

With his ready smile and easy-going manner, J. Matthew "Matt" Maguire Jr. may seem an easy mark for lawyers on the other side of the table. Surely this tall, affable fellow can't be too tough, especially when it comes to the arcane minutiae of municipal bidding regulations and government contracts, right?

The answer, as more than a few battered lawyers can attest, is a resounding "no."

In the roughly seven years since he was recruited by former Georgia Attorney General Michael J. Bowers to join Meadows, Ichter & Bowers (which merged with Balch & Bingham in 2003), Maguire has become what Bowers describes as the firm's "go-to guy" for issues involving complex state and municipal litigation, rising from protégé to partner and cultivating a reputation as a quietly determined straight-shooter so well regarded by others in the field that he was named a bid-protest hearing officer for Fulton County—the same county ordered by a jury to pony up \$180,000 after Maguire sued on behalf of a developer for selective code enforcement.

"He's very fair, very sharp," says Joseph J. Kim, an attorney with the state Department of Administrative Services, which has been the target of several of Maguire's efforts.

"I've never felt like he was trying to play 'hide-the-ball,' which some lawyers do," says Kim. "He brings a lot of credibility to his work." Only five or six firms in Atlanta specialize in governmental litigation, Kim adds.

"Very talented," says McKenna Long & Aldridge partner J. Randolph "Randy" Evans, one of a team of lawyers that has been wrangling with Maguire and other attorneys in a long-running dispute pitting the Governor's Office of Consumer Affairs against Columbus-based Bill Heard Chevrolet.

Evans, general counsel for the Georgia Republican Party, is joined by former Gov. Roy E. Barnes in expressing high regard for Maguire's abilities.

Maguire is "one of the bright young stars of the bar," says Barnes. "I've worked with him on a couple of occasions; he's very diligent, smart, but most of all he has good judgment. That's unusual, it usually only comes with gray hair and age, but it came to Matt at an early age, and I think we're going to see great things out of this man over the coming years."

Maguire himself seems a bit surprised to hear of the praise others cast his way.

"I've just been lucky to be at the right place at the right time," says the self-described so-so scholar, a Rhode Island native who attended the University of Virginia before coming to Georgia for law school.

"Georgia seemed almost exotic then," he recalls. "I figured I'd stay a couple of years, then move on."

But he met his wife, an actuary, and the two are now comfortably settled, raising their 5-year-old twins.

Maguire was an associate with Goodman, McGuffey, Aust & Lindsey handling a variety of plaintiffs' litigation when he met Bowers as the two worked on a mediation case involving artificial stucco.

As the case drew to a close, Bowers recalls telling the young associate, "If you ever think about moving, give me a call."

"He said, 'I thought you'd never ask,'" says Bowers.

Maguire displayed an eagerness for government-related litigation, becoming a valuable asset to his team, Bowers says.

"He very smart, works real hard, and he's honest to a fault," says Bowers. "But the other thing is that people like him; he's just a real nice guy."

"I didn't know anything about litigating against governments until I met Mike," says Maguire. "And I liked it from the beginning." Maguire says he views his role as protecting the public purse and looking out for taxpayers' interests.

Maguire has racked up a lengthy list of wins on behalf of contractors, developers and political candidates who find themselves in a fight with City Hall—or a county commission or state agency. Among other cases, he's forced the voiding of State Road and Tollway Authority contracts, persuaded the Department of Administrative Services to change bidding proposal regulations, won a summary judgment ruling ordering the Governor's Office of Consumer Affairs to reveal the identities of complaining parties, and defeated a state decision to deny a consortium of bidders a contract on the grounds of antitrust violations, among other cases.

He also raised a successful challenge to the city of Atlanta on behalf of vendors denied a multimillion dollar pay-phone contract, and handled numerous actions against other cities and municipalities concerning contracts, bid requirements, code regulations and zoning decisions.

One of the more frustrating cases he's handled, he says, involves a long-running challenge to an advertising contract at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport. That case, which began in Fulton County Superior Court in 2004 and is now before a federal judge, has been "a real hair-puller," says Maguire.

Maguire says that his one regret is that he doesn't get as much jury-trial experience as he'd like. In an effort to remedy that, he recently agreed to take on pro bono assignments on behalf of an old friend, Mountain Judicial Circuit District Attorney Brian M. Rickman.

"I think his interest in complex civil litigation will translate into the criminal area very well," says Rickman, who has assigned Maguire to help work a murder case in Stephens County.



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