

## **Interview with Chuck Ross**

By Dodie Sachs

This article is part of a series of interviews with past presidents of the Gwinnett County Bar Association. I sent out the same questions to all the GCBA Past Presidents to gain some insight not only into the history of the GCBA but also into the motivation of the Past Presidents themselves. If you would like to participate, please let me know. I would be happy to send you the interview questions.



Chuck Ross is part of Webb, Tanner & Powell's Litigation Group where he leads the firm's Technology Litigation Practice. With over 20 years of trial experience, Mr. Ross' practice is focused on complex litigation related to technology and data privacy as well as municipal representation, zoning actions, government investigations and white-collar defense. He has particular experience in matters involving trade secrets, data breaches, restrictive employment covenants and corporate investigations. He has also argued before both the Court of Appeals and the Supreme Court of Georgia on numerous occasions.

Prior to joining Webb, Tanner & Powell, Mr. Ross was an Assistant District Attorney in Gwinnett County, where he served as the Chief of the White Collar Division. He has been featured on Dateline NBC, 48 Hours, Forensic Files and Solved. Mr. Ross received his Juris Doctor degree from Ohio Northern University, Claude W. Pettit School of Law, where he served as the Lead Articles Editor of the Law Review. He also holds a Masters Degree in Political Science from Eastern Kentucky University and a Bachelor of Science from the University of Kentucky.

**What sparked your interest in the law?** I always enjoyed studying government and the law. The law is a living, breathing thing and it is always evolving. I find that fascinating. Plus, I had a master's degree in political science, what else was I going to do?

**Is there anyone in particular that inspired you to become an attorney?** My parents always said, 'you argue so well, you should be a lawyer.' I was also a debater in high school and college. It was a logical progression.

**What was your first job out of law school?** While I was in Law School, I worked for the Kenton County Ohio Child Support Enforcement Agency. Once I graduated, I worked as an assistant district attorney in Dublin Judicial Circuit in Dublin, Georgia for a year and a half. Then I interviewed in the Gwinnett DA's office and worked there from 1998 until March 2015.

**When did you first get involved with the GCBA?** I was assigned to Judge Bishop's courtroom for five years. During that time, he often stressed to me the importance of being involved in the Gwinnett Bar. Also, in 2007 Carole Cox was president of the GCBA and she convinced me to get involved, so I did.

**Who were the first people you interacted with in the GCBA that made an impact?** Margaret Washburn and Judge Warren Davis both tutored and guided me. Margaret introduced me to everyone in the Gwinnett and Georgia State Bar. Judge Davis taught me the effective use of the Constant Contact email system and how to write the President's Corner and Milestone announcements. Both of them kept the newsletter going. They were both very supportive to me as President and continue to be huge assets to the GCBA. Were it not for the countless hours and resources they have devoted to the GCBA, it would not be where it is today.

**When were you president of the GCBA and who was on your board?** I was president in 2013 and 2014. My board consisted of Joe Zdrilich, Mary Trammel, Josh Huckaby, Chuck Efstrotation, and Carlton Rouse.

**What was your mission or project when you were President?** I wanted to update the website so that you could view events, join the GCBA, and register online for membership and luncheons. It took a while and few different versions, but we have a great website now thanks in large part to Chuck Efstrotation finishing the work that I began. I also wanted the GCBA to do more social and special events, like going to a Gwinnett Braves (Stripers) game and getting to meet the Atlanta Braves' General Counsel and a Hockey night with the Gladiators. People that we never saw at luncheons came to those events. I also wanted to continue our hard work and recognition by the State Bar as we had traditionally won the Best Law Day, Best Newsletter and Best Website awards at the Annual Meeting.

**How have things changed with the bar association since you were president?** For one thing, I'm the "old guy" now! But seriously, while the Gwinnett Bar has gone paperless and management of the GCBA is less time intensive, paradoxically, the Internet and social media have also taken our members away from time they might have spent at a bar activity. Now there are too many distractions. Before the Internet, your square was much smaller. Now it's easier to work more because you can work from most anywhere. By trying to make work life easier to manage from more locations, the Internet instead has made it so that we work more as you never really leave your work at the office anymore and have less time for social activities.

**How has the experience of being GCBA President helped your career?** Serving as President of the Gwinnett County Bar Association has been one of the pivotal experiences of my career. It has allowed me to meet people that I would never have met otherwise. Probably 80% of my friends, the people that I lean on to this day, I met at GCBA events or through my involvement with the GCBA. I even met one of our partners, Nathan Powell, at the GCBA hockey outing. I have made important work connections and even learned of restaurants that were good locations to meet clients through lawyers in the GCBA. I have also received a lot of clients as referrals through my friends in the Bar. But, most importantly, is that being a lawyer is about helping people solve problems. That's the part I enjoy the most, and if I can't help someone, I want to help them find someone who can help them. Through the contacts that I've made with the Bar, I probably know someone who can help solve just about any issues they have.

**In your opinion, what are the benefits of being a GCBA Member?** There is someone in GCBA that does anything that can come across your desk. With the GCBA, you can call someone who

is a member and make connections to whomever you need. I may not know anyone who practices maritime law, but I bet I can make a couple of quick calls to GCBA members and have an answer in less than ten minutes. Who knows, from that experience, maybe you associate with that attorney on the case and find that you have a real knack for maritime law and move to Savannah! The GCBA is a base to expand your practice and to help solve people's problems, which is what we are supposed to do.

**In your opinion, how can seasoned lawyers have a greater impact or connection with younger lawyers in Gwinnett?** If you are a younger or newer lawyer, take the time to reach out to the "seasoned" (that means older) members of the Bar. If you are one of those "experienced" lawyers, and someone reaches out to you, take advantage of the opportunity. Lawyers love to tell "war" stories and everyone can learn from them. Some of the best advice I ever got was from my father-in-law when I was preparing to take the bar exam. I had finished the bar review course and my father-in-law, who was not a lawyer, told me I should go talk to Mr. Jim, who was the oldest practicing lawyer in Dublin, Georgia. Mr. Jim told me to go look at all of the past year's Daily Report case summaries and read them. I took his advice even though BAR/BRI and PMBR didn't make that same recommendation after all the weeks of their classes. When I took the exam, every essay was based, to some degree on cases I had read about in those summaries. Don't miss those opportunities.

**What ways do you think your experience can assist the development of the bar association moving forward?** Past presidents of the bar should share their experiences, their successes and failures, with the new officers and should stay active to help new generations build upon our experiences and learn from them.

**What can the current bar administration do to make your participation in the bar more convenient?** Have the meetings at my office. Seriously, I make an effort to attend all the luncheons. When I don't have a conflict – I'm there.

**If you had a word of advice for a new attorney, what would it be?** Be Nice! To quote Dalton in the great cinematic masterpiece that is Road House, 'Be Nice...it's not personal. I want you to be nice until it's time not to be nice.' I sincerely believe that. Being a lawyer is an honorable profession, and lawyers should be professional to each other. That doesn't mean you don't fight for your client, but you can win your argument without being rude or disrespectful to opposing counsel.