

20 LEGAL 16 ELITE

W. Andrew “Andy” Copenhaver

Womble Carlyle Sandridge & Rice LLP, Winston-Salem

Antitrust

Vita: 69; born in Roanoke, Va.; bachelor's from Duke University and law degree from UNC Chapel Hill; wife, three children and seven grandchildren.

Why he chose to specialize in this field: Antitrust cases typically are complex and require a lawyer to become very well-versed with the client's business and the market in which it operates. Each case is unique, challenging and interesting.

Memorable case: I represented a cigarette manufacturer in a class action suit brought by tobacco growers against the cigarette and leaf companies alleging price fixing of tobacco auctions. That case provided a fascinating, in-depth look at one of the most important historical industries in North Carolina and adjacent states.

Favorite place: Wyoming or Montana, in the summer.

Hero: Professor Bill Aycock, who was truly part of Tom Brokaw's "Greatest Generation." After distinguished service in World War II, he returned to North Carolina, became a law professor at UNC Chapel Hill and was chancellor at the time of the Speaker Ban [a state law enacted in 1963 that restricted Communist and other radical speakers at universities]. He was a bright, dedicated public servant who contributed much to UNC, its law school and his state.

Recent reading: *Factory Man: How One Furniture Maker Battled Offshoring, Stayed Local – and Helped Save an American Town* by Beth Macy. This book tells the story of Bassett Furniture, once the world's largest furniture company, and chronicles the demise of the American furniture industry brought about by the shift to offshore manufacturers.

Don't ask him to: Do any serious shopping.



I love the outdoors. If I were to have another career, I would like to be a landscape architect.

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Richard S. Wright

Moon Wright and Houston PLLC, Charlotte

Bankruptcy

Vita: 44; born in Winston-Salem; bachelor's and law degrees from Wake Forest University; wife, two daughters – and a really fat cat.

Memorable case: In one of my first Chapter 11 cases, I represented the owner of five mobile-home parks that rented trailers by the week – you don't see those much anymore. Multiple lenders were seeking to foreclose on the underlying real estate simultaneously, and there was a lot of complex valuation litigation. I was young and unsure of myself, but the client was not one to shy away from a fight and his belief in me never wavered. We eventually confirmed a plan in which he retained all of the parks. It was a great result, but the best part for me was how the client's support gave me confidence in myself.

Passions: My family, my law firm and most any kind of music.

Where he'd live if he had to practice somewhere else: Winston-Salem – it's a great southern city, with a strong sense of history and tradition.

Favorite place: Going for a morning run on the Battery in Charleston, S.C., another great southern city.

Hero: I have many, but my father tops the list. He is an entirely self-made businessman and a dedicated public servant. He has never once compromised his integrity or hurt another person to achieve success.

Recent reading: *Good Hunting: An American Spymaster's Story* by Jack Devine and *Smiley's People* by John le Carré.

Don't ask him to: Go along just to get along. A good fight is better than a bad settlement any day.



I'd want to be the guitarist in a heavy metal band. I told my parents in high school that I wanted to make a living with my electric guitar. My father said that would be fine, but if I came home with any tattoos or piercings, I would have to find another place to sleep at night. He wasn't kidding. That's when I started thinking about other career options.

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James R. Forrest

Forrest Firm PC, Durham

Business

Vita: 37; born in Raleigh; bachelor's and law degrees from UNC Chapel Hill; wife, four children and a boxer named Vegas.

Why he chose to specialize in this field: I love entrepreneurship, and rubbing elbows every day with talented, intelligent, sophisticated and savvy businesspeople is invigorating. I'm blown away by the talent in the Triangle, and being able to add value and provide a resource to those individuals and companies is very satisfying.

Memorable case: A monstrously big deal early in my career at a large Atlanta firm. We would have regular internal meetings with just attorneys from our side of the transaction. I learned a ton, but I spent most of the time calculating how much the one-hour meeting was costing the client with all of those lawyers present.

Passions: Customer service, golf and eastern North Carolina barbecue.

Where he'd live if he had to practice somewhere else: Wilmington.

Favorite place: Anywhere in the Caribbean.

Heroes: Hard to narrow down to one particular person, so I'll go with Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Jesus Christ and my wife (in no particular order, of course!).

Recent reading: *Fruit at Work: Mixing Christian Virtues with Business* by Chris Evans, and *The Startup Hats* by David Gardner (both Triangle entrepreneurs).

Don't ask him to: Assemble or put together anything. My dad was an industrial engineer, and somehow the proverbial apple fell quite a distance from the tree.



I'd be an NFL punter. You get the glory as a professional athlete, but you don't really tackle, and you don't have the pressure of field goals. If not I'd be a dentist – my dentist friends all seem to do really well while working four days a week. Or a veterinarian – I've got a soft spot for animals.

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Harper Heckman

Nexsen Pruet PLLC, Greensboro

Construction

Vita: 50; born in Winston-Salem; bachelor's and law degrees from UNC Chapel Hill; wife and three daughters.

Why he chose to specialize in this field: Happenstance – my firm needed a construction lawyer, and I had previously sold hardware in Winston-Salem and Nantucket, Mass. Apparently, the barrier to entry was not high.

Memorable case: "War stories" are great – I use them a lot when teaching. Probably a case we tried for three weeks in Elizabeth City. Beautiful place – ugly weather. It was a multiyear case involving claims and counterclaims between a contractor and its subcontractor on a federal prison project in eastern North Carolina. That case made me realize how difficult, time-consuming and expensive it is to resolve complex construction disputes through traditional litigation, and served as an impetus for me to become trained as both a mediator and arbitrator.

Passions: UNC sports.

Where he'd live if he had to practice somewhere else: I'd sell hardware at the coast.

Favorite place: Bald Head Island.

Hero: Dean Smith.

Recent reading: Anything by Malcolm Gladwell or James Lee Burke.

Don't ask him to: Cheer for Duke.



I'd be a professor. I've taught construction law at UNC Chapel Hill and Elon for more than 10 years and consider it among my most rewarding professional challenges.

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Jeffrey M. Davis

Lincoln Financial Group, Greensboro

Corporate Counsel

Vita: 37; born in Greensboro; bachelor's from Clemson University and law degree from UNC Chapel Hill; wife and two sons.

Memorable case: When I was in private practice, we represented some folks challenging the redistricting of North Carolina's legislative districts. Much to our surprise, the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals remanded the case for an emergency hearing before the district court in Raleigh. None of the attorneys on our side were available, except me, and I was just a few years out of law school. When I arrived at the courthouse, the Solicitor General and three veteran lawyers from the Attorney General's staff were on the other side. When the judge asked me to begin, I started by saying that I was really glad that I had worn a tie to work that day since we didn't have advance notice of the hearing. Despite being outnumbered by some very fine lawyers, the judge ruled in our favor – never mind that he was later overturned by the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals.

Passions: My family, Clemson football and CrossFit.

Favorite place: Our home – it has a Clemson room with orange walls, large Clemson Tiger paws, a fridge and a big screen TV to watch the games.

Hero: My wife, Melody. She does an awesome job of raising our boys, keeping our house functioning, running a successful small business and living out her faith. I want to be like her when I grow up. Any modicum of success that I've enjoyed is directly attributable to her unwavering support.

Recent reading: *The Martian* by Andy Weir. I also read or listen to a podcast of the Bible every day.



I'd like to be involved in the legislative process, perhaps as a chief of staff for a legislator. From campaigning to lawmaking to the interpersonal engagement, the political process fascinates me.

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Ryan T. Smith

RTS Law Group, Charlotte

Criminal

Vita: 35; born in Wheeling, WV.; bachelor's from Marshall University and law degree from West Virginia University.

Why he chose to specialize in this field: I focus the large majority of my practice on impaired driving (DWI) defense. Good people can make mistakes. I'm a big advocate in giving these individuals the opportunity to learn from their mistakes, and not letting lapses in judgment ruin their futures. Also, law enforcement officers are human too, and sometimes they just plain get it wrong. Either way, clients retain me to fight like hell.

Passions: Increasing the camaraderie among members of the legal profession in Charlotte. I'm the social chair of the local defense bar and the commissioner of the lawyer basketball league. Also, living a healthy and fit lifestyle.

Where he'd live if he had to practice somewhere else: Barcelona, Spain. I'd be able to relive my glory days from 2005 by jumping over to Pamplona for another "Running of the Bulls." I'm one-for-one so far. I've always been one to press my luck.

Favorite place: My office late at night, with Miles Davis playing on repeat and creativity at full throttle.

Hero: My mother, Linda Smith. She not only helps and motivates me on a daily basis, but she has dedicated her life to our family, putting others' wants and needs ahead of her own.

Don't ask him to: Work less or sleep more. Or, eat chocolate: As a seventh grader, I won a ridiculous bet to not eat chocolate for one week. I'm still winning.



I'm one of the few attorneys who enjoys running a business just as much as practicing law. I've always been accused of working too many hours: After my evening workout, I usually head back to the office. The show Shark Tank is constantly in the back of my mind – if I never practiced law again, I'd advise other lawyers how to build their practice.

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Mike Okun

Patterson Harkavy LLP, Chapel Hill

Employment

Vita: 67; born in Boston; bachelor's from Antioch College and law degree from UNC Chapel Hill; wife, two sons and four grandchildren.

Why he chose to specialize in this field: I was a college dropout. I went to welding school – I welded chairs for a while. Then I became a union ironworker working on high-rises and became interested in labor and employment issues. At about the same time, Dan Pollitt, a former labor and employment law professor at UNC and my Sunday school teacher growing up (my family moved to North Carolina when I was three or four), encouraged me to come home and go to law school. I finished college while I was working and came home. Then a number of very fine people gave me a shot at working in the area and showing me how – Judy Kincaid, Hank Patterson, Jon Harkavy and Melinda Lawrence, to name a few.

Passions: My family, my wife's cooking, and fairness and respect for workers.

Favorite place: I'm happy most anyplace above ground. Perhaps the mountains of North Carolina or East Tennessee, or in a bathtub of hot water with a good book.

Heroes: My parents, and Roy Campanella.

Recent reading: *Vanity Fair*, *Sports Illustrated* and *The New Yorker*.

Don't ask him to: Dance, until I've had a drink or two – or root for Duke basketball no matter how many drinks I've had.



I would enjoy being an ironworker, which was the job I had before I went to law school. I might also like to be an artist – I was an art major in college but, alas, insufficient artistic talent; a professional baseball player, alas, insufficient athletic ability; or a philanthropist, alas, insufficient finances.

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Sean M. Sullivan

Troutman Sanders LLP, Raleigh

Environmental

Vita: 39; born in Raleigh; bachelor's from University of Miami and law degree from American University; wife and one daughter.

Why he chose to specialize in this field: As a child, I spent most of my time outside, and I have always had a strong interest in science. Environmental law gives me an opportunity to bring those interests into my professional life.

Memorable case: I will always remember working on a challenge to the EPA's uranium drinking water standard when I was a first-year associate in D.C. We were arguing for more uranium in drinking water, so we lost, but that's when I knew I had picked the right field. I loved understanding the technical points behind the legal issues and being able to argue both.

Passions: Aside from fishing, Miami Hurricanes football (though it has been a challenge to be too passionate about it lately) and scuba diving.

Where he'd live if he had to practice somewhere else: South Florida.

Favorite places: Kerr Lake and Juno Beach, Fla.

Hero: Not sure that I have one. I have always done things my own way.

Recent reading: Shelby Foote's *The Civil War*.

Don't ask him to: Leave Raleigh permanently. I wouldn't mind being a snowbird and splitting time between Raleigh and Florida, but I moved away from North Carolina during high school, and it took me 15 years to get back home.



If I weren't working any more, I would probably be fishing for large-mouth bass every day, but I am not sure I'd want to be one of those tournament guys you see on TV – the competition would ruin my Zen.

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Rob Blair

Essex Richards PA, Charlotte

Family

Vita: 50; grew up in Charlotte; bachelor's from Wofford College and law degree from Wake Forest University; wife, two sons and a chocolate Lab named Deac.

Why he chose to specialize in this field: Representing people as opposed to companies interested me. I grew up as an only child of a single mom after my father died when I was 5 years old. My mother remarried four years later, and that marriage was unsuccessful. It was an area that was relevant to me in real life, one in which I felt I had some context, and one where I could possibly make a bit of a difference.

Passions: Outside work, my family and watching my two sons grow up. There is nothing better than sitting on the side of a soccer field on a weekend watching them play. Otherwise, I enjoy playing an occasional round of golf and escaping with a good book.

Where he'd live if he had to practice somewhere else: Perhaps Beaufort, N.C. or Beaufort or Charleston, S.C. Somewhere where I could live on a sound or tidal creeks and marshes where I could have a boat and fish after work.

Hero: My mother. For giving me the constant love, stability and opportunities that were not always easy for her.

Recent reading: *Truth or Die* by James Patterson. Perhaps I should have a more intelligent answer, but I love murder mysteries by Patterson, Joseph Finder and others – I like the escape they provide.

Don't ask him to: Play Pictionary or charades.



I'd be a pediatrician, because I love working with and helping children. Children are unassuming, honest and funny.

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Maury M. Tepper III

Tepper & Eyster PLLC, Raleigh

Intellectual Property

Vita: 50; born in Cincinnati; bachelor's from Wake Forest University and law degree from University of Cincinnati; wife and three children.

Why he chose to specialize in this field: As a musician, I thought I would want to work with copyrights and practice in the entertainment area. I began handling trademark matters and discovered that I loved helping clients with their brands even more.

Memorable cases: I especially remember working to help name Advair, a medication for asthma, and working to remove Old Salem microwaveable cheese spread from the market (it turns out the Moravians did not make microwaveable products). Most important to me at the moment, since I have a nephew with Duchenne muscular dystrophy, is the chance to work with a company that is bringing forward the most promising treatment in decades.

Favorite place: In one of the rocking chairs on the front porch of the Carolina Inn at Pinehurst.

Hero: Although I'm not Catholic, I am impressed by Pope Francis and the way he lives out his beliefs.

Recent reading: *Clapton's Guitar: Watching Wayne Henderson Build the Perfect Instrument* by Allen St. John. If you think that craftsmen are dying out, you need to read this compelling account of one of the world's greatest luthiers, who lives in the Virginia mountains. Also *All the Light We Cannot See*, a great story by Anthony Doerr, and *Villa Incognito* by Tom Robbins – I just re-connected with this entertaining author when I learned that he is a native of Blowing Rock.

Don't ask him to: Sit still or stay quiet.



If I weren't practicing law, I would love to play in a jazz group. I play sax, and a little bit of keyboard. I'd like to own a jazz club and get to play every night.

Jean Sutton Martin

Law Office of Jean Sutton Martin PLLC, Wilmington

Litigation

Vita: 48; born in Salisbury; bachelor's and law degrees from Wake Forest University and master's from University of South Carolina.

Why she chose to specialize in this field: My leap into litigation came when presented with a case involving children harmed by a pharmaceutical product. I was alarmed and astonished by the lack of testing that had been conducted, quite frankly because so little was required of the manufacturer. I felt called to fight for those who need an advocate to seek redress and have never looked back.

Memorable case: The first significant class action in which I participated was against Sallie Mae for racial discrimination in its lending practices. Not only did I have the opportunity to work with, and learn from, some amazing litigators (some of whom I am fortunate enough to work with still today), but for the first time I realized that I could be part of effectuating change in corporate conduct and policy. This case taught me to appreciate fully the sense of purpose in what I do.

Where she'd live if she had to practice somewhere else: Winston-Salem, in order to be closer to family, friends and the Deacs.

Favorite place: Sanderling Resort, Duck.

Recent reading: *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* by Mark Haddon. When I finish, I hope to see the Broadway adaptation.

Don't ask her to: Go camping. I have post-camping stress disorder from my Girl Scout days.



My dream job would be a radio show host because (1) I have a face for radio and (2) it would allow me to combine all the things I love. I'm a talker, and when I don't have to be serious, there is no telling what random thoughts come out of my mouth. What's interesting is that when I tell people of this dream, the response is always, "I can see that."

Brian W. Byrd

Smith Moore Leatherwood LLP, Greensboro

Real Estate

Vita: 43; born in Martinsville, Va.; bachelor's and law degrees from University of Virginia; wife, two sons and two dogs.

Why he chose to specialize in this field: I enjoy the generally congenial nature of a transactional practice. In addition, as primarily a developer's lawyer, I enjoy seeing a tangible result of my services and feeling that I played a small part in the development of a new project.

Memorable case: A particularly difficult free-standing drugstore project that stretched over three years due to various issues, including amendment of restrictive covenants, environmental issues and entitlements.

Passions: Watching my kids play sports, UVA sports, camping and boating.

Where he'd live if he had to practice somewhere else: Somewhere in the mountains.

Favorite place: A campground with my family.

Heroes: Professionally, my co-heroes are Charlie Melvin and Garrett Walker, my mentors and two of the best real-estate lawyers that I know. Each has his own style of practicing, and I've been fortunate to be able to draw on the many strengths of both of them. Outside the practice of law, without question my wife is my hero.

Recent reading: I enjoy early American history and biographies of the group of remarkable individuals responsible for the founding of our nation.

Don't ask him to: Navigate without a GPS – I have a terrible sense of direction.



I'd be a meteorologist at a National Weather Service office. I have been fascinated by meteorology since childhood, I think due to the fact that, despite all of our advancements, weather remains outside our control and, to a significant degree, unpredictable.

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Jason Walls

The Walls Law Firm PLLC, Apex

Tax and Estate Planning

Vita: 40; born in Goldsboro; bachelor's and master's degrees from North Carolina State University and law degree from Campbell University; wife and one son.

Memorable case: Early in my career, I represented an elderly lady who wanted her marriage annulled. She had recently married an elderly gentleman, but she realized the marriage wouldn't last. I explained to her the law as it relates to annulment and divorce and that it was my legal opinion that she would have to wait a year to file for divorce. Not impressed with my reasoning, she explained why her marriage should be annulled. On the day of the hearing, I don't know who was more embarrassed – me or the judge – listening to my client's testimony, that, even after several attempts, she and her husband could not consummate the marriage. I quickly realized that I should limit my practice to estate planning.

Passions: Spending time with my wife and our newborn son, N.C. State sports and keeping up with the issues of the day.

Where he'd live if he had to practice somewhere else: Anywhere coastal.

Favorite place: The Grove Park Inn, Asheville.

Recent reading: *Washington: A Life* by Ron Chernow.

Don't ask him to: Do home improvements.



I would be an agriculture teacher and adviser to the Future Farmers of America organization. Growing up in eastern North Carolina, I was very involved in FFA throughout high school. After graduation, I attended North Carolina State University with the goal to become a teacher. Although my career path changed, I still consider myself a teacher.

Aaron Lay

Hamilton Stephens Steele + Martin PLLC, Charlotte

Young Guns

Vita: 34; raised in Elk Valley, Tenn.; bachelor's and law degrees from University of Tennessee.

Memorable case: It involved two male Nigerian Dwarf goats named Fred and Barney. I represented a family pro bono in an action against their homeowner's association. The family lived in an equestrian community and owned several horses. They had purchased the goats as comfort pets. The HOA claimed that the goats were livestock, fined the family and banned their children from using the pool and other amenities. Fred and Barney were only about two feet tall and weighed less than twenty pounds each. The family treated them just like their beloved pet dog. We filed a declaratory judgment action and successfully argued that Fred and Barney were household pets rather than livestock. I definitely never expected to be explaining to a judge that "you can milk a male Nigerian Dwarf, but he cannot produce enough milk to be commercially viable." Eventually, Fred and Barney got to come back home to their family. After that, I was interviewed by *USA Today* and other local and national media outlets. I still get teased about being the "goat lawyer."

Passions: Travel, food, bourbons and whiskeys, hiking, outdoor adventures, college football, the Tennessee Volunteers and politics.

Favorite place: South Africa. Where else can you go on safari, dive with great white sharks and finish the evening off with a great red wine and a kudu steak?

Recent reading: *The 4-Hour Workweek* by Timothy Ferriss.

Don't ask him to: Get something off the top shelf. I'm too short.



If I was not a lawyer, I'd like to be a travel and food writer and show host. Think Anthony Bourdain: Parts Unknown combined with The Points Guy and Rick Steves.