



AWARDS

Two Realtors vie for top honor

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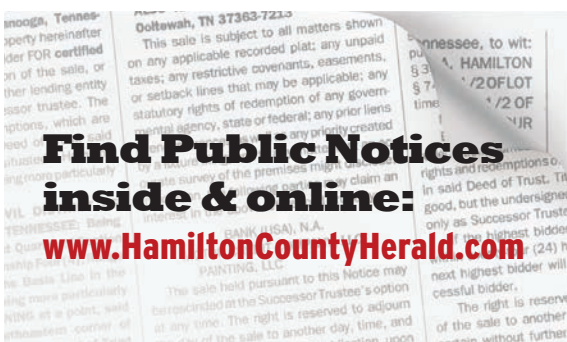


BAR ASSOCIATION

New beginning for attorneys

Litchford, Pearce stay together but form new firm.

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CHATTANOOGA, HAMILTON COUNTY, TENNESSEE

August 9 – 15, 2019

HAMILTON COUNTY HERALD



50 YEARS AGO

What was going on in Chattanooga in 1969?

Friday, August 8

George M. Clark Sr., chairman of the board of Pioneer Bank reported Thursday that the banks' total resources amounted to \$73,446,600 July 31. This is nearly 5% over the same date last year. Clark also announced the election of business executive and Chattanooga developer Weldon F. Osborne, to the board.

Groundbreaking ceremonies took place Thursday in East Ridge at the site of the new American National Bank and Trust Company's new branch on Ringgold Road and Armour Street. East Ridge city officials and bank officers took part in the ceremonies.

New officers recently elected to guide the Chattanooga Little Theatre for the 1969-70 year are: Humphrey Heywood, president; Mrs. William L. Montague, first vice president; Mitchell Crawford, secretary, Bernard Sullivan, treasurer; Mrs. Lee C. Head, board chairman, Walter T. Forbes Jr., and Mrs. R.B. Davenport III were elected new mem-

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A lobbyist's work is never done



Photograph provided

Nicole Watson is a government affairs attorney and lobbyist with the Chattanooga office of Waller, Lansden, Dortch & Davis.

Attorney Watson always ready for client crisis, hard questions

By David Laprad

Government affairs attorney and lobbyist Nicole Watson is taking a moment to laugh about the public's perception of what she does.

Some people think her days and evenings are filled with dinners, parties and schmooz-

ing as she persuades elected officials to consider the interests of her clients. A bright smile, a warm handshake and a carefully chosen compliment, and her job is done.

But that's not the case with her work as a member of the Government Affairs team at the Chattanooga office of Waller, Lansden, Dortch & Davis, Watson says.

"It's a lot of long days, hard work and educating myself," she explains. "I have to be knowledgeable about every government agency, committee and procedure. And I have to know each of the steps it takes to pass a bill – and it's nothing like the Schoolhouse Rock song. There's a lot of minutia."

Watson, 38, spends each waking moment acutely aware

that the next waking moment could bring a question from a client or a query from a lawmaker. So, she actually spends her days and evenings filling her brain – and the thick portfolio she carries everywhere – with information.

"I'm not an in-house government affairs person; I'm a contract lobbyist for a law firm," she says. "We have 30 to 40 clients, and I have to be up to speed on all their issues. I could be walking down a hallway and

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Women of Distinction announces honorees

Women of Distinction of Greater Chattanooga will celebrate its 2019 honorees at a benefit luncheon Friday, Oct. 25 from 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m. at the Chattanooga Convention Center. For more than 30 years, the Women of Distinction event has honored women who make a difference in their community.

"A Woman of Distinction is one who volunteers her time to help improve the quality of life for others," says steering com-

mittee member Lynda Hood. "She establishes standards that inspire and encourage other women to achieve their full potential. She provides leadership and influences decisions that shape and define our city and community."

Women of Distinction of Greater Chattanooga's 2019 honorees are:

Linda Collins
Emeritus Professor,
University of Tennessee at
Chattanooga

Gina Dhanani
Chief operating officer,
The Double Cola Company

Dr. Jennifer Ellis
Associate professor, UTC

Autumn Graves
Head of School,
Girls Preparatory School

Everlena Holmes
Dean of School of Health Sciences,
Hunter College

Dr. Kari Hudson
Optometrist,
Oakmont Eyecare

Carol Newton
Fiscal Consultant,
Tennessee Department of Education

Lila Statom
Sessions Court Judge,
Hamilton County

Angie Supan
Assistant director of sales,
River Gallery

Nicole Watson
Attorney, Waller

"This year's honorees have set themselves apart through their civic, cultural, philan-

thropic and environmental commitments," says Hood.

In 2018, Women of Distinction of Greater Chattanooga gave \$23,359.27 each to The Heart and Lung Institute at Erlanger, The Heart and Vascular Center at Parkridge Medical Center and The Buz Standefor Lung Center at CHI Memorial for a total of \$70,077.81.

Source: Women of Distinction of Greater Chattanooga

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that she has thick skin and can laugh at herself. "It takes a certain personality to do this job, and I have it."

There have been occasions when Watson's tough hide has protected her from the fiery darts of an advocacy group or other opponent to her client's interests.

"I had a client with a sensitive social issue. They were opposed by a passionate advocacy group," she recalls. "The group's members would come to Nashville and swarm the halls of the legislature."

Watson's representation of the Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council early in her career certainly helped to stir a hornet's nest of opposition. As the council lobbied for preemption to prevent cities from shutting down pet stores, advocacy groups popped up in fierce opposition.

"It grew ugly," Watson admits. "You know you've made it in this field when you have protesters."

Watson says this can happen when a lobbyist becomes involved with a hot button issue, so she steels herself before wading into choppy waters.

"If you're lobbying for a company, and an environmental group doesn't like you, you have to be ready for them to throw mud at you," she says. "And when they do, you have to shrug it off."

The existence of balance in Watson's work helps. For every sensitive issue she heralds, she's able to count several victories in widely valued matters.

Watson is especially proud of her advocacy for the Tennessee Fire Service Coalition, a group of fire service organizations devoted to promoting improvements in fire protection. This year, Watson was part of a successful push to secure cancer presumption benefits for firefighters in the state.

The passage of the act was the culmination of a ten-year battle. Waller is credited with carrying the ball across the goal line after becoming involved in earnest earlier this year. "We're



Photograph provided

Watson volunteers with the Junior League of Chattanooga during a Mocs football game last fall. The league was raising money for its community initiatives.

really happy to have been a part of making that happen," Watson continues.

Watson is also part of the team at Waller that's representing the National Museum of African American Music, which is aiming to launch early next year in downtown Nashville.

"They were looking for extra money from the state to carry them over the line, and we were able to get them a substantial amount in the governor's budget," Watson points out. "I was proud of that as well."

With over a decade of government affairs experience, Watson has become recognized for her legislative and government relations strategies across Tennessee and the Southeast, says Waller partner James Weaver, who leads the firm's Government Relations practice.

"Nicole has earned a tremendous reputation as an effective legislative strategist," Weaver says. "Our clients benefit greatly from her experience and insights into working with legislators and policymakers."

Watson perfected her craft over many years of work in the political realm, beginning with stints as a congressional intern for US Senators George Allen

and John Warner while a student at Emory & Henry College in Virginia.

"When I worked for Warner on Capitol Hill, I had a lot of interactions with lobbyists and saw how I could make a career out of what they were doing," she says. "I went to law school knowing I was going to be a lobbyist."

In keeping with her aspirations, Watson took a nontraditional approach to internships while studying at the Regent University School of Law in Virginia Beach. Instead of pursuing posts with law firms, she served as a government affairs summer associate, first for a bipartisan firm in Washington, D.C. and then for the National Rifle Association.

Watson remained in D.C. after law school and spent a decade lobbying for the Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council at the federal, state and local levels.

She then moved to Chattanooga in 2013 to work for Tennessee American Water. After gaining valuable government and regulatory affairs experience with the company, Watson joined Chambliss, Bahner & Stophel, where she led the firm's government relations, public policy and economic development initiatives.

Waller, which serves the healthcare, financial services, retail and hospitality industries,


welcomed Watson to its Chattanooga office last year.

While Watson continues to work with clients and local, state and federal government officials across the Southeast, she appreciates every opportunity to contribute to matters that impact her hometown.

Watson's current efforts in Chattanooga include working with the city council to bring products by scooter maker Lime to the city and representing Hospice of Chattanooga and Cempa Community Care. While working with Cempa, she was part of a successful attempt to advocate for state legislation that allows nonprofits to operate needle exchange programs.

Despite her heartfelt participation in these ventures, Watson has been called a hired gun – a common indictment of her industry. The thought

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