

DAILY REPORT

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ON THE RISE

14 UNDER 40

Meet our picks for young lawyers we predict you'll be hearing more about.

GROWING A FIRM

Making up for lost time

SOMETIMES LAWYERS

underestimate Derric Crowther, 38, who has practiced only six years, and at relatively small firms, says Crowther's new law partner, Solomon H. Ashby Jr.

"And then," says Ashby, "they get pleasantly—or unpleasantly—surprised."

One big-firm lawyer who defended a premises-liability case against Crowther a few years ago, Swift, Currie, McGhee & Hiers' Lynn M. Roberson, says Crowther gave her no chance to underestimate him.

Right away, says Roberson, Crowther called her up, introduced himself and invited her to lunch.

"I got no impression that because he was under 40, that he'd be easy pickings—none," says Roberson.

Crowther, who has a big, deep voice and a giggly laugh he uses to punctuate his best lines, has been impressing with his persistence and persuasive powers since his youth in southeast Atlanta. This year that has turned lucrative, with his 3-year-old law firm scoring big wins.

Not one to give up, when the University of Pennsylvania wait-listed him for undergraduate admission, Crowther enrolled for a postsecondary year at Northfield Mount Hermon School in Northfield, Mass., in a special program for kids from disadvantaged backgrounds. "We were poor, I just didn't know we were poor," says Crowther.

Crowther ultimately did get into Penn, where he was a linebacker on the football team. An Army reservist, Crowther was called up for a few years of stateside service after college, during the Gulf War. Shortly after graduation from the University of Dayton School of Law, Crowther met his future boss—but not in an interview room or at a cocktail party.

Crowther was on a flight to Philadelphia to visit friends, and sitting nearby was Michael N. Weathersby of the Atlanta firm of Evert & Weathersby (now Evert Weathersby Houff). Crowther struck up a conversation. Later, Weathersby hired Crowther to work at his firm, first as a paralegal, then as a lawyer.

"Derric's the type of person who's never met a stranger," says Ashby, who met Crowther at that firm and joined Crowther's own firm in June. Ashby recalls that Crowther did things others said couldn't be done.

While Crowther was defending an asbestos manufacturer, Ashby recalls, he was asked to scout a small rural town outside Georgia where a plaintiff claimed asbestos exposure while working in a warehouse. Several partners protested that such digging was a waste of time.

"He not only talked himself into the warehouse to look around, he also talked such that we could get experts into that warehouse to take photographs and samples and that sort of thing," Ashby says.

"I think that's the first time someone used the term 'lucky'" to describe Crowther, Ashby adds. But, he says, getting a facility to agree to examination by an expert in the context of an asbestos lawsuit—"that's beyond lucky." According to Crowther, no asbestos was found, and the case against his client was dismissed.

o n t h e R I S E

Crowther says that while he went to Evert & Weathersby to learn the ropes and get some courtroom experience, all along he wanted to represent plaintiffs. So after a year's stint at the plaintiffs' firm of Henry, Spiegel, Fried & Milling, he opened his own shop—the Crowther Law Firm—across the street. That was in 2003, but it was this year that things really came together, with Crowther enjoying a string of wins earlier this year and marrying surgeon Freda McCarter last month.

In January, U.S. District Judge Charles A. Pannell Jr. awarded Crowther's clients a \$2,673,980 default judgment—including \$1 million in punitive damages—in a case in which Crowther's client alleged that a moving company worker struck her with a heavy box, with the injuries putting her in a wheelchair. *Angle v. All Star Moving & Storage*, No. 1:04-CV-3684 (N.D. Ga. Jan. 12, 2006).

That same month, according to Crowther, he secured two big settlements for clients in medical-malpractice cases. In one, where he says he obtained his first seven-figure settlement on his own, Crowther represented a Macon man whose wife had died, allegedly from a hysterectomy gone wrong. Crowther says the client came to him “a broken man” after another plaintiffs' firm dropped his case two weeks before the statute of limitations was to run out. *Bentley v. Medical Center of Central Georgia*, No. 04-CV- 24812 (Bibb Sup.).

The opposing counsel in that case, Mitchel P. House Jr. of Sell & Melton in Macon, uses a string of C-words to describe Crowther. “He's very congenial, I think extremely capable, ... and, I have to say, somewhat charismatic. ... and I might add, he's a very collegial individual.”

Hearing this assessment, Crowther notes, “My approach toward the litigation process is, if we don't have to fight, why should we?”



BONNIE HEATH

Derric Crowther Partner, Crowther Law Firm

Age: 38

Law school: University of Dayton School of Law

Motivation: “The fear of not having.”

Last book read: “How to Argue and Win Every Time,” by Gerry Spence

Best advice received: His mother said,

“You can be anything you want to be if you put your mind to it.”

Dream vacation: Jerusalem, during peacetime

As a kid he wanted to be: A lawyer

Colleagues might be surprised to know: He served in the U.S. Army Reserve.

House can expect to see more of Crowther, as his success in Macon inspired plans for an office there. Even as his business grows, Crowther continues to give back to the community, paying for test-preparation courses for interns in his office. He doesn't forget his clients, rattling off their names and numbers for a reporter's reference without prompting.

“If there's something I do differently than most lawyers ... I don't treat my clients like a business. ... They're family.”

—Alyson M. Palmer

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