

A strong sense of loyalty runs in family of Charleston lawyer



By Brian Cox

Like the name James and a love for Clemson University sports, loyalty and job longevity can be seen to run in attorney James “Chip” Bruorton, IV’s family.

Bruorton’s grandfather, James Atkinson Bruorton, Jr., worked for Nabisco for 42 years. His father, James Atkinson Bruorton III, was a sales rep for Union Carbide, now Kemet Electronics, for 40 years. And Bruorton himself has to this point spent his entire 20-year career at Rosen Hagood, the law firm he joined right out of law school in 2003.

“I guess we have a habit of having loyalty to our employers,” says Bruorton with a smile. “Loyalty is a trait my father passed down to me.”

Bruorton, who was born and raised in Greenville, S.C., except for a short two-year stint the family spent in Texas, has gone by “Chip” since he was born – as in “a chip off the old block.”



Chip Bruorton with his wife, Lindsay, and their three sons -- Lyles, Gracen and Carver – on vacation.

“There’s a large part of me that is a reflection of [my father],” says Bruorton. “I try to emulate a lot of what he did when I was growing up in how I am with my family. He’s still a good influence on my life.”

While not the first James in the family, Bruorton is the first lawyer. He was active in high school and college intramural sports, particularly basketball, baseball, golf, and football, and Bruorton says law appealed to his competitive spirit.

“I’m a very competitive person,” he says. “I didn’t have the athletic ability to play professional sports so I chose to be competitive with my advocacy.”

After graduating from Clemson University with a degree in Financial Management, Bruorton attended the University of Tennessee College of Law in Knoxville, earning his juris doctor in 2003. During the summer between his 2L and 3L years, he clerked at Rosen Hagood in Charleston, S.C.

The firm, which has produced three South Carolina Bar presidents in the last 40 or so years and last year celebrated its 75th anniversary, was a good fit for Bruorton, who appreciated its deep roots in Charleston and the firm’s recognition of the importance of family life.

“Family values are very important to me,” says Bruorton, who with his wife, Lindsay, has three sons. “The firm has high expectations but at the same time everybody recognizes work is not your whole life. There was a comfort level here, knowing I could meet the firm’s expectations, excel as a lawyer, and be a present and engaged husband and father.”

Bruorton set about building a practice focused on the areas of construction litigation, employment litigation, commercial business litigation, and government law. His construction litigation experience includes mechanics liens, payment and performance bond claims, construction defect claims and surety indemnification claims.

“Construction is a different animal,” says Bruorton. “Representing general contractors, you sometimes wear two hats. As to construction defect claims, you’re defending claims

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Chip Bruorton and his wife, Lindsay, have been married 21 years. Lindsay is a schoolteacher with a master's degree from Clemson University in Literacy.

against them but you're also being an advocate of claims against subcontractors. Being able to advocate both sides while still protecting your client's interest is a learned trait."

Bruorton says he learned over the years that often representing a client's best interests isn't simply about arguing fault, it's about reducing their exposure and allocating risk.

While construction litigation is the largest practice area for Bruorton, he has also had success in the employment law sector. In 2015, Bruorton and a colleague represented a group of former and current employees of a tree nursery in a breach of fiduciary duty case against the employer. After a three-week trial, Bruorton's clients were awarded damages of \$53,508,288. The verdict was included as one of the Top Verdicts in South Carolina in 2015 and one of the Top 50 Verdicts in the U.S. in 2015. The case was ultimately settled for a confidential amount.

The firm currently has 11 lawyers who focus primarily on litigation in a range of areas, including administrative and government law; commercial and business litigation; employment and labor law; family law and divorce; probate, estate and trust litigation and personal injury.

One sector Bruorton says the firm sees potential for growth in

the next few years is in probate, estate and trust litigation.

"Quite frankly, there is a lot of family money in Charleston," he says. "We're starting to see more and more disputes over family money. Unfortunately, family members can get pretty ruthless with each other if somebody thinks they're not getting a fair share."

The firm has been a Primerus™ member since 2004. Bruorton has attended the PDI Conferences for nearly a decade.

"I think you have to have consistency in showing up, having the same people attending events in order to establish strong relationships," says Bruorton, adding that the firm aims to have at least one representative at Primerus™ meetings, including having one or more of its associates involved in the Young Lawyers Section.

"We try to attend as much as we possibly can," he says. "We make sure our attorneys understand we're a part of Primerus™ and the power that comes from the cultivated relationships. If there's something we can't do for a potential client — whether it be locally or in another state — one of the first things we do is to see if there's a Primerus™ firm in that location."

An active member of Mount Pleasant Presbyterian Church, he has served as a deacon, Sunday School teacher, and on the International Missions Team Committee, Stewardship Committee, and Youth Ministry Committee. Bruorton traveled six years in a row to Honduras in connection with Habitat for Humanity before COVID put a stop to the mission trips. He hopes they begin again next year.

Not only were the trips of great benefit to the residents of the area where they were working to build more than a dozen houses on a tract of land the church had purchased, Bruorton says they also helped him to disconnect because phone service was unreliable.



Chip Bruorton has three sons: (l-r) Lyles, Carver and Gracen.

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“It was both rewarding and beneficial from a mental health perspective as well as a service perspective,” he says. “I miss it.”

Bruorton remains an avid fan of Clemson sports. He recalls fondly attending football games with his family growing up and he has passed the passion down to his children. He makes it a point to get to a couple home games and at least one away football game during each season. He even made it to one of Clemson’s four recent National Championship games. Unfortunately, he chose to attend one that Clemson lost. For a change of pace, he likes to spend time with the family at their place in the Blue Ridge Mountains where they can enjoy the outdoor activities of the various seasons including snow tubing, zip lining, hiking, and golfing. He also likes to fish and enjoy the Lowcountry.

He and his wife, Lindsay, have been married 21 years. Their oldest son, Carver, 19, is a freshman at Clemson, carrying on a family tradition. Their second son, Lyles, is 16 and enjoys theater and art while the youngest, Gracen, 11, has shown a talent for soccer.

Bruorton says much of his time away from work is spent experiencing his sons’ varied interests, pursuits and growth.

“You live a lot through your kids,” he says. “I appreciate even more now the role my father played in my early years as I live it out with my own.”



Rosen Hagood attorney Chip Bruorton has traveled to Honduras six times to volunteer with Habitat for Humanity to build homes on a parcel of land purchased by Bruorton’s church.



Chip Bruorton describes his trips to Honduras as “rewarding and beneficial” and a way to disconnect and rejuvenate.