

# Friends for more than three decades, law partners for 20

By KELLY INGEBRETSEN  
MBJ Contributing Writer

MADISON — They've poured concrete together, canoed, rode four-wheelers and thrown baseballs with each other's kids.

Greg Copeland, Tom Cook, Glenn Taylor and Glen Bush have been friends for more than 30 years. They've also been law partners for two decades in a firm they founded with a handful of young attorneys. Today, Copeland, Cook, Taylor and Bush, P.A., is a 64-lawyer firm with a significant presence on the upscale Highland Colony Parkway in Madison.

The four friends started Copeland, Cook, Taylor and Bush, P.A., in 1985 on the first floor of the Capital Towers building in downtown Jackson. Already longtime friends, they had been law school students at Ole Miss at roughly the same time in the 1970s. After graduation, they all wound up working together at the old Heidelberg Woodliff and Franks law firm in Capital Towers. Because of the way the office was arranged, the four men were physically separated from the rest of the staff and they became close friends.

Back then, Heidelberg Woodliff and Franks was considered one of the largest firms in town with about a dozen attorneys. Under the tutelage of the late George Woodliff and Kenneth Franks, whom they consider "giants" in the profession, the four new attorneys hit the pavement "stepping and fetching" for about \$30 an hour. They were runners, researchers and frequent litigators. Copeland remembers averaging two lawsuits a week as a young lawyer, many of them over dented bumpers. "There was no discovery," he said. "You talked to your person, you tried to talk to the police officer and then you'd go try your case."

They also spent lots of time in the state law library with all the other lawyers in town, back before the Internet, and that's how they found out what was happening around town. Nowadays, there's no need to leave your desk.



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(From left) Glen Bush, Glenn Taylor, Tom Cook and Greg Copeland celebrated the 20th anniversary of Copeland, Cook, Taylor & Bush, P.A., this summer with several clients from the firm's early years, along with employees and their families.

## Going their own way

After about a decade honing their friendship at work and Al's Half Shell, the four decided to venture out on their own. They didn't move far, just downstairs into offices that attorneys Fred Banks and Reuben Anderson had just vacated.

In the beginning, they focused on oil and gas, insurance and defense litigation, representing gas producers seeking payment from natural gas companies. The oil business took a serious downturn, but the firm was branching out into other areas such as real estate, environmental and corporate and general business. A merger in 1994 with a tax law firm further expanded the firm's capabilities in taxation, employee benefits, estate planning and probate.

Today there are 64 attorneys and a total staff of approximately 140 people. The partnership has grown from four to 22 partners and added former Gov. Ronnie Musgrove, of counsel.

Bush, a former chemist in the oil fields in West Texas, focuses primarily on oil and gas, environmental, and commercial and real estate transactions. For Taylor, it's oil and gas, com-

mercial litigation and business work for various clients. Copeland is a litigator, with more than 200 trials under his belt over the last 30 years. They all consider Cook the renaissance man, although he singles out corporate and real estate law.

Over the years they've picked up some loyal clients including Southern Farm Bureau, McCarty Farms, B.C. Rogers Poultry, Union Planters, BankPlus, which is a tenant in their building, numerous oil companies, and individuals in the oil business and corporate world who rely on them for business and personal matters.

Probably the firm's most notorious case is Marty Frankel, who bilked seven insurance companies out of more than \$200 million. Copeland represents the Mississippi Insurance Commission and four other state insurance commissions in what has turned out to be a very lengthy and bulky process. Since Copeland put Frankel in receivership May 10, 1999, more than two million pieces of paper have been generated, and more than 100 depositions have been conducted.

## Unknown territory

In 1999, the four partners left Capital Towers and moved out to Highland Colony Parkway into two buildings they had constructed — 200 Concourse and 400 Concourse. They consider the move a good investment, but back in 1996 when they first started making plans, it was not a foregone conclusion that the parkway would be a success.

"I said, 'We're going where?'" remembers Taylor.

They spent a good deal of time looking for space downtown, but in the end decided to take the huge step and build their two 50,000-square-foot buildings on land once occupied by an old barn. Unsure of how their clients would take to the move, they still kept an office downtown for more than a year. The downtown office wound up vacant most of the time, and they even joke that no one could find the keys. It turned out their clients in town didn't mind driving to Madison, and of course, out-of-town clients weren't affected at all.

As they celebrate their 20th anniversary, Copeland, Cook, Taylor and Bush are planning to build a third building next door, this one with 80,000 square feet so the whole firm can be together in one building, not spread out over 200 and 400 Concourse. The new building should be finished next fall, and they plan to lease their old offices.

In addition to being a good investment, moving to the parkway gave them the chance to map out a technologically efficient office building, and they are planning an even better layout in their new building. The firm has always put a great emphasis on staying ahead technologically and investing the money to do it. The four men feel that's vital as the profession becomes increasingly paperless.

Copeland, Cook, Taylor and Bush agree their strong friendship has enabled them to cover a vast amount of ground over the last two decades, and on the way they've gathered a great staff and loyal clients. "And we're still so young," laughs Taylor.

## Strictly Business

### House passes H.R. 525

WASHINGTON — The U.S. House of Representatives has passed the Small Business Health Fairness Act of 2005 (H.R. 525), a bill that would allow small businesses the same access to affordable health insurance that big business and unions enjoy.

The bill passed by a 263-165 vote, with 36 Democrats joining 227 Republicans. All four Mississippi representatives voted in favor of the legislation, according to the National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB).

"NFIB appreciates our representatives in Congress who voted to help make health insurance more accessible and affordable for our state's job creators — Mississippi's small-business owners," NFIB spokesper-

son Jim Brown said. "NFIB's small-business members encourage Senators (Trent) Lott and (Thad) Cochran (both R-Miss.) to join their colleagues in the House and help make health insurance more affordable for Main Street businesses. Access to affordable health insurance is the No. 1 issue for NFIB's 5,000 members in Mississippi and 600,000 members nationwide."

### Mynelle Gardens named best

JACKSON — *Mississippi Magazine* has named Mynelle Gardens the Best Garden or Park in the state. The July/August edition of the magazine showcases Mynelle and other places its 36,000 subscribers chose as the "2005 Best of Mississippi." This annual show-

case allows subscribers to vote on various categories to decide what is best in our state.

"We are thrilled that Mynelle was selected," said parks and recreation director Ramie Ford. "Mynelle Gardens has a unique charm and character that is very appealing to people who visit. The serene beauty of the grounds provides a great experience for a visit, a wedding or other event."

Mynelle Gardens, which is now maintained by the City of Jackson, began as a private garden created by Mynelle Westbrook Hayward and was acquired by the City of Jackson in 1973. It is a seven-acre collage of several distinct gardens, with winding pathways, cascading pools and distinctive bridges that lead across the pond to an island oasis.