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MAGAZINE®

ERNEST L. GREER

Attorney of the Month

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**A-LIST
ATLANTA
LAWYERS
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Attorney *of the* Month



ERNEST L. GREER

GREENBERG TRAURIG LLP

Setting a High Bar

By Jan Jaben-Eilon

The Atlanta Business Chronicle publishes a list of the 100 Most Influential Atlantans each year. The only attorneys to make the list have been Billy Payne, Sen. Sam Nunn and Hon. Griffin Bell. These lawyers were not listed specifically for their active law practices but instead for accomplishments with the Olympics, serving in the U.S. Senate or as Attorney General of the United States. They were named late in their careers.

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However, recently, Ernest L. Greer of Greenberg Traurig, has become a fixture on the elite list of Atlanta's influencers. Greer, 47, is the firm-wide vice president of Greenberg Traurig. He is also the managing shareholder of the firm's Atlanta office and co-chairs the firm's U.S. strategic committee. He is the only privately practicing attorney to be included on the list. Simply put, Greer is breaking new ground in the business world for attorneys in Atlanta and Georgia.

No other attorney has ever served as chairman of the Georgia Chamber of Commerce, the premier organization to promote businesses in the state of Georgia. Even more, Greer serves as chairman in a year when Georgia was named the number one state to do business by CNBC. He has become an iconic figure in the Atlanta business community and his influence spreads throughout the state. As chairman of the Georgia Chamber of Commerce, he has moved competition from battles between sections of the state to a concerted effort to work together and promote One Georgia.

"It's all Georgia," he said

He is creating a grassroots organization of all chambers working together on behalf of the state. "I'm honored and humbled to be a part of the effort to make the state more business-friendly," he said.

"From his first days as a member of the Georgia Chamber's board, and especially this year as its chair, Ernest has made a significant impact on our organization," noted Chris Clark, the president and CEO of the Georgia Chamber of Commerce. "He has challenged our volunteer leadership and staff alike to think about relevancy, to focus on meaningful results, and to remember to always think first about the Georgians who will ultimately benefit from our success. With his leadership, the Georgia Chamber has grown stronger ... by helping to attract a new generation of leaders who share his energy and commitment to the future."

"Ernest Greer is Georgia's civic-minded and engaged power attorney," said David Allison, editor of the Atlanta Business Chronicle, which now places him annually on its list of the most influential. "Most CEOs can't name the head of other big law firms but all know Ernest. He is publicly visible and known to all business and government leaders.

"He is out there making good things happen," he continued. "That says it all."

When asked about his goals, Greer said that his mission is to challenge the legal community to become more involved in their communities. He observed successful companies and realized that those companies don't just work at their businesses; they work hard to be impactful as well.

"My personal goal is to drive change and improve the state of Georgia," he said. "I hope my efforts send the message that law firms are businesses and individual attorneys must view themselves as citizens, focused on improving and being impactful to the community at large, not just practicing attorneys serving our clients."

"It is our obligation as lawyers, the harbingers of the rules of conduct in society, to actively participate in giving back to our communities and being more visible in our cities and neighborhoods," he explained. "Let's talk about how we can collaborate and make things better in our great state."

To do that, he explained, lawyers must see themselves as

business people.

"We sit as lawyers and talk about our cases and transactions and our most famous clients. And while that is critically important, equally as important is who we are as people and the role our industry should play in today's society" said Greer. "Lawyers have great knowledge and immense resources, and therefore we must play a larger role in the business community and meet our civic duties.

"In the law business, we are expected to achieve results that our clients desire and provide value," he continued, "but as part of the business community, we must implement solutions outside of individual law practices."

He noted that The Coca-Cola Company does far more than just sell bottles of Coke. The Atlanta landmark softdrink company contributes to the community in many ways, including by donating the property for the recently opened National Center for Civil and Human Rights in downtown Atlanta. Greer also serves on the board of the center.

Adjacent to Centennial Olympic Park and the World of Coca-Cola, the new museum which focuses not only on the history of the civil rights movement but also explores other human rights struggles, is particularly close to Greer's heart.

"If The Coca-Cola Company was solely interested in generating business revenue," noted Greer, "it would not have contributed the property for the National Center."

Greer also stressed that education is one of the most important issues facing the business community in the state. A St. Louis, Missouri native, Greer recognizes the importance of a good education. His parents showed him first-hand the sacrifices necessary to be successful. His father was a teacher of special needs children, and he remembers children knocking on their door to see his father.

When Greer was in high school, a cousin attended a private school and her mother suggested that Greer apply as well. He took an admissions test resulting in the school inviting him to attend. At the time, he was the only African American in the school, which, he now says, prepared him for multicultural settings. Eventually, he established a fund at St. Louis Country Day School to help disadvantaged youth attend the school.

Greer later attended Harvard University where he lettered in varsity football.

"I wanted to be a businessman and thought I would work on Wall Street," he recalled.

However, he was offered a fellowship to Northwestern School of Law, which provided full tuition and provided a \$10,000 a year stipend.

"That was better money than a Wall Street internship," noted Greer, who took the opportunity to study law.

After graduation from Northwestern, Greer served as a judicial clerk to a U.S. Court of Appeals judge. "It was through clerking that I learned that might doesn't always prevail," he said. "I saw briefs from small law firms win on their merit and big ones lose, also on merit."

In Atlanta, he is now the go-to person for companies for business litigation matters and otherwise. Greer's client list is beyond impressive, representing clients as diverse as the city of Atlanta and state of Georgia, as well as a variety of Fortune 500 corporations and small to mid-size businesses, both in and outside of Georgia. At

Greenberg, Greer has flourished as a lawyer, leader and in managing a large law office. He has helped build Atlanta's Greenberg Traurig office from a dozen to now over 100 local attorneys.

It is through this recognition of hardship, education, business, law and success that motivates Greer to encourage the legal community to give back.

"Every lawyer has a graduate degree," he noted. "Every county in Georgia has a lawyer in it. Education systems need to be empowered and law firms can offer their specialized knowledge to each local chamber of commerce. Lawyers have a unique way of thinking through and approaching issues. Legal analysis requires a rigorous and organized thinking process that gets you to hone in on the most significant issues."

Greer pointed to the Lawyer for a Day program that Greenberg Traurig initiated three years ago with the support of 100 Black Men of Atlanta as an example of how attorneys can take their knowledge into their communities. The Lawyer for a Day program adopted B.E.S.T. Academy in Atlanta to introduce disadvantaged youth to the legal profession. Over a six-week period, approximately 18 students attend weekly classes developed by Greer and fellow attorney Richard J. Valladares. The classes provide real-life business situations and teach the children how to research, prepare opening statements, publicly present their cases and other important skills. The program culminates with a mock trial. More than 20 Greenberg Traurig lawyers have donated their time to mentor these students.

"Lawyers can creatively use their talents to expose children to the legal profession as a career option or simply give time or resources to those in need," he said.

For another community project, Greenberg Traurig recently donated more than 65 tons of food to Atlanta's food bank as part of the state's annual Georgia Legal Food Frenzy.

Greer has received numerous awards and accolades over the past few years. He is listed by The Best Lawyers in America for mass tort litigation/class actions-defendants in 2013-2014 and consistently recognized by the Atlanta Business Chronicle in Who's Who in Law and Accounting. He's been selected as one of Georgia's Legal Elite by Georgia Trend magazine and by Chambers & Partners USA Guide.

"It is easy to get caught up in accomplishments and awards," he said, "but there is so much more to being a good lawyer to your clients than just winning awards."

He serves on the board of trustees for the Woodruff Arts Center and is vice-chair of the membership committee at the Rotary Club of Atlanta and a member of the Buckhead Coalition.

Both Greer and his wife Patrice are active supporters of education and the arts. He has served on the transition committee for Georgia Attorney General Sam Olens and the City Attorney search committee for Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed. He was also a committee member for the Georgia Competitiveness Initiative.

Mayor Reed described Greer recently in an article in the Atlanta Business Chronicle, "Ernest really is a person you want around when the stakes are high. He gives very sound advice."

Greer and his wife Patrice have two daughters and live in the City of Atlanta.

AT A GLANCE

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EDUCATION

- Juris Doctor, Northwestern University School of Law, 1991
- A.B. Government, Harvard University, 1988

PRACTICE AREAS

- Complex Commercial Litigation
- Products Liability Litigation
- Employment Litigation

CURRENT COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

- First Attorney Chairman, Georgia Chamber of Commerce
- The Woodruff Arts Center, Board of Trustees
- Center for Civil & Human Rights, Board of Directors
- Rotary Club of Atlanta
- Buckhead Coalition
- Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity, Inc. (Kappa Boulé)
- The National Association of Guardsmen, Inc., Atlanta Chapter
- Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc.
- 100 Blackmen of Atlanta, Inc.

AWARDS & HONORS

- Gate City Bar, A. T. Walden Outstanding Lawyer Award, 2014
- James Magazine, 100 Most Influential Georgians, 2014
- Atlanta Hawks African-American Trailblazer Awards, 2014
- Top 100 Lawyers in Georgia, 2011, 2013 and 2014
- BTI Client Service All Stars, Federal Regulations, 2014
- Nation Bar Association, Sankofa Award 2014
- Atlanta Business Chronicle, 100 Most Influential Atlantans – 2012-2014