

In the Footsteps OF HIS FATHER

SECOND-GENERATION ATTORNEY
BRENT ROSSER LETS INTEGRITY AND HONESTY
GUIDE HIS PRACTICE AND PRO BONO WORK

BY BETSY GRACA PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF CRAVOTTA

It's rare to find islands with beaches as unspoiled as Bear Island, parts of which haven't changed since Blackbeard hid along its shores in the early 1700s. The island, part of Hammocks Beach State Park, remains one of North Carolina's most treasured pieces of land, and is one that Brent Rosser, partner at Hunton & Williams in Charlotte, is trying to preserve for its recreational and educational value.

"My favorite thing about practicing law is the opportunity to help others," Rosser says. "Being in a position of trust to look at [a] problem, look at the facts and help identify solutions to that problem, I enjoy very much."

The 34-year-old business and environmental litigator has been one of the most active pro bono attorneys in his firm, spending hundreds of hours each year on such cases.

Last year, Rosser spent more than 400 pro bono hours on the Bear Island case alone. At stake is approximately 300 acres of undisturbed land that Rosser's client, a nonprofit organization, had been maintaining for decades. Descendants of the land's original owner sued the organization, claiming rightful ownership. After a two-week trial in 2010, in which Rosser was a lead attorney, a jury determined the nonprofit did not have the financial means to continue upkeep that would reflect the required educational

and recreational value. "The whole case was fascinating given the history of the property and the people who are close to it," says Rosser. (At the time of publication, the case was awaiting a hearing before the Court of Appeals of North Carolina.)

Rosser has a track record of good results in his pro bono cases. A couple of years ago, he helped two maids fight a noncompete agreement when they became unhappy with their employer and decided to seek out new jobs. "These were people did not have any real formal education and all they really knew how to do is to work in the house-cleaning service area," he says. "And we were able to get the noncompete deemed invalid and get them back to work quickly [elsewhere]."

He has also worked with the Council for Children's Rights, advocating in court for children caught in the middle of custody battles. "It's a very humbling experience to be in that sort of position of trust, where you're making recommendations that affect people's lives like that," he says.

Rosser became a lawyer through his father's example. "I looked up to my father in a lot of ways," he says. "I always liked going to his office and seeing what he did and meeting many of his clients, because some of his clients actually became family friends. A client-lawyer relationship is one of trust and I think one of the ways you can develop that trust is through developing

personal relationships. ... I think that only makes the job more enjoyable."

He carries that belief to his own practice, in which he represents financial institutions and energy companies across the country, and focuses on commercial litigation and environmental litigation. Since he began practicing in 2002, Rosser has represented some major players, including a Fortune 10 company in the auto industry in a products liability case, and a Fortune 10 company in the banking industry in a breach-of-contract case.

Named partner in April 2010, Rosser has made it a top priority to mentor the younger associates. "I tell this to some of our young lawyers," he says. "It's always important to be honest, to be forthright—not only with the court, of course, but also with your clients and your adversaries, because you want to be somebody that people can trust. When you lose that, or you lose your reputation, it's a very difficult thing to get back."

Rosser's dad passed away during Rosser's second year of law school, but his influence remains with Rosser every day: "I learned from my dad the importance of having integrity and maintaining high character in all that you do," he says. "I think that advice is especially applicable to the practice of law." **SL**



BRENT ROSSER

- PARTNER, HUNTON & WILLIAMS
- ENVIRONMENTAL LITIGATION AND COMMERCIAL LITIGATION
- NORTH CAROLINA RISING STARS: 2012
- RECIPIENT, E. RANDOLPH WILLIAMS AWARD FOR EXCEPTIONAL PRO BONO SERVICE, 2008–2010