



## Attorney James Pannell cited for professionalism, integrity

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By [Jan Skutch](#)

Savannah attorney James “Jim” Pannell comes from a family of lawyers and judges and an even greater family of mentors in fellow attorneys since he started practicing law in 1974.

His colleagues in the Savannah Bar Association Thursday night named Pannell the 2012 winner of the Frank Cheatham Professionalism Award, named after the late Chatham County Superior Court Judge Frank S. Cheatham Jr.

“It was actually a total surprise,” Pannell, 63, said Friday, adding that of course his wife, Karen, already knew. “I kind of feel like doing this bond work I don’t know anybody anymore.”

The award, presented during the bar’s annual cocktail party at the Savannah History Museum, has gone to some of the city’s top attorneys since 2000, all recognized for their integrity in the practice.

“Jim is the consummate professional,” attorney Paul W. Painter Jr., who introduced Pannell Thursday night, said Friday. “He treats everyone from the highest ranking judge to the lowest staff member with courtesy and dignity.”

While Cheatham was considered “the judge’s judge who had a very broad range of legal knowledge, Jim is a lawyer’s lawyer who over the years has been at home in the courtroom, the board room and the record room,” Painter said, calling Pannell one of the dying breed of general practitioners.

Pannell, who specializes in bond work with attorney Tom Gray, said his practice has been guided by attorneys whose own practices have been marked by integrity and honesty.

“You tend to practice like your mentors,” he said, naming among others Gray, Bill Franklin, and the late Ed Maner and Joe Oliver. “I was very fortunate to have good role models.”

Pannell joined the Oliver Maner & Gray law firm after earning his law degree from the University of Georgia law school and remained there until he and Gray left in 2008 to go on their own as Gray & Pannell, now Gray Pannell & Woodward.

His career seems to have been cast at birth; his father was the late Charles Pannell, a Georgia Court of Appeals judge.

His brother, Charles Pannell Jr., is a federal judge in Atlanta, and another brother, Bill, is an Atlanta attorney. His son, Jon, practices with Gray and Pannell here.

“There ain’t much originality in the family,” he said.

Even his law school produced bonds that following him in his professional career.

His legal writing class included Painter and Carl Pedigo, who were taught by then-law student, now U.S. Bankruptcy Judge, Lamar Davis Jr.

Pannell followed Gray to Savannah where the others also practice.

Pannell said he and Cheatham have commonality. Both were “double dogs” — graduating from the University of Georgia and its law school. Cheatham was president of his senior class; Pannell president of the student senate. Both served in the Georgia legislature, were long-time members and leaders of Wesley Monumental United Methodist Church and held leadership roles with the YMCA of Coastal Georgia board of directors.

And both are former presidents of the Savannah Bar Association.

“I respected (Cheatham) greatly, so winning this award is very important to me,” Pannell said.

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