Looking Out for Others Drives Smith’s Work

By Estes Gould

Three days after Jeffrey Smith’s father had surgery to repair a broken hip, doctors told his mother he was being discharged that day – whether or not she had found a nursing home for his rehabilitation and Alzheimer’s treatment.

Smith’s mother had been searching for a suitable place in Mississippi or Memphis, but she was told by the hospital she had to decide right then because, regardless, her husband would be leaving that day. “If she hadn’t had a lawyer in the family, she wouldn’t have known what to do,” said Smith, telling his parents’ story.

Smith, a partner with the law firm Adams and Reese LLP, recently was awarded the Pro Bono Attorney of the Year by the Tennessee Justice Center for his pro bono work in the health care industry. It is situations like his parents’ that make him glad to represent TennCare patients free of charge, he said.

Smith represents TennCare patients whose benefits are being cut, or some treatment they need is being denied. He also created a partnership between his practice and University of Memphis Cecil C. Humphreys School of Law students to help serve such TennCare patients.

In his parents’ case, he was able to keep his dad in the hospital for another day, paid by Medicaid, while his mother took time to decide which rehabilitation facility would be appropriate.

“It had a happy ending,” he said. “That brought home to me why it’s really important for anyone in this situation to have someone looking out for him.”
But health care makes up only a fraction of the cases Smith covers. He focuses on business-related litigation, with labor and employment law and franchise distribution law comprising two-thirds of his caseload. The other third is split between health care, construction and industrial equipment issues.

“I’ve always been interested in business, and with law, I get to learn something new in every single case,” he said.

His business interests originally led him to a finance degree at the University of Mississippi. He decided to pursue law school only after an inspiring professor taught his business law class in undergrad.

Upon graduating from law school at Ole Miss, he joined a small firm that handled business more indirectly than he had anticipated, but he found he enjoyed it – and stuck with it.

“Labor and unemployment law was not something I saw myself doing when I graduated law school, but that set me on the road,” he said.

Years later, he is now a partner with Adams and Reese. His upcoming cases include a construction case, for which he has received a favorable ruling, but which he might appeal, and health care cases with clients who feel they should have been compensated for a procedure.

But despite the growth in his career, Smith still keeps a token from his past to keep him grounded: his grandfather’s hat. His grandfather, a Navy veteran and farmer by trade, was a “simple man with a simple life,” Smith said. When he visited during the summers as a boy, the grown-ups would gather and talk late into the night about news and events.

“He was a man of a lot of wisdom and integrity,” he said. “And that grounds me; I’m not too far from being a simple farmer.”

Smith has his own family now: a wife and three young daughters. Outside of work, his family occupies most of his time. But soon, he hopes to bring them to his Ole Miss stomping grounds for a football game or two.

“That’s as beautiful as it gets – Oxford in the spring,” he said.