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# ATTORNEY<sup>(S)</sup> AT LAW

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MAGAZINE



## JEFFREY HARRIS



# JEFFREY HARRIS FELL IN LOVE WITH THE COURTROOM

By Elaine Frances

**A**ward-winning litigator Jeffrey R. Harris says the secret to his firm's success is simple. "I think fundamentally, we are not afraid to try a case before a jury. Whether it's a product liability case, a medical malpractice case or a complex wrongful death claim, you figure out how to present the evidence to a jury in the most understandable and approachable way," says the partner with Harris Lowry Manton LLP, which has offices in Atlanta and Savannah.

"Other firms try to be specialized in a specific practice area," he explains. "But when it comes time to try a case to a jury, it really doesn't matter whether the case is

a medical, products, trucking or industrial accident -- you still have to explain it to the jury. So, we focus on the trial side, handling the most complex cases in the country. We really consider ourselves to be a trial boutique firm. We do something few firms do well."

Harris says he was fortunate to "fall in love with the courtroom." He worked as a police officer, then landed a job with a prosecutor's office. "I was able to work on hundreds of criminal trials, and I got interested in the craft of trial work and decided to go to law school." He graduated first in his class, magna cum laude, at Mercer Law School, which he attended af-

ter earning an undergraduate degree from the University of Georgia and an MBA in finance from the Mercer Business School.

He immediately loved the "unbelievable, chaotic nature of trial. It's out of control and you need to be able to adapt and make mid-course corrections." During a trial, he especially enjoys the opportunity to engage with juries and is a master at the art of persuasion. "You have to tell your (client's) story and trust the jury system to resolve major issues, even if the evidence is complicated. I think juries usually get it right and I'm proud to be a part of the a system that is the foundation of the American judicial process."

Born and raised in Atlanta, Harris started his legal career at a defense firm in Savannah. "But I knew quickly that I'd prefer representing plaintiffs, so I joined several plaintiffs' firms," before launching his current firm with his partners Steve Lowry and Jed Manton, whom he says are "great partners." Harris Lowry Manton LLP has racked up major high-profile, multi-million-dollar wins in the past decade, including many of the state's top verdicts.

Harris served as the lead trial attorney on a landmark case, *Jones v. CSX*, winning an \$11.2 million verdict for the family of a camera operator who was killed while working on the "Midnight Rider" movie. He also led major courtroom victories for clients in catastrophic medical malpractice cases, including a record \$18 million jury verdict in which he represented a client paralyzed from negligent medical treatment. He has also obtained record verdicts in the products liability arena including a \$48 million seatback verdict, a \$40 million defective transmission verdict and a \$17 million defective tire verdict, along with other high-profile verdicts involving business torts, sexual assault and wrongful death.

In every one of these cases, there was something that resonated for him beyond the winning verdicts. "We made a difference in changing an industry, getting



Jed Manton

Stephen Lowry

Jeffrey Harris

a product recalled, changing a dangerous practice or making sure some other family doesn't suffer a similar injury," Harris explains. "We are making the world a better place, and that's why we do what we do."

Harris also loves taking on cases involving new issues. For instance, "if there's a defect in a product, I have to think like an engineer, in a medical case I have to learn the medicine, or in a business case I have to learn about an industry. I enjoy learning something new every day. You have to master the subject before you can simplify it for a jury."

A challenging part of his work is time management. "So many cases can get stacked up for trial," he explains. "It's fun, but it's exhausting. Right now, I have four trials set for September, October, December and January. I won't be able to enjoy football season!"

The dozen attorneys at the firm, which was recently honored at the Georgia Legal Awards as the 2019 Litigation Team of the Year - Small Firm, work in a "relaxed but high-pressure environment," says Harris. "I don't care what you wear, but you have to be focused on winning for the client. There's an intensity in what we do."

When hiring attorneys, he looks for good writers. "So much of what you're doing leading up to a trial requires writing." But the first thing he does when he hires new attorneys is have them "unlearn how they learn to write in law school, all those 'heretofores'. They need to write in a more straightforward way. That's why we have a lot of former judicial clerks in the firm. They know how to get to the point."

Harris obviously enjoys the practice of law. "I've been very happy with my career, and I enjoy seeing young lawyers learn the craft of trial work." His main advice to prospective attorneys is to "find a practice area you enjoy." Those attorneys who are unhappy are generally, he says, not in the right practice area.

He's apparently found the right fit for himself. Even starting in law school, he received a number of scholastic awards, including the Woodruff Medal and the Order of the Barristers. He's been repeatedly recognized as a Georgia Super Lawyer, one of the top 100 lawyers in Georgia, a member of Atlanta's Legal Elite and one of the Finest Lawyers in the South. He was also honored by the *Fulton County Daily Report* as one of the top 14 lawyers under 40 practicing in Georgia.

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One highlight of his legal work is practicing with his wife, Rebecca Franklin Harris, who works as of-counsel with his firm while maintaining a successful practice with her father. "We work on a lot of cases together. The downside is talking about cases at home and our children want us to shut up about law." Chances are

## Firm Name:

Harris Lowry Manton LLP  
1201 Peachtree Street NE - Suite 900, Atlanta, GA 30361  
Phone 404.961.7650  
www.hlmlawfirm.com

## Founded:

2006

## Firm Composition:

- Partners: Jeffrey R. Harris, Stephen G. Lowry and Jed D. Manton
- Associates: Sarah Adle, T. Peyton Bell, Andrew J. Conn, Yvonne S. Godfrey, Madeline E. McNeely, Maria D. Sayers
- Staff: Michelle Day, Zuzana DuBois, Susan Dunn, Odalys Garcia, Heather Johnson, Kyle Kerns, Andrea McNeese, Korinne Morris, Benita Giddens Porter, Toni Robider, Aletha Summerlin, Lauren Turcotte

## Practice Areas:

Wrongful death, catastrophic injury, personal injury, defective products, motor vehicle accidents, trucking accidents, auto defects, medical device failures, burn injuries, medical malpractice, aviation law, financial misconduct

## Community/Civic Involvement:

Host annual First Responder Appreciation Celebration Luncheon, endow the Harris Lowry Manton LLP Civil Justice Scholarship and sponsor Make-A-Wish Georgia, #HonorMark 5K and many other civic organizations.

## Awards:

2019 Georgia Legal Awards Litigation Department of the Year - Small Firm; Daily Report Top Verdicts and Settlements - six #1 verdicts in six categories; Daily Report Top Verdicts and Settlements - #2 Medical Malpractice Verdict for 2018.

## Other Locations:

410 E. Broughton Street, Savannah, GA 31401

he's only referring to his 13-year-old daughter, not his four-year-old toddler. Asked whether the teen might follow in his footsteps anyway, Harris states, "She swears she won't, but I think it would be a great disservice to the world if she doesn't. Whatever she does, she'll be awesome and I'll be proud."

When Harris isn't in one of his partner's offices, bouncing ideas around or representing his clients in the courtroom, he probably is near the water he loves so much and is the reason he lives in Savannah. It could be scuba diving, boating or fishing. Or, he could be reading the historical biographies he enjoys.

Although he avoids watching TV shows or reading about the law, he admits that he's read "To Kill A Mockingbird" many times. "I feel a great affinity for (the character) Atticus Finch," he says. "But I'll never be that calm, genteel, collected guy you see in the movie. I'm a little more high-energy in court."

He's beginning to see the advantages, however, of getting older. "You get a benefit from having grey hair as a trial lawyer," he laughs, looking to the long future he foresees for himself. "I look forward to trying cases until the time I can't stand anymore."