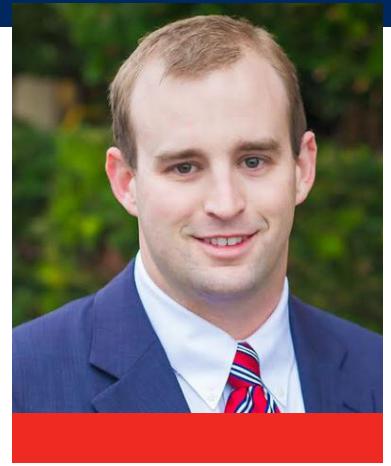


Fifth generation Floridian making a name for himself



By Brian Cox

The initial in W. Nathan Meloon's name stands for "Walter," a family name that dates back to the mid-1800s.

"If you called Walter when I was growing up, there would have been four people who responded," says Meloon, a non-equity partner with Widerman Malek in Melbourne, Fla. His father, grandfather, great-grandfather, and great-great-grandfather are all named Walter as well.

Which is why he goes by Nathan.

A fifth generation Floridian, Meloon has deep roots in the Orlando area where his family settled decades before Disney arrived. The Meloons relocated from New Hampshire to the

Sunshine State in 1924 with thoughts of starting an orange grove business. When those plans fell through, the entrepreneurial Walter C. Meloon decided to build boats and offer boat tours on the lakes around Orlando. He started the Winter Park Boat Tour and founded the Florida Variety Boat Company, which constructed a diverse range of watercraft, from powerboats to race boats and sailboats. In 1936, the company was renamed Correct Craft.

During World War II, the company pulled off the incredible feat of building 400 boats in just 30 days for the U.S. Army to use to cross the Rhine. The accomplishment was dubbed "A Miracle Production" by National Geographic.

By the time Correct Craft celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2000 it had become the oldest family-owned and operated boat manufacturer in the world. The family sold its stock in the company in 2008.

Meloon grew up in the family business. In high school, he spent summer mornings cleaning and detailing boats at the dealership – "which is not fun to do in June in Florida" – and helping in the shop. His grandfather ran the company at the time. His great-grandfather, who was still alive and in his upper 80s, would insist on going to Red Lobster every night for dinner, where the talk surrounded business issues. Through his middle school years, Meloon often joined the elder Meloons for dinner and was exposed to a wide range of company concerns.

"At dinner was where they would make most of the business decisions," says Meloon. "We eventually had to cut it down to once a week because I had had everything on the Red Lobster menu."

The experience provided Meloon with the seeds for developing a sound understanding of what factors influence people's business decisions.

Just before this time, Meloon had become captivated by the political turmoil created by the 2000 presidential election and the resulting court case of Bush v. Gore, in which the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in a 5-4 decision that a recount ordered by the Florida Supreme Court was unconstitutional and should be stopped.

"I think that was the first time I thought I wanted to be a lawyer," says Meloon, who was 9 at the time. "I was watching all of that and it seemed very interesting. I thought it would be really fun stuff to argue about."



As a toddler, Nathan Meloon appeared on the cover of "Waterski" magazine with his father, Walter Gary Meloon, and his grandfather, Walt Meloon. The family is an icon in the boating industry.

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A family photo that spans four generations of Walter Meloons: (l-r) Grandfather Walt Meloon, father Walter Gary Meloon, Walter Nathan Meloon, and great-grandfather Walter O. Meloon.

The election sparked an abiding interest in politics. In high school, Meloon volunteered on several campaigns and while studying political science and economics at Florida State University (FSU) in Tallahassee, he interned in the state legislature, where he got to “see how the sausage is made.”

For the next several years, he would continue to blend his passion for politics and his interest in law.

During the summer after his first year in law school at FSU, Meloon interned for the State Attorney’s Office in Orlando where he worked in the post-conviction and death penalty unit, which introduced him to criminal law and honed his appellate writing skills. He also interned for State Rep. Eric Eisnagle, who now sits on the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals.

The following summer, Meloon worked as a legal intern for the Brevard County Attorney’s Office. To avoid a long commute, his future wife’s grandmother offered to let him live with her in her condo on Satellite Beach. Every day after work, he would take her to dinner and then go fishing on the beach or watch rocket launches.

He thought, “If I could figure out how to work here, I would love it.”

In time, he did just that.

His last semester of law school, Meloon began working for the Florida Department of Environmental Protection as the deputy director of legislative affairs. He lobbied before the state legislature on environmental issues such as programs concerning brownfield clean-up and dry cleaning. The experience was invaluable.

“I deal with a lot of the same issues now,” says Meloon, whose practice focuses on land use and development, real estate, local government law, commercial litigation, and property rights protection.

The summer Meloon graduated from law school, he suffered a personal tragedy when his younger brother, Gary, died unexpectedly the Saturday before Meloon was scheduled to take the bar exam. He was studying at Starbucks when his wife, Hannah, called him to tell him to come home. His parents were waiting for him with the news.

“I had to decide if I was going to go ahead and take the bar or put it off until February,” says Meloon, who chose to take the bar as planned. “No matter what happens, you have to just plow ahead and get things done.”

It was the same mental fortitude Meloon employed when he was diagnosed with Type I diabetes at age 17. In the face of this challenge and adversity, Meloon refused to let the disease impede his drive and ambition.

“I did what I was going to do regardless,” he says. “What option did I have? I wasn’t going to let it change anything.”

In the wake of his brother’s death and after 18 months with the Department of Environmental Protection in the state capital, Meloon was ready to return to central Florida where he grew up and took a position as director of policy and government affairs for the Melbourne Regional Chamber of East Central Florida.

Within the year, Meloon learned of an opening at Wideman Malek working with Scott Knox, for whom he had interned at the Brevard County Attorney’s Office, and he seized on it. He embraced the firm’s philosophy and culture.

“When I came in, they said there’s no billable hour requirement. You bring in work as an associate, you get a piece of the pie, if you go above and beyond, you get a piece of that, too,” recalls Meloon. “I thought there would be a catch – there wasn’t.”

Despite thinking he preferred transactional zoning work, Meloon was surprised to find he enjoyed litigation and being in court.

“I’ve gone from where I thought I would do 100 percent transactional zoning work to where that is now about 20 or 30 percent of what I do, and the rest is litigation,” he says.

He is focused now on building his client base and solidifying the foundation of his practice.

“I’ve found one of the best ways to get clients and build a practice is by doing good work for my current clients,” he says. “You also have to go out and let people know who you are. You have to spend about 10-15 hours a week of being out there and marketing, which is really being in social settings.”

Primerus, he says, is a valuable resource in that regard.

Since the first Primerus Young Lawyers Conference he went to three years ago, he has gathered practical and effective tips and tools. It was after returning from a Primerus conference that he re-initiated a quarterly training session for associates.

Meloon and Hannah have a 2-year-old daughter, Margaret, and are expecting a second in August. In his spare time, he enjoys

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running, playing golf, and fishing. Considering his family's legacy, it is perhaps not surprising that he's maintained a life-long interest in history.

The family traces its roots back to Colonial America in the mid-1600s. One of his ancestors was the royal governor of New Hampshire during the Revolutionary War. Another, Tobias Lear, was the executive secretary to George Washington from 1786 to 1799 and recorded the first American president's final words.

"It was cool in high school, at least I thought it was," says Meloon with a smile. "Other kids may have thought it weird."



Attorney Nathan Meloon and his wife, Hannah, have a 2-year-old daughter, Margaret.