

Mississippi business lawyer helps clients develop their own entrepreneurial spirit



By Brian Cox

If you ever find yourself traveling in south-central Mississippi on a Friday night around 9 PM, be sure to tune your radio dial to 98.3 WJDR or 102.7 The Pearl to catch attorney Wes Daughdrill spinning records and talking about music he loves for 90 commercial-free minutes.

"I had always thought it would be fun to have my own radio show where I could play whatever I wanted," says Daughdrill, the president of Young Wells Williams P.A. in Ridgeland, Miss., just north of Jackson.



On Friday nights, you can find attorney Wes Daughdrill on the radio, spinning tunes and talking music with his friend, Steve Mercier, as part of the program "Friday Night Rock Show with Wes Daughdrill."

Five years ago, almost on a whim, Daughdrill made that dream come true when he approached the owner of the local FM station with his idea. "You can throw me out, if you want to," Daughdrill told him, "but here's what I want to do."

The broadcaster did not throw him out and a deal was quickly struck.

On "The Friday Night Rock Show with Wes Daughdrill," listeners can expect an eclectic playlist that could include songs from the likes of Van Halen, Journey, The Cars, George Jones, Patsy Cline, Merle Haggard, Stevie Wonder, or Smokey Robinson and the Miracles – whatever strikes the business lawyer's fancy that week. Daughdrill likes to play the "deep tracks," not the songs people have heard a thousand times.

"I love rock, pop, some old country," says Daughdrill, who grew up constantly listening to the radio and spends all week planning the playlist for his show. "I get real joy out of it, I really do. It's one of the highlights of my week."

Born and raised in Prentiss, a small town south of Jackson with a population of just over 1,000 people, Daughdrill grew up around the grocery store his family operated for three generations. His grandfather, Emmett Smith, opened the grocery in 1963. When he retired in 1990, Daughdrill's father took over running Emmett Smith's Market. In 2001, his brother, Wade, took over the business from their father.

In addition to groceries, the market had its own slaughterhouse and sold fresh meat to customers and distributed it to area cafés, hospitals, and schools. Though able to survive both Hurricane Camille and Hurricane Katrina, Emmett Smith's Market finally succumbed to a shrinking local economy and closed in 2008.

For decades, though, the business was so integrated into the Daughdrills' lives that it became an extension of the family home and was an essential element of the Prentiss community.

"It used to be when I was a kid you didn't have to leave our little town to get anything you needed, from a hammer to a suit," recalls Daughdrill.

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Attorney Wes Daughdrill and his wife, Allison, grew up in the same small town of Prentiss, Miss where they also raised their four children. The couple will celebrate their 30th anniversary next year.

From a young age, Daughdrill witnessed firsthand how small businesses every day must work to find ways to compete, to fit into the marketplace, to set themselves apart from the competition, and to build and maintain a loyal customer base. That insight has proved valuable over the course of his more than 30 years as a business attorney.

“I do believe growing up in a small business environment has helped me considerably in my practice because the people that raised me had an entrepreneurial spirit,” says Daughdrill. “And I think that helps me a little bit that I’ve got some of that in my blood.”

Daughdrill left his hometown when he decided to attend the University of Mississippi in Oxford, where he studied banking and finance, fully intent on going to law school. He stayed at Ole Miss to earn his law degree. In his first year, he successfully interviewed for a clerkship at Young Wells Williams, which, after a second clerkship the following year, hired him. He has been there ever since. His partner and mentor, Jim Neeld, first interviewed Daughdrill back in the summer of 1991.

“I liked what Jim did,” says Daughdrill of his decision to join the firm and his resulting longevity there. “I like the transactional stuff. I like building something up. What intrigued me was being on a team to help people put their dreams together.”

Originally founded in 1962 in Jackson, by James Leon Young and his father, J. Will Young, the 12-lawyer firm now operates out of its primary office in Ridgeland. The firm represents both Fortune 500 companies and mom-and-pop businesses run by people who pulled themselves up by their bootstraps and now have lucrative local businesses they’ve established.

“I’ve had businesses walk in that were literally starting with an idea and they needed to form an entity, and they barely had enough money to form the entity, but their idea took off and I helped them on the ground floor and now their business is a thriving 30-year business,” says Daughdrill. “To me, that is the satisfying part of this, helping them with all aspects of putting a business together and employing people.”

While Daughdrill’s main practice centers on corporate and transactional law, he also represents a few governmental entities (including his hometown of Prentiss), and during the past three decades has become well established nationally as an adoption attorney.

As a young associate, Daughdrill began doing occasional work for a partner who was well known in Jackson as a divorce attorney. Part of her practice involved handling adoptions, and in 1989



Wes Daughdrill’s two daughters, Avery (left) and Ginny (right), tailgate with the family before an Ole Miss football game. Ginny is in her second year of law school at Ole Miss and Avery plans to attend the university in the fall.

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she was involved in the formation of the American Academy of Adoption and Assisted Reproduction Attorneys (AAAA), a national organization that now has some 450 highly vetted members. As Daughdrill gained more experience helping her with interstate adoptions, she encouraged him to join the AAAA, which he qualified to do. Interstate adoptions remain an active part of his practice.

“You see some sad circumstances for sure, but it’s been a rewarding part of my practice,” he says.

In 2002, after living in Jackson for the first nine years of his career, Daughdrill and his wife, Allison, decided it was time to return to small-town life. He had always intended at some point to move back to the country, and now, with their children nearing school age, the time seemed right.

They built a home on a rural piece of property that Daughdrill’s family owned outside of Prentiss, where their children could attend the same small school they had gone to. He is the fourth generation of the Daughdrill family to live on the land. The house, with its large front porch and white columns, is within shouting distance of the home Daughdrill grew up in.

“If I yell really loud, my mother can hear me out my back door,” he jokes. “It felt like a natural thing to me. I think one of the great things that comes from growing up in a small town is you’re around a wide variety of people. You know how to relate to people because you interact with people from all walks of life every day.”

Daughdrill and Allison, a dietician working with hospitals and nursing homes, have four children. Their oldest son, Wesley, 27, is a graduate of Ole Miss and a Doctor of Physical Therapy in Pensacola, Fla. Austin Emmett, 25, is in his third year of law school at Ole Miss, as is their daughter, Ginny, 23, who is in her second year. Their second daughter and youngest child, Avery, is a senior at Simpson Academy and plans to attend Ole Miss next year like her parents and siblings.



The Daughdrill family celebrate the wedding of son, Wesley, to his bride, Bailey. Pictured are (l-r) Austin and his wife, Anna Kate; Avery; Bailey and Wesley; Allison and Wes; and Ginny.

Over the course of his long career, Daughdrill says he has seen technology transform the legal profession, making it more efficient, and has witnessed the evolution toward specialization. But there is one thing he says has not changed and that he doesn’t believe will ever change – a lesson he learned a long time ago at the family’s grocery store.

“You’ve got to have the baseline of knowing what you’re doing, but the separating factor is your availability and hands-on, personal involvement with the clients. At the end of the day, they want to know that you are truly concerned about them and their legal needs and that you are going to do your very best to take care of them. That’s what brings value to a client.”