



Photo by Trip Burns.

By **Tommy Burton**

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Attorney Tray Hairston, 35, bubbles with enthusiasm and positivity about Jackson and its residents. After graduating from Madison Central High School in 1997, where his mother DeEtta Hairston taught, he attended Tougaloo College where he studied English and humanities with an emphasis in philosophy. His collegiate career also led him to spend a semester at Brown University in Providence, R.I., and New York University in New York City.

Throughout his travels, one thing prevailed: He wanted to come back and serve the people of Jackson. "It was nice to get away, but I knew I wanted to come home and feel connected," Hairston says.

Hairston received his law degree from Mississippi College School of Law in 2009. He currently works for Butler Snow law firm in Ridgeland. Before Butler Snow, Hairston served as legal counsel for Gov. Phil Bryant.

His current work focuses on municipal bond issues. In simple terms, he helps cities find money to fix infrastructure and improve economic development.

"Today in Mississippi, there's not enough money in general," he says. "I explore tax-exempt bonds, which, in turn, saves the state money. I try to find solutions that make sense financially."

Hairston gave a talk at TEDx Jackson on using the health-care industry as an economic driver. He says he recognizes the challenges Jackson faces at the state and federal level, but believes solutions are close at hand. "Everything has to be balanced," he says.

Hairston didn't always see himself becoming a lawyer. He says that his two greatest influences are his father, Tommy Hairston, and Judge Henry Wingate. "Dad was a letter carrier who was also active in the union," he says.

"There were many discussions around the dinner table about how people could be treated fairly." Hairston says that Judge Wingate "was a mentor to me, and I learned a lot from him. He steered me toward studying philosophy."

Since 2010, Hairston has served as an adjunct professor at the Mississippi College School of Law where he teaches a judicial philosophy course.

Hairston has a fundamental belief that Jackson is on the cusp of many great things. "Other cities like Little Rock (Ark.) and Birmingham (Ala.) have had a rebirth," he says. "It's time for our renaissance. I see Jackson as the last vestige of the 'old South.' With great planning, we have a bright future."

People should be engaged with things that are happening in Jackson, he says. "We should all care about

our capital city," says the father of one daughter, Zoe.

"It is the heartbeat of our area. If it prospers, so does everything around it."

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