

Attorney Tanya D. Jeffords

Mrs. Jeffords is in private practice in Augusta, Georgia in the Law Office of Tanya D. Jeffords and Associates, PC, where her logo is PPP and her motto for success is Preparation and the Power of Prayer. She has an AA degree in Fashion Design from the Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising in California, where she was born and raised. She received her undergraduate degree from Augusta State University and graduated from Mercer University, Walter F. George School of Law in 2001. Upon graduation from law school she was a federal judicial law clerk for 2 years with the United States District Court for the Middle District in Albany, Georgia, the Honorable Judge Lois Sands. She returned to August, Georgia and practiced in the law firm of Fulcher, Hagler, Hanks and Harper where she worked in litigation concentrating on railroad defense, insurance defense and employment and labor law. She is licensed in both South Carolina and Georgia. She gained most of her trial experience while working as a Public Defender in the Augusta Judicial Circuit. She reentered into the private practice of law in March of 2008 and practices in the areas of criminal law, family law, personal injury, and employment and labor law.

She recently argued and won her first case before the Supreme Court of Georgia in the case of the State of Georgia v. Richard Gonnella. She has served as a member of the boards of the Georgia State Bar and the Augusta Bar Association and was a representative for her district with the Young Lawyers Division of the State Bar. She is a Christian, the wife of Bill Jeffords, III, the mother of William Jeffords IV and Godmother to Tavarus Patterson, and co-founder and CEO of Dream Builders of America's Youth Inc.

Lawyer has strong sense of social justice

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By [LaTina Emerson](#) Staff Writer

Tanya Jeffords wanted more control of her time and career, so she decided to take matters into her own hands.

In 2008, the lawyer opened her own law office, Tanya Jeffords & Associates PC, at 418 Greene St. She wanted the flexibility to spend time with her family and have more time trying cases in the courtroom.

Mrs. Jeffords, 39, handles cases in criminal law, personal injury, family law, civil litigation, and employment and labor law. Criminal law makes up 50 percent of her practice. She is licensed in Georgia and South Carolina.

"I'm the first lawyer in my whole family," she said. "I think the law is a great profession. It allows you to be continuously challenged. I never get bored.

"My nickname is The Tiger."

She said she was given that nickname by a client in her first murder case. He told her that she was aggressive in the courtroom. In her office, she displays a vase with a picture of a tiger on the front.

Throughout Mrs. Jeffords' office are items representing the people and things that mean the most to her: faith, family and the law. Lining her desk and tables are photos of her husband, William Jeffords III, and her young son, William IV.

On the wall near her desk is a large poster that reads "World's Greatest Mother Award" from her son. Being a mother is an important part of her life, she said.

Her Christian faith also plays a central role, as symbolized by biblical Scriptures and a colorful picture of several women dressed in church attire that hangs across from her desk. There are countless law books lining her bookshelf, in addition to the iconic symbol of the law: the scales of justice.

Lawyer Jacque Hawk has known Mrs. Jeffords since she was a college student. Today, she shares office space with him. Mr. Hawk said she is an "excellent attorney."

"She's already very, very good and has the potential to be unbelievable," he said. "I consider her my protegee' and she considers herself my protégé. The thing about Tanya, Tanya is very smart. When you teach her anything, that's it. She's got it."

When Mrs. Jeffords was starting at the public defender's office, she went to Mr. Hawk's office for advice on his trial techniques.

"I spent about two hours, and she utilized it in the next four or five trials and won every trial," Mr. Hawk said. "I could do that with 50 other lawyers, and maybe one or two would get it as quick as she did and be able to do that."

"She was able to take what I taught her in a couple of hours, apply it immediately and get great results, which is rare."

He would prefer that Mrs. Jeffords worked for him, he said, but he's pleased that she has branched out on her own.

"I think it's great for her," Mr. Hawk said. "There's some attorneys, you see them go out on their own and you know that's a disaster. With her, she's going to be fine because she's very good with people, and she understands the legal process and the trial process extremely well."

"Those two things will make you successful, and she's got those two things going for her."

Faithful decisions

Mrs. Jeffords also has her faith to rely on, said the Rev. Sam Davis, her pastor at Beulah Grove Baptist Church. He has known Mrs. Jeffords for more than 10 years.

"On a scale of one to 10, let's give her a 12," the Rev. Davis said. "It's just her personality and her commitment to people. Tanya has an unusual love for people. That has really impressed me over the years."

Another commitment she makes is to Bible study, which she attends noon Wednesday despite her busy schedule.

"She's always kept prayer in the midst of all of her decisions," the Rev. Davis said. "She talks about the struggles, but Tanya seems to move right through them because of her personality and her commitment to the Lord."

He has seen Mrs. Jeffords in action with her son and her "adopted son," Tavarus Patterson, 20.

"Tanya loves children, and the little child they have now, he's the center of their life. The love that she has for her children just overflows into love for other children," the Rev. Davis said. "In addition, ... Tanya is a family-focused person. She loves family. It's such a beautiful sight to see a young person with such a fantastic career in front of them that loves the Lord as much as she does."

The pastor said that he can count on Mrs. Jeffords' legal expertise "whenever there is need at the church."

"Tanya is always the first person that I look for. She has given me free consultation ever since she has been a part of the church. That speaks volumes," he said.

Hard work

Mrs. Jeffords grew up in Milpitas, Calif., the youngest child. In her close-knit family, she had four sisters and one brother, and a foster child also lived in the home. Her mother, Arnetta Flowers, was the head of the household.

"Family is very important to me because of that. We didn't have much money, so actually I went to work at 14 years old so that I could help my mom," Mrs. Jeffords said. "I tried to be as independent as I could at a young age so that my mom wouldn't have to worry. She worked seven days a week and three jobs."

Mrs. Jeffords' first job was working as a store clerk at a convenience store, TGNV, which is similar to Family Dollar. Mrs. Jeffords said that she learned about work at an early age.

"You have to work hard. That's what it takes to get where you want to go," she said.

In high school, she knew that she wanted to be either a lawyer or a fashion designer.

"Somebody told me that it was 11 years to become a lawyer, and I just was not going to school that long. I was always designing clothes and sewing, so I went to design school right out of high school," Mrs. Jeffords said.

She attended the Fashion Institute of Design & Merchandising in San Francisco. After completing her studies, she moved to Los Angeles and worked for several years in the design industry.

"It was wonderful," she said. "I had a good time."

In 1992, Mrs. Jeffords moved to the South to earn a business degree. Her mother and stepfather lived in the Augusta area, and she wanted to be closer to her stepfather because he was ill.

"I ended up deciding to go to law school instead (of getting a business degree). I changed my whole career path," she said.

Mrs. Jeffords enrolled in classes at Augusta State University and earned a bachelor of arts degree in political science and sociology. She graduated from law school at Mercer University in 2001 and passed the bar exams in Georgia and South Carolina.

"I got married the same week that I graduated from law school," Mrs. Jeffords said. "I got married on Thursday and I graduated from law school on Saturday. Right on the Savannah River.

"I wanted to make a commitment to my family first and my career second, and that's why I did that."

She has been married for eight years.

After graduation, she worked for two years as a federal judicial law clerk for Judge Louis Sands in the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Georgia in Albany.

"I didn't like doing the criminal law at that point, and it's so funny that's what I do now," she said.

In 2003, she returned to Augusta and got a job at Fulcher Hagler LLP, where she concentrated on personal injury defense and railroad litigation defense.

Still, Mrs. Jeffords wanted to get more trial experience and to help people, so she decided to take a position at the public defender's office in 2005. She worked there for three years.

"I was able to try numerous serious felony cases, including murders, armed robberies," she said.

Art Davison, a lawyer at Fulcher Hagler, worked with Mrs. Jeffords for several years.

"Tanya had always wanted to spend a lot of time in the courtroom," Mr. Davison said. "She's certainly a very bright and delightful person. We knew she would do well.

"Tanya is a person who's always looking for challenges, and she's been successful in meeting those challenges. She's a pleasure to work with."

In business

In March 2008, Mrs. Jeffords decided to go into private practice. Her son had been born in 2007, and she wanted to spend more time with him.

"The whole purpose of going into private practice was that I did not want my son to be raised by the day care," she said. "I wanted to be there and have the flexibility. ...

"Plus, I wanted to get back into the civil arena because I was doing all criminal. I like the balance now between the civil litigation and the criminal work."

Mrs. Jeffords loves her job.

"I enjoy practicing law," she said. "I love to try cases. That is the most challenging and best experience for me, and I like helping people.

"That's what you do as a lawyer. You're helping people with their problems. You're the person going with them through a tough time."

Being her own boss, Mrs. Jeffords has the freedom to pursue areas of law that she finds interesting. She is now the defense attorney for drug court.

"That's one of the things that I enjoy most about being in private practice," Mrs. Jeffords said. "I have a contract to work with drug court and people who are trying to get their lives on track, but they've been charged with felonies."

She goes out to interview indigent clients and acts as their advocate to get into drug court if they can't afford an attorney, she said. She attends court every Thursday. Mrs. Jeffords also sits on the drug court team, which creates the process for getting into drug court, she said.

"I wouldn't be able to do that if I weren't in private practice," she said.

During her last year in college, Mrs. Jeffords worked with Mr. Hawk as his bookkeeper and paralegal. When she was about to leave for law school, he bought her a framed picture of the first black senator and representatives and said that she was going to be the next senator.

When she started her own practice, she sought Mr. Hawk's expertise. She says he is one of the best criminal defense lawyers in town. She frequently asks him questions so that she can continually improve as a lawyer, she said.

The biggest challenge is being a business owner.

"I personally would like to just try cases, but you have to do both," she said.

In June, Mrs. Jeffords argued her first case before the Supreme Court of Georgia. It was an appeal for a murder trial, the State of Georgia v. Richard Gonnella. She's still waiting for the results.

Mrs. Jeffords has a busy schedule, so she relies on "preparation and the power of prayer."

"I just take it day by day and week by week, but my first priority is to my husband, my child, my business and then helping kids to achieve their dreams," Mrs. Jeffords said. "The best part of the day is my son's smile and kiss. It's pretty awesome.

"It's hard being a mom, wife and a trial lawyer. A lot of the successful women, particularly African-American women, they're not married.

"I try to be cognizant of what's around me and do what I can to do it differently, by keeping my family as the center. I feel lucky to be pursuing my passion and my purpose in my life in every area, including my work."

Building dreams

One of Mrs. Jeffords' passions is helping young people. She is the president of Dream Builders of America's Youth Inc., a nonprofit organization that she helped start in Albany in 2002.

"The reason we started was that I had a mentee who was living with me, and I realized that she just didn't have a lot of confidence," Mrs. Jeffords said. "She talked herself out of everything she could possibly achieve in life before she even made one step forward. I realized a lot of young people lack confidence."

Dream Builders is launching a program called the Frederick Douglass Mobile Reading Room.

"Our goal is to work with pre-K to develop in them a love for reading. If the kids don't know how to read, they're the ones most likely to drop out of school and commit crimes," Mrs. Jeffords said.

Dream Builders has a group of 25 student ambassadors from the Augusta area. The organization takes them on a college tour and helps them prepare for SAT and ACT. They go on a tour of the State Bar of Georgia and other activities.

The organization is starting a 12-week program at Murphey Middle School.

Two years ago, when Tavarus Patterson didn't have anywhere else to go, he went to live with Mrs. Jeffords during his senior year in high school.

Today, Mr. Patterson is a sophomore chemistry/pre-pharmacy major at the University of South Carolina Aiken. He hopes to be accepted into pharmacy school next year.

He earned excellent grades before he met Mrs. Jeffords, but he said she has been a good role model.

"I call her my mom. She's really, really sweet. She's really good and caring. She tries to help people out as much as she can, and she doesn't think of herself," he said.

In the next 10 years, Mrs. Jeffords wants her private practice to allow her to "be there for the important events in her son's life." She wants to try to win as many cases as possible, both criminal and civil.

Mrs. Jeffords hopes to add to her family.

"I would love to adopt a baby and become foster parents in the future for young children," she said.

Dream Builders gives thanks to supporters

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By [Travis Highfield](#) Staff Writer

After more than 12 years of guiding children toward the careers of their dreams, Dream Builders of America's Youth Inc. turned the spotlight on its supporters in a "Celebration of Thanks" on Sunday.



TRAVIS HIGHFIELD/STAFF

Georgia Supreme Court Justice Robert Benham addresses the audience at the "Celebration of Thanks" ceremony hosted by the Dream Builders of America's Youth, Inc.

The event, held at Beulah Grove Baptist Church in Augusta, drew a crowd of more than a hundred, who were afforded the opportunity to learn more about the Dream Builders program.

The program, started by Tanya and Bill Jeffords in 2002, aims to motivate area youths to "dream, plan and achieve."

"Our job is basically to help young people create a positive vision for themselves," said Tanya Jeffords, the program's president. "I think the real point is that kids need to be exposed to positive people, places and things. I think if you do that, you create a vision in them for where they want their life to go early. Then they make better choices as they go along."

As guests filed into the church's banquet hall, they stopped to peruse the "dream boards" that lined the walls. The cardboard tri-boards are made by students in the program and detail their goals, from their dream car to their dream job.

Jasmine Patterson, 21, said Dream Builders gave her the confidence to pursue her interest in acting. The Georgia Regents University student said she was able to meet workers in the theater and film industries, cementing her desire to become an actor.

Next month, Patterson will perform in the theater adaptation of the novel *Excuse Me Miss, But I'm In Love With Your Husband*.

"It definitely gave me hope being in (Dream Builders), so I'm really glad that she's continuing this so that students after me can get that foundation and build their confidence and self-esteem," she said.

The event's keynote speaker was Georgia Supreme Court Justice Robert Benham, who shared his life story with the audience in hopes that the youth in attendance would leave inspired.

"It is possible for each of you, no matter your background or situation, to reach mile heights," he said. "If you make the right decisions early on, you can have a bright future."

The audience was introduced to the program's Student Ambassador Board, comprised of students ages 13 to 19 who will seek to drum up support for their latest initiative, Teens Against Guns.

Several supporters were awarded tokens of appreciation for their dedication to the program, including program volunteer Alexia Davis and Superior Court Judge Carlisle Overstreet.