Chief of the Month: Kevin Anderson, North Carolina

Each month, the Center for Consumer Protection will provide an article about an Attorney General’s Office Consumer Protection Chief.

Thanks for the opportunity to be Consumer Protection Chief of the Month and to share some information regarding the North Carolina Consumer Protection Division. North Carolina has a rich consumer protection tradition, and I’m proud to have worked in the Division on a wide variety of interesting and important consumer matters in my 20 years in the attorney general’s office.

It is a singular pleasure to be working with Attorney General Josh Stein. I have known and worked with him from the time he was North Carolina’s Consumer Protection Director. In fact, to my knowledge, he is the only former Consumer Protection Director in an attorney general’s office to later become an attorney general. I’m grateful that North Carolina’s prior attorney general, Roy Cooper selected me to serve as Director in 2011; he placed great emphasis on consumer protection matters and I was lucky to be able to work closely with him during his 16 years in office. There are many others in the consumer protection community, both within North Carolina and from other offices, who provided me with helpful guidance over the years and there is not enough space here to mention them all. But special thanks to pillars in the field such as Julie Brill, Debby Hagan, the late Herschel Elkins (I still have his “Points of Authorities Manual” on my office bookshelf), and Phil Lehman, all of whom generously shared their knowledge and experience with me.

The North Carolina Consumer Protection Division enforces the North Carolina Deceptive Trade Practices Act, along with our antitrust laws, charities laws, and non-Medicaid false claims laws. We also represent the interests of North Carolina consumers in utilities matters.

The Consumer Protection Division’s lawyers do stellar work, and I admire and respect how they have passed up more lucrative opportunities in order to continue protecting North Carolina consumers. We also have a group of talented consumer specialists who do the important and challenging work of handling the 20,000 plus written complaints we receive from consumers each year.

Consumer law is always interesting. My first case involved suing the company that promoted Miss Cleo, the 1-900 fortune teller prominently advertised on late night cable television back in the
Over the years, I moved on to other areas and have been involved in a wide variety of issues and a number of large multistates, including the National Mortgage Settlement. But in some ways, the smaller scale, North Carolina-specific matters stand out just as much as the larger, more comprehensive settlements. For example, I vividly remember the communication from a local attorney whose mentally ill sister had been scammed out of her life savings and the calls I made that resulted in her getting all of her money back. One of the best things about being a consumer protection lawyer is having the opportunity to work on some of the most impactful and cutting-edge legal issues of our times while also being able to make a difference on the individual level.

I grew up in Louisville, Kentucky, where I attended the same middle school that Jennifer Lawrence attended and graduated from the same high school that Muhammad Ali attended. I spent way too much of my youth playing competitive junior tennis. I ended up playing tennis in college at UNC-Chapel Hill and am one of the few players in ACC history to have an undefeated record in ACC play (which is another way of saying I won the one ACC match where coach put me in the lineup). While I did not end up becoming the next Bjorn Borg or Jimmy Connors, it was a fantastic experience to be a part of the UNC athletic program even in a small way.

I stayed at UNC to attend law school, with the general goal of eventually doing some sort of public interest law. My dad had worked on antitrust matters for the United States Department of Justice, and had argued two antitrust cases before the U.S. Supreme Court when he was in private practice. One of my earliest memories as a kid involves tagging along with my dad on a visit to the Louisville home of Pee Wee Reese (legendary shortstop of the Brooklyn Dodgers teams of the 1950s), so that Mr. Reese could sign some legal papers my dad had prepared.

My first legal job involved working for a large Washington, D.C. law firm, Arnold & Porter. I then went to work on Capitol Hill as an Assistant Counsel for a Subcommittee of the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary. One of the highlights of that job was helping draft The Torture Victim Protection Act, a law that one legal commentator has called “the most important human rights law of the twentieth century.” Eventually, I moved back to North Carolina, and found my legal home in the attorney general’s office. I enjoy teaching, when time permits, and have taught as an adjunct instructor at the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Law and the Duke Sanford School for Public Policy.

On a personal note, I continue to play tennis. (My family would add “a lot” here.) I also attend more Bruce Springsteen concerts than any normal person would, and, in my spare time, have even occasionally written items for Backstreets magazine and Springsteen’s website. And for a magical moment that lasted about 3-4 seconds, Bruce once put his guitar right in front of me at a concert and allowed me to strum a few discordant notes during the “Born to Run” guitar solo.

My terrific and supportive family consists of Cynthia, Hope (17), and Alec (14). Cynthia has a MPP and works on post-secondary education and workforce development public policy issues. Hope recently graduated high school and will be attending Davidson College where she plans to
major in biology. Alec just finished a great freshmen year in high school and is the master of all things technology-related. He occasionally tells me that he thinks I am the only lawyer he has ever met who actually likes his job.

I am grateful that I somehow stumbled into the world of consumer protection and have had the good sense to stay in it for 20 years. Part of what I appreciate most about the consumer protection community is that it is full of quality lawyers who are also quality people. Thanks again for the opportunity to share a little bit about myself and our office, and thanks to all the consumer protection lawyers throughout NAAG for being such great colleagues over the years.