

## Bringing Leaders Back Home

Originally published in *Mississippi Business Journal*

We often hear about the “brain drain” where our best and brightest leave the state to pursue their careers. In fact, the 2000 Census showed that Mississippi was one of the top ten states who lost college educated young adults between the ages 25-39. I am curious to see what the 2010 Census reveals on this trend. People who come to Mississippi enjoy the warmth and hospitality that the state has to offer. The challenge obviously is the opportunities for economic advancement. We are fortunate that the benefits of family and friends often lure some of our most talented home-grown Mississippians back. Matt Thornton is one of those Mississippians who has gone on to success out of the state, but has chosen to come home and contribute his time, talent, and energy to building companies in the state.

Thornton grew up in Cleveland, Mississippi in a modest hardworking home. After graduating with honors from Ole Miss, he took a job with Price Waterhouse Management Consulting (now part of IBM Global Services). Thornton consulted with global corporations about strategy, particularly with mergers and acquisition integration. During his career with Price Waterhouse, he lived in Dallas, New York, Tokyo, and Toronto and traveled the globe. He then settled down in Nashville as an internal business consultant with First American Bank (now Regions Bank). This work led him back to Mississippi when First American merged with Deposit Guaranty, and he moved to Jackson where he served in a leadership role through the merger with AmSouth.

With his passion for helping businesses grow and succeed, Thornton was a natural fit for his next role with the Mississippi Technology Alliance where he served as Vice President of Innovation and Resource Development. He later worked as a Managing Director and Fund Manager for The InvestLinc Group, and most recently as SVP of Corporate Strategy, Operations, and Customers Service for SmartSynch, a Jackson based smart grid technology company. In December of last year, Thornton was named President & CEO of Butler Snow Advisory Services, LLC, a new subsidiary of Butler Snow law firm.

In this new role, Thornton is drawing on his diverse background in consulting, management, financial advisory, and governmental relations to provide non-legal advisory services. According to Thornton, “these services include a complete range of traditional business & financial advisory to start-up, emerging growth and mature enterprises (private, public, non-profit and government).”

I wanted to get Thornton’s perspective on the economic prospects for Mississippi. He noted, “there continues to be deep human capital in the microelectronic, pharmaceutical, energy and technology sectors throughout Mississippi.” He also emphasized the intellectual property opportunities present within the Research University community, in addition to those present at Stennis Space Center and the Army Corp of Engineers. Lastly, Thornton highlighted the strong base of family-owned entities in multiple industry sectors, many being second and third generation companies. In his new role, Thornton anticipates being able to help these type companies and as well as companies around the country plan and execute on their goals.

In response to my questioning about what brought him back to Mississippi he responded, "I am blessed to have traveled the world for work, but it was the values and traditions of Mississippi that called me home." It is revealing that one of his favorite quotes is by Winston Churchill, "We make a living based on what we get, and we make a life based on what we give." Thornton tries to live out this idea in his life and work. I am sure that many businesses will benefit from his passion and knowledge in the years ahead. I am encouraged that as Mississippi businesses succeed we will see more opportunities for our best and brightest to stay home to build high growth careers.

#### **QUICK FACTS:**

#### **Matt Thornton, President and CEO of Butler Snow Advisory Services, LLC**

*Favorite Books:* *Winston Churchill CEO* (Alan Axelrod); *Twelve Ordinary Men* (John MacArthur)

*First Job:* "I started a grass cutting business in 5th and 6th grade, I painted rental houses in junior high, and I worked on a farm in high school."

*Proudest Moment as a Business Leader:* "The successful project completion (while I was at Price Waterhouse Consulting) for JP Morgan - Tokyo, involving their Fixed Income & Equity Divisions. We had team members from Great Britain, Australia, Japan and the United States. Managing through this diversity of culture, languages and structures was a very gratifying experience."

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