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Meet the Dealmakers | Will Joyner

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MEET THE DEALMAKERS

Will Joyner

Will Joyner is a partner in Kilpatrick's Winston-Salem office. He is an experienced deal lawyer who represents clients across a wide range of industries in their most important business transactions. Will focuses his practice on business and corporate law, mergers and acquisitions, and private equity. In his M&A practice, he regularly represents public companies, private equity funds, major nonprofit organizations, and private middle market businesses.

Will also maintains an active outside general counsel practice, primarily in the technology and life sciences sectors. He has counseled hundreds of startups and investors in connection with business formation, equity structure, investor negotiations, commercial agreements, and exit events.

Will was recognized in *The Best Lawyers in America*® for Corporate Compliance Law, Corporate Law, Mergers and Acquisitions Law, Securities/Capital Markets Law, Securities Regulation, and Venture Capital Law in 2024 and 2025. He was also named "Triad Lawyer of the Year" in the area of Mergers and Acquisitions Law by *The Best Lawyers in*

America® in 2022, 2023, and 2025. Will was listed in the 2024 and the 11 immediately preceding editions of *Chambers USA: America's Leading Lawyers for Business* for Corporate/Mergers & Acquisitions. He was recognized as a North Carolina "Super Lawyer" for Business/Corporate Law in 2025 and the nine years immediately preceding by *Super Lawyers* magazine.

How do you describe your practice?

One thing that's notable about my practice is just how varied it is. Although the largest segment of my practice is mergers and acquisitions, I also regularly handle other types of transactions like joint ventures, private equity investments, emerging company and venture capital investments, and various commercial agreements. I also work with clients as outside general counsel.

I learned early on in my career as a North Carolina-based corporate lawyer that it is beneficial to have a broad focus. Whereas attorneys based in the largest cities might have an easier time building a practice that is 100% M&A, or that is specific to one particular industry, that is very difficult to do in North Carolina. So, I have tried to embrace working on a wide range of transactions with many different types of clients.

As long as you have the set of core competencies that your clients need, you can learn the additional specifics of a particular industry or type of transaction. And, when the situation calls for it, you can also rely on subject-matter experts, like IP, antitrust, or tax lawyers.

Is it fair to say that the needs of your clients have helped shape your practice?

That is absolutely the case. For example, I represent a heavy equipment manufacturer that has an independent dealership network across the U.S. and, to meet the needs of this client, I've developed a deep knowledge in state equipment dealer statutes that protect the independent dealers. I became familiar with the patchwork of these statutes across the nation to advise the client on the application and interpretation of these statutes as their business has expanded geographically. Similarly, I do M&A work for automotive dealership groups and have a lot of experience with the intricacies of deals in this industry.

Another area where the needs of my clients led to a deep dive into a niche is nonprofit governance. I work with a number of both major nonprofit organizations as well as smaller nonprofits that we often represent on a pro bono basis. As this side of my practice has grown, I've developed expertise in areas like nonprofit bylaws, boards of directors, and tax-exempt status and its related rules. This also dovetails with my community work because I've served on quite a few nonprofit boards over the years.

Letting my clients' needs guide my practice has not only expanded my areas of expertise but also has been helpful in developing strong relationships with my clients, some of whom I've been representing for

decades. These relationships, in turn, have helped grow my practice because so many new clients are word-of-mouth referrals from existing or former clients.

What is the most rewarding aspect of your work?

It's very rewarding to build strong relationships of trust with clients over years of working together. For example, I work with one of the largest eye banks in the U.S. An eye bank acts as an intermediary between organ donors and hospitals and surgeons who need corneal tissue for transplant surgeries. I've been their outside general counsel for about fifteen years, and it has been fun to grow with them. Working with this organization has allowed me to work on M&A deals, strategic venture investment in technology companies, and nonprofit governance, among other areas. It has also given me a true insider's view on the inner workings of the organization, including having attended some of their board retreats. It's a bit of a cliché, but I do have the role of a trusted advisor with them, and they rely on me for just about any legal issue that crops up. They know that I will either handle it myself or find the right Kilpatrick attorney to help.

Why is Kilpatrick the right platform for your practice?

There are many reasons, but I'll highlight a couple. First, the firm really stresses collaboration among attorneys, which is invaluable for someone like myself who's acting as outside general counsel to a number of clients. A lot of what I do is finding answers to my clients' questions, which can range from corporate to employment to IP to litigation. If the question is not a corporate or commercial question, it's a matter of finding the right colleague who has the right expertise. And the people at Kilpatrick are both very knowledgeable and very

willing to assist. The second reason is Kilpatrick's commitment to the communities in which our offices are located. Here, in Winston-Salem, our office's Managing Partner, Steve Berlin, makes it a priority to set a good tone for community involvement so that Kilpatrick is seen as a pillar of the community. The firm does a great job of engaging with our respective communities and of supporting individual attorneys and staff with their own efforts to be involved with causes that are important to them. This has been very rewarding for me, personally, because there's a good synergy between my community involvement and my legal practice. Also, in my opinion, being a part of the community where you live helps create a balanced, well-rounded life.

What causes do you predominantly support in your community work?

One area of emphasis has been entrepreneurship and economic development. Ever since I started practicing law 29 years ago, a meaningful portion of my practice has always been devoted to emerging companies in the technology and life sciences sectors. Much of my community and pro bono work has been helping with initiatives for entrepreneurship and strengthening the startup ecosystem in Winston-Salem. I'm focused on making resources they need to scale up and grow, get financing, hire people, and so on. These resources include coaching, mentoring, and introductions to investors. On a pro bono basis as a Kilpatrick attorney, I've done the legal work involved in forming a lot of the local startup ecosystem, including organizations such as Winston Starts, Flywheel Foundation, and the Center for Creative Economy.

In addition, I've mentored startups with [Winston Starts](#), which is a resident accelerator program for promising and scalable startup companies. It

provides both office space that allows symbiotic development of the startups as well as more formal mentoring and coaching. With [Flywheel Foundation](#), I was a founding board member and have now passed the torch to another Kilpatrick attorney, Skyler Shields. Flywheel Foundation's mission is to support impact-driven entrepreneurship through ecosystem development, education, and impact investment.

With respect to economic development, I've previously served on the board of [Greater Winston-Salem, Inc.](#), which is this area's business recruitment and economic development organization. We at Kilpatrick also did the pro bono legal work a few years ago to form that organization as a combination and re-branding of the local chamber of commerce and business recruitment organizations. It has helped Winston-Salem grow and reinvent itself while not losing the art, culture, and community that make it such a wonderful and unique place. I'm very passionate about the success of Winston-Salem. This is a great place to live and work, and I feel it's important to contribute to its continuing development and growth. ■

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