

THE Southern Report



Jackson, Miss.

CHANGE IS AFOOT IN A STATE THAT CLINGS TO ITS TRADITIONS



ROY SMITH JR.

The University of Mississippi's Medical Center is located in Jackson, and it drives business throughout the state, employs more than 9,000 and educates more than 2,500 students at any one time. Roy Smith Jr., president of Daniel Coker Horton & Bell, says health care has become a major employer in the state capital for that reason, and that "health care reform is going to have an impact" likely to lead to more legal business in the future.

But the legal industry is also keeping a close eye on a major expansion at Nissan Motor Co. Ltd.'s auto assembly plant in suburban Canton and a port expansion project in

Gulfport that businesses hope will boost foreign shipping and jobs throughout the state.

A pivotal battleground during the Civil War and home to celebrated American authors Eudora Welty and Richard Wright, Jackson is the capital and largest city in the Magnolia State. Listed at No. 11 on the *Bloomberg Businessweek's* list of 40 strongest U.S. metro economies, state government is the biggest employer in Jackson, but health care and specialized manufacturing are definitely on the rise.

Mississippi's tort reform effort has stabilized the law firm environment in Jackson and surrounding cities, Smith said. "Before the recession, with all the 'judicial hellhole' discussion going on, we had a lot of firms opening offices here. Some still have offices here, but they're not very big."

Mergers have also made their mark, according to the University of Mississippi School of Law, which tracks them.

New Orleans-based Jones Walker joined with Jackson's Watkins Ludlam Winter & Stennis in 2011, and in 2012 local firms Wells Moore Simmons & Edwards, with roots extending into the late 19th century, and YoungWilliams merged to become Young Wells Williams Simmons. And at the start of the year, Jackson firms Wilkins Tipton and Adelman Law Firm merged to form Hagwood Adelman Tipton. —LISA HOLTON