

A longtime federal prosecutor is going private.

## Switch to other side



**Tom Bondurant**

**Age:** 55

**Education**

Emory & Henry College, double major in political science and economics/business administration; University of Richmond Law School

**Family**

Married, with three children

**Favorite authors**

Cormac McCarthy, James Lee Burke

**Last movie seen**

"Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince"

**Outside the courtroom**

Attends lacrosse matches with children, fishes and camps at the Outer Banks

**Quote**

"It's been a hell of a ride. I think I've done something good. I think I've done something positive."

Photos by ERIC BRADY | The Roanoke Times

**Plan to address stormwater fee plan**

City Council is invited to a public hearing to ask questions about a proposed stormwater fee that could create a new revenue source for Roanoke businesses.

The fee would be based on the amount of impervious surface on a property, according to the city engineer. The city engineer has a list of projects — costing 50 million — to maintain the city's sewer system.

The new fee would be a percentage of the property's assessed value.

City Council is looking at a plan that would cost about \$1 million a year. Some businesses are concerned about the same fee others could pay in the amount of property taxes.

City Council gave city staff a go-ahead earlier this month to continue with work on the way for a public hearing on the new stormwater fee.

The public hearing will be held at 5:30 p.m. in the City Center Exhibit Hall. City staff will provide a general overview of the stormwater fee and answer questions. The hearing will be held at the same time on Sept. 23.

— Mason Adams

**House fire finally set**

A house destroyed by a fire in Southeast Roanoke and damaged by a fire in Southwest Roanoke, displacing 15 people, was intentionally set, according to police.

The fire was the second at the house in the block of Riverland Street, said Roanoke police spokeswoman Tiffany Crews. Crews were called to the house on Sept. 29 for a fire that destroyed a porch.

The house is owned by a Vinton life insurance company that after the first fire, the interior was renovated. He has been vacant since after he briefly lived there.

Police are investigating the fire. He didn't say if the fire was intentionally set. He didn't say if the fire was the same as the two incidents that were pure coincidences.

On Sunday's blaze, a house on 11th Street broke its windows, displacing a 24-year-old woman and her 15-month-old baby. The woman returned to the house.

Donald Conner, house, the blaze was set. He said he plan to sell and move to Bedford County, but repairs were delayed.

Somebody trying to set the house on fire, I hope so, he said. He said as estimated at \$1 million, Bradbury said, remained under

— Jorge Valencia

By Mike Gangloff  
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He walks around Tom Bondurant's desk in the U.S. attorney's office with a hint at the variety of a career that's about to change again.

There's a patch-covered jacket of a slain member of the Pagans motorcycle gang, mounted in a frame and covered in glass. There's a pipe bomb, safely labeled with an "Inert" sticker but with a timer that ticks ominously when the bomb is lifted.

There's a drawing of Bondurant questioning a witness and another of his favorite bar in Abingdon. There's a cartoon of him tallying convictions.

"You couldn't ask for a better 30 years," Bondurant said Tuesday. "But at the same time, I'm ready to move on."

On Oct. 1, the region's longest-serving federal prosecutor is moving to the other side of the courtroom, leaving the U.S. attorney's office and on the same day taking a criminal defense position with Gentry Locke Rakes & Moore.

Mike Pace, a partner at the firm, said Bondurant will join Gentry Locke's white-collar practice, where he will assist the increasingly common procedure of corporations investigating fraud and financial crimes themselves, then presenting the evidence and culprits to prosecutors.

It's a process that shields shareholders and streamlines the court process, Bondurant said. Increased government intervention in the economy and the U.S. Department of Justice's designation of financial crimes as the No. 2 priority behind terrorism should bring an "explosion" of such cases, Bondurant said.

Former courtroom opponents were quick to praise Bondurant on Tuesday, calling him well-prepared, quick on his feet and having a knack for summarizing complex cases.

Attorney David Damico recalled facing Bondurant during the high-profile Abed "crime family" case about a decade ago. Planning to discredit a government expert witness, Damico said he studied



The jacket of a slain member of the Pagans motorcycle gang hangs in Tom Bondurant's office.

hard in advance and delivered a scathing cross-examination.

Bondurant responded with an ovation as Damico walked back to the defense table. Jurors began to laugh.

"That probably took a little bit of the edge off" his questioning, Damico said ruefully.

Still, Damico's client was acquitted. Bondurant's successful prosecution of other Abed defendants helped set how racketeering was defined in the federal 4th Circuit courts. The case was cited again recently as former Page County Sheriff Daniel Presgraves tried to avoid, then pleaded guilty to, a racketeering charge that Bondurant presented.

Lawyer John Lichtenstein called Bondurant "an extremely potent adversary with a nose for the ball."

He joked that he prepared for courtroom encounters with Bondurant by doing sit-ups. "The core would have to be strong. He's going to hit it," Lichtenstein said.

U.S. District Court Judge James Jones, the chief federal judge in the Western District of Virginia, on Tuesday called Bondurant "an outstanding lawyer — one of the best who practices in this court."

The son of a general district court judge who served in Giles, Bland and Russell counties, Bondurant began his legal career clerking for a federal judge in Abingdon. A year later, he joined the U.S. attorney's office.

As a boy, Bondurant had stuttered, but going through the Hollins Communications Research Institute's program smoothed his speech. Aiming for a courtroom job was a way to prove something.

"In that sense, it was kind of important to me to become a trial lawyer, to get paid to talk," he said. He started out as a circuit-rider, leaving on Monday for the coalfields region and sometimes not returning until Friday. "I was the federal law west of Roanoke," he said.

In the pre-war on drugs era of the early 1980s, federal cases typically concerned firearms, moonshine and financial crimes, he said.

That changed over time. Bondurant was the office's lead drug prosecutor for nine years. At another point he focused on fraud. He launched a decades-long string of public corruption cases whose recent targets included the Henry County Sheriff's Office and Lynchburg's mayor.

The public corruption prosecutions were probably the most satisfying because they made a clear difference in people's lives, he said. The least satisfying were the drug cases, where "it's hard to see change," Bondurant said.

In 2001, Bondurant became the office's chief criminal prosecutor, a role whose administrative tasks he gleefully confessed to delegating to his longtime paralegal Kim Suter.

Earlier this year, Bondurant was a candidate for U.S. attorney, but President Obama nominated Charlottesville lawyer Timothy Heaphy for the post. Heaphy has not yet been confirmed by Congress.

Bondurant said the president's choice was not the reason he was leaving. With one child starting college, and two others nearing college age, he wanted to increase his income, he said.

Plus, it was time for another change.

"After 30 years, things get sort of routine," Bondurant said. "This'll be the spark I need."