Ahsaki Baptist, an associate in the Memphis office of Wyatt Tarrant & Combs LLP who’s been with the firm for five years, was surrounded by the law growing up.

The profession runs through her family. She watched and loved fictional heroes like Matlock and Perry Mason.

“I have a lot of lawyers and judges in my family, so they had a huge influence on me growing up,” said Baptist, a member of the firm’s litigation and dispute resolution service team who concentrates her practice mostly in commercial litigation.

“Just seeing the work they do and their progression in their careers, I knew that was something I wanted to do.”

Baptist also has an aunt who’s a judge and another aunt with a law office in Southaven that does a lot of tax work.

“They paved the way for me,” Baptist said. “And I’m just following in their footsteps.”

Following those footsteps took the Southaven native to law school at Ole Miss. After graduating, she wanted to be in Memphis to stay near home, but she also wanted to find a firm that had more than one name on the proverbial shingle.

She wanted, in essence, a big-firm feel in a relatively small city. Wyatt Tarrant is a regional firm that’s in several cities across multiple states.

The firm traces its history back 200 years, to the frontier days of 1812. So there is a storied legacy, a deep bench of talent – and plenty of room to grow for a lawyer like Baptist.

In its history, Wyatt Tarrant attorneys have served as counsel to some of the region’s landmark real estate developments, including FedExForum.

In her practice, Baptist handles work related to real estate matters, litigation, governmental affairs and bankruptcy/creditors’ rights.

It’s a panoply of work that’s led her to do everything from help public and private commercial real estate developers develop and lease commercial properties around the country to helping municipal bond counsel to representing lenders and businesses in bankruptcy actions.

“A lot of the time is spent behind the desk, preparing motions, for example,” she said. “If you do your job right, you may not end up in court. A lot of it is strategy, client interaction – a large motion practice.”

She also enjoys pro bono work, and is proud of Wyatt Tarrant’s focus on it.
“When I first started, I got involved with Memphis Area Legal Services and got a pro bono case,” she said. “I think a lot of times you don’t realize how special lawyers are, in the fact that we have a special skill that can help people.

“The fact that I was able to help one of my pro bono clients that wouldn’t otherwise have been able to get legal assistance – I think that really brings home why I’m doing what I’m doing.”

Something else she’s passionate about is her work with the Tennessee Bar Association. She’s the chair of the TBA’s Diversity Leadership Institute, which focuses on leadership and diversity in the legal field.

She encourages young attorneys or those thinking about entering the field to stay the course.

“I have a younger brother, and I tell him this all the time,” she said. “Don’t be afraid to try and fail. Because I’d rather try and fail than not to have tried at all. It’s OK, you don’t have to know everything. When I started, I didn’t know what I do now.”