

John A. Sowards

MEMBER

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Suite 700
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Practices

Farm Credit Services
Corporate Law

Industries

Agribusiness
Financial Services
Real Estate

Education

University of South Carolina School
of Law, J.D., *cum laude*, 1982

University of Tennessee, B.A., *magna
cum laude*, 1975

Admissions

South Carolina

It is hard to say exactly when, but at some point during his nearly four decade long legal career, John Sowards' career shifted. He went from being the kind of lawyer who handles complex, high-worth transactions masterfully, to the kind of lawyer who executives want at the decision table.

Today, John is a most-trusted advisor to some of the state's largest and most successful businesses and organizations. Among his most important clients are Stern Development, a 70 year-old real estate development firm led by William H. Stern and his sons, Nephron Pharmaceuticals, one of the nation's most prominent generic drug manufacturers led by Lou Wood Kennedy and William P. Kennedy, and KW Beverage, one of the nation's largest closely held Anheuser-Busch distributors led by James F. Kirkham and Rodney G. Williams. Those clients are among the most savvy operations in the Palmetto State and the leadership of each demands legal counsel that matches their level of sophistication.

While these relationships dominate John's time, he also routinely works on financing transactions, real estate matters and special projects involving the Firm's other clients, especially in the Farm Credit arena.

Practice Specifics

John has the kind of extensive knowledge and understanding of legal issues that can only come from doing the work, for decades.

Since the early 1980s, businesses have called on him for guidance involving real estate purchases and development, financing and debt restructuring, corporate workouts, as well as more general advice to closely held businesses operating in a variety of industries. He routinely provides assistance on a variety of home office functions for closely held businesses in particular. His work is extensive across South Carolina. If you have been here a while, there is a good chance that he handled the legal work on one of your favorite shopping centers or hotel complexes. Additionally, John has worked extensively around the U.S. and now counts projects or matters worked on in 28 states for a variety of clients.

Leading in a Meritocracy

Over the decades, John has been substantially involved in the management and government of the Firm.

Nexsen Pruet is like most law firms of its size. It is structured as a meritocracy. Members select their leaders based on ability and willingness. It is telling that Sowards was first elected as the Firm's Chairman to a three-year term in 2010. At the end of that tenure, he was selected to serve a second term until 2016.

As Chairman, Sowards guided the vision and strategy of the Firm's eight offices. During his tenure, the Firm experienced rapid growth and expansion, adding practice areas and pushing the number of attorneys beyond the 200 mark for the first time.

Commitment to Community

Outside the firm, John is dedicated to public service and civic causes.

For more than ten years in the 1990s and early 2000s, John was heavily involved with the Columbia Urban League and served on its Board for six (6) years. He was named as its Outstanding Board Member in 2004.

For his involvement with a student at Irmo High School, John was named as the Outstanding High School Mentor for 2003 by the Lexington-Richland School District Five.

In 2004, he was appointed to serve as a member of the Irmo Chapin Recreation Commission. He and fellow commissioners oversaw parks, entertainment venues, youth sports, and recreation in the Lexington County portion of the Richland-Lexington School District Five. John was appointed and reappointed for three (3) five (5) year terms and served for 15 years with his term ending in 2019. During his tenure on ICRC, he served for more than ten years as Chairman.

Since its creation in 2012, he has served as a member of the South Carolina Public Employee Benefit Authority Board. The group manages the State Health Plan and retirement plans and pension trusts for more than a half-million state employees and retirees. He initially served as Chairman of its Retirement Policy Subcommittee and since 2015 has served as its Chairman.

In 2012, he completed the Riley Institute Diversity Leadership Initiative. He and a team of business and community leaders created a toolkit for transforming schools. The project was inspired by the successes achieved by a heavily diverse elementary school and was designed to serve as a roadmap for success.

But, his most significant recognition came on March 8, 2019 from South Carolina Governor Henry McMaster. For his cumulative service to the State of South Carolina, on that Friday evening, the Governor presented him with the state's highest civilian honor -- The Order of the Palmetto.

Recognitions

- Listed in *Best Lawyer's in America* for "Lawyer of the Year" in Columbia, S.C. in Banking and Finance Law, 2022
- 2019 Order of the Palmetto
- Martindale-Hubbell "AV" Preeminent Peer Review Rated
- "Legal Elite of the Midlands" - Banking and Finance, 2012
- Listed in Best Lawyers in America for Banking and Finance Law and Financial Services Regulation Law, Since 2010
- Eagle Scout

Community & Professional

Lexington-Richland School District Five - Outstanding High School Mentor (2003)
Columbia Urban League - Outstanding Board Member Award (2004)
Saluda Shoals Foundation
Irmo Chapin Recreation Commission, Commissioner (2004-2019)
Public Employee Benefit Authority, Trustee (2012-present)

News

03.18.2019 | News from Nexsen Pruet
Former Nexsen Pruet Chairman receives South Carolina's highest civilian honor