

Former Nexsen Pruet Chairman receives South Carolina's highest civilian honor

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John A. Sowards
803.771.8900
jsowards@nexsenpruet.com

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News from Nexsen Pruet

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John Sowards, former Chairman of Nexsen Pruet, has been awarded the Order of the Palmetto by Governor Henry McMaster. This prestigious award, considered the highest civilian honor in the State of South Carolina, recognizes a person's lifetime achievements and contributions to the Palmetto State.

"John is a trusted mentor, supporter and inspiration to his colleagues and community," said Leighton Lord, current Chairman of Nexsen Pruet and John's successor. "His leadership was instrumental in driving the vision and strategy of Nexsen Pruet into the firm of today."

Originally elected by his peers in 2010, he was selected to serve a second term from 2013-2016. As Chairman, he was responsible for guiding the eight offices of Nexsen Pruet.

In just three years, John led Nexsen Pruet through a rapid period of growth and expansion, adding a number of new attorneys across several key practice areas. His second three-year term continued this focus on strengthening the firm's legal services in areas critical to the vitality of the business communities of North and South Carolina.

Outside the firm, John is involved in a wide range of public service and civic causes. He currently serves as a member of the South Carolina Public Employee Benefit Authority Board. PEBA manages the state health plan and all of the state's retirement benefits. He has been chosen by the eleven member board to serve as its Chairman since January 2016.

John was also instrumental in the re-development of the State Farmer's Market. He has been credited for consummating the complicated public/private deal, which facilitated the re-development and relocation of the centralized market.

John has served as Chairman of the Irmo Chapin Recreation Commission, the group which oversees parks, entertainment venues, youth sports and recreation in the Lexington County, South Carolina portion of School District

Five, for more than 10 of his 15 years of service with the organization.

In 2012, he participated in the Riley Institute Diversity Leadership Initiative, where he and a team of other key community leaders created a toolkit for transforming schools. The project was inspired by the successes achieved by an elementary school with a significant free and reduced lunch student population in the Richland Lexington School District Five and is designed to serve as a roadmap for other educational facilities to bring the same achievements to the students of their schools.

John has earned recognition for his civic efforts from a number of organizations, including being named an Outstanding High School Mentor by the Lexington-Richland School District Five and an Outstanding Board Member by the Columbia Urban League.

The Order of the Palmetto was first awarded in 1971 by Governor John C. West and has been presented to more than 3,500 outstanding South Carolinians.

Nexsen Pruet is one of the largest law firms in the Carolinas, with more than 190 attorneys and offices in Columbia, Charleston, Greenville, Hilton Head and Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, as well as Charlotte, Greensboro and Raleigh, North Carolina. Founded in 1945, Nexsen Pruet provides a broad range of legal services to the business community and represents companies and other entities in local, state, national and international venues.