James E. Holshouser - In Memoriam

James E. Holshouser, the former governor of North Carolina who practiced with Nexsen Pruet’s Financial Services and Economic Development Group in Raleigh and made a lasting mark on public service and education in the Tar Heel State, died Monday June 17, 2013. He was 78.

Mr. Holshouser joined Nexsen Pruet in 2009 and also co-chaired the firm’s Public Policy & Government Affairs Group for North Carolina.

At age 38, he became the youngest person ever elected Governor of North Carolina. What’s more he was the first Republican elected as North Carolina's chief executive in the 20th century.

He served as governor from 1973 to 1977 after four terms in the General Assembly. During his tenure, he was a member of the executive committee of the National Governors Conference and chaired the Southern Growth Policies Board. He also served on the Study Commission on Reorganization of State Government and the Legislative Study Commission on Student Financial Aid.

In addition to his service in government, Mr. Holshouser’s career was defined by a longstanding commitment to higher education. As Governor, he led the consolidation of senior colleges and universities into the University of North Carolina System, capital improvement funding for the N.C. Community College System and implemented statewide enrollment for kindergarten.

He was a member emeritus of the University of North Carolina Board of Governors. In that position, he chaired the Personnel and Budget and Finance committees, and led the university’s Presidential Search Committee in 1996-1997. Additionally, he served on the Board of Trustees of Davidson College and the Board of Advisors for Lees-McRae College; chaired the Board of Trustees of St. Andrews Presbyterian College; and at the time of his death served on the Advisory Board for the new law school at Elon University.

His involvement in education did not stop there. He served as a board member of the North Carolina Center for Advancement of Teaching Foundation; was a member of the board of DonorsChoose, a national non-profit that provides a way for people to donate directly to specific projects at public schools; and was a member of the Jim Hunt Institute for Educational Leadership, the Southern Regional Literary Commission and the Governor’s Commission on Literacy.

Mr. Holshouser also had a wide-ranging interest in healthcare issues.
He served on the Board of Directors of the United Network for Organ Sharing, which the federal government designated to oversee and establish rules for the distribution of organs for transplants in the United States; chaired the Board of the Matter of Life Consortium, Inc., which seeks to increase statewide education and involvement in organ and tissue transplantation; was vice chair of the North Carolina Foundation for Advanced Health Programs, Inc.; and was honorary chairman of the National Kidney Foundation of North Carolina.

In 2012, the University of North Carolina School of Government honored him by creating the James E. Holshouser Jr. Distinguished Professorship, and in 2001 he received the North Carolina State Bar’s John B. McMillan Distinguished Service Award. Each year the North Carolina Economic Development Association awards the Governor James E. Holshouser Scholarship, whose recipients attend the state’s Economic Development Institute.

He also was named Honorary Doctor of Laws by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Davidson College, Appalachian State University, Elon University, UNC-Wilmington and St. Andrews Presbyterian College.

Mr. Holshouser’s other memberships, honors and awards include national winner of the Jaycee Freedom Guard Award for participation in civic, religious, and governmental activities; the Advisory Board for the Study of the American South; the North Carolina Political Review Advisory Board; the North Carolina Community Foundation; chairman of the Steering Committee for Eisenhower Fellowships; Institute of Government Foundation; North Carolina Community Development Initiative, Inc.; and the NCLM Local Leadership Foundation.

He earned his undergraduate degree from Davidson College and his L.L.B. from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.