

NARRON WENZEL, P.A.

Welcome 2 NOW

WRITTEN BY BOB FRIEDMAN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CATHERINE DAVIS

Welcome2NowLaw! was the password to get online at the law offices of Narron Wenzel P.A. “We like to say business and community intersect at our offices,” said James “Jimmy” Narron who started the firm in 1975 in Smithfield when Johnston County was mostly farmland producing tobacco, corn, and soybeans. “I was the token small-town lawyer, so I hope my insight has meant something to those folks.”

That was then ... this is now.

“Change is coming, and I want to ride that wave, and we’ve done that. We’re on one side or the other of almost everything that comes through here because we’ve been here so long,” said Narron, who is celebrating his 75th birthday.

Most of the firm’s work comes from Eastern North Carolina. They have offices located in both Wake County and in Johnston County.

“The firm’s focus has always been an estates and trust practice, spanning from representing individuals to advising corporate trustees and banks,” said partner Jason Wenzel.

The balance of the firm’s work is in corporate law, civil litigation, commercial and residential real estate, bankruptcy, labor law, and taxes for individuals, closely held businesses, and farms.

“Some of these farms are big businesses with dozens if not hundreds of



■ JASON WENZEL AND JIMMY NARRON

employees and have everything from securitized loans down to fleets of rolling stock,” said Wenzel.

A Land Rush

Johnston County is among the fastest-growing regions in the state and the nation, with a growth rate of between 2.8% and 5.7% according to the N.C. Department of Commerce. The U.S. Census reported it was the fastest-growing county in N.C. during the decade 2010 to 2020 with an estimated growth rate of 4.9%.

Novo Nordisk, B.D., and Do Good Foods have recently announced plans to locate in the county. Amazon is finalizing construction of a new 620,000 square foot distribution and fulfillment center. Work is underway on Eastfield Crossing, a huge mixed-use development project with a business park, retail space, and housing for 650 people that will create an estimated 3,500 jobs.

Johnston County is in the midst of a land rush.

“Folks in Johnston County who have had the same land in their family for three generations are getting calls from developers all over the world. The firm is helping field those calls and handling any ensuing transactions,” said Narron.

“We don’t just see a difference of new versus old residents of this area. We see

intergenerational differences as well,” said partner Kemp Mosley. “We help our clients figure out what’s important to them. To the developer client, the dollar signs may be most important, but to the land-holding client that’s been in Johnston County for generations the land is most important.”

Attorney Stephanie Norris added, “You’ve got businesses, families, citizens of Johnston County, still struggling with what they want to do, how do they want to grow their business, which side of the agriculture and the development do they foresee for their own land and for their own family and multiple generations. We help guide those clients.”

A sale of property will likely raise estate and tax issues. “Most folks do not realize how much tax decisions impact every facet of our daily life,” said partner and tax attorney Matt McGonagle. “The most common questions we receive center around planning and structuring 1031 Like-Kind exchanges. Many of the landowners in our area must be made aware of the roll-back taxes that will apply to land in the present use value program for farm or timberland.”

McGonagle said the firm is regularly contacted by attorneys around the state who have clients with tax questions about doing business in the region.

Part of the Community

Jimmy Narron stood in the well of the Johnston County Courthouse in a crisp blue suit and trademark red bow-tie one afternoon this past November. The gallery was packed with his family, friends, and colleagues as he received the John B. McMillan Distinguished Service Award from N.C. Bar President Marcia Armstrong.

Narron pointed to the paintings of judges hung on the courtroom walls and said he had argued before most of them. But he said the award ceremony was not a tribute to the past. It was a challenge to the firm's lawyers to remain engaged with the community.

"The reason we need to have this thing today is to say, 'if I can do it, you can do it.' You don't have a community unless you're part of a community and you put back into that community," explained Narron.

His past or current involvement includes Campbell University's Presidential Board of Advisors, North Carolina Community Foundation, Society for International Business Fellows, North Carolina Symphony Foundation, North Carolina Museum of Art Foundation... the list is endless.

The firm's attorneys have indeed followed Narron's lead. For instance, Wenzel is involved with the Central Johnston County Rotary Club, Greater Smithfield-Selma Chamber of Commerce, and serves on the Johnston County Board of Adjustment, among others. Stephanie Norris is the pres-



■ JIMMY NARRON ACCEPTING THE JOHN B. MCMILLAN DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD AT THE JOHNSTON COUNTY COURTHOUSE ON NOVEMBER 10, 2022. (Photo Attorney at Law Magazine)

ident-elect of the Johnston County Education Foundation. Mosley serves on the executive committee for the Estate Planning & Fiduciary Law Section of the N.C. Bar Association and has chaired its legislative committee, and Benton Sawrey was recently elected to the N.C. General Assembly.

"Jimmy expects us to be involved. It's the culture and the mentality of the firm, and I think ultimately it pays dividends; it's the way the community and the bar view us as attorneys," said Sawrey.

"I think people see you as a well-rounded person who's engaged in the community and trying to bring the community forward," Narron says. "We're trying to build the institutions, the community, and the community's organizations in a way that's responsible and effective for the folks here."

"Being involved in the community connects us to our clients. It also connects us to what's going on in the com-

munity so that we can give better advice," added Norris.

Stewards of Growth

Narron Wenzel currently has 13 attorneys in its Smithfield and Raleigh offices. It expects to hire more next year, adding depth to core practice areas identified through the firm's close connection to the community.

Jimmy Narron is currently involved with projects like planning infrastructure for the growing needs of Johnston County.

"We've tried to grow with the county and the community that we serve, and there's a need because the county is growing and because this area of North Carolina has new industry coming in. So, there's a need for quality transactional legal services," said Mosley. "Our firm has molded itself accordingly. We've been beneficiaries of that growth, and we try to be responsible stewards of that growth by being involved."



■ MATT MCGONAGLE, JIMMY NARRON, JASON WENZEL AND KEMP MOSLEY

AT A GLANCE

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