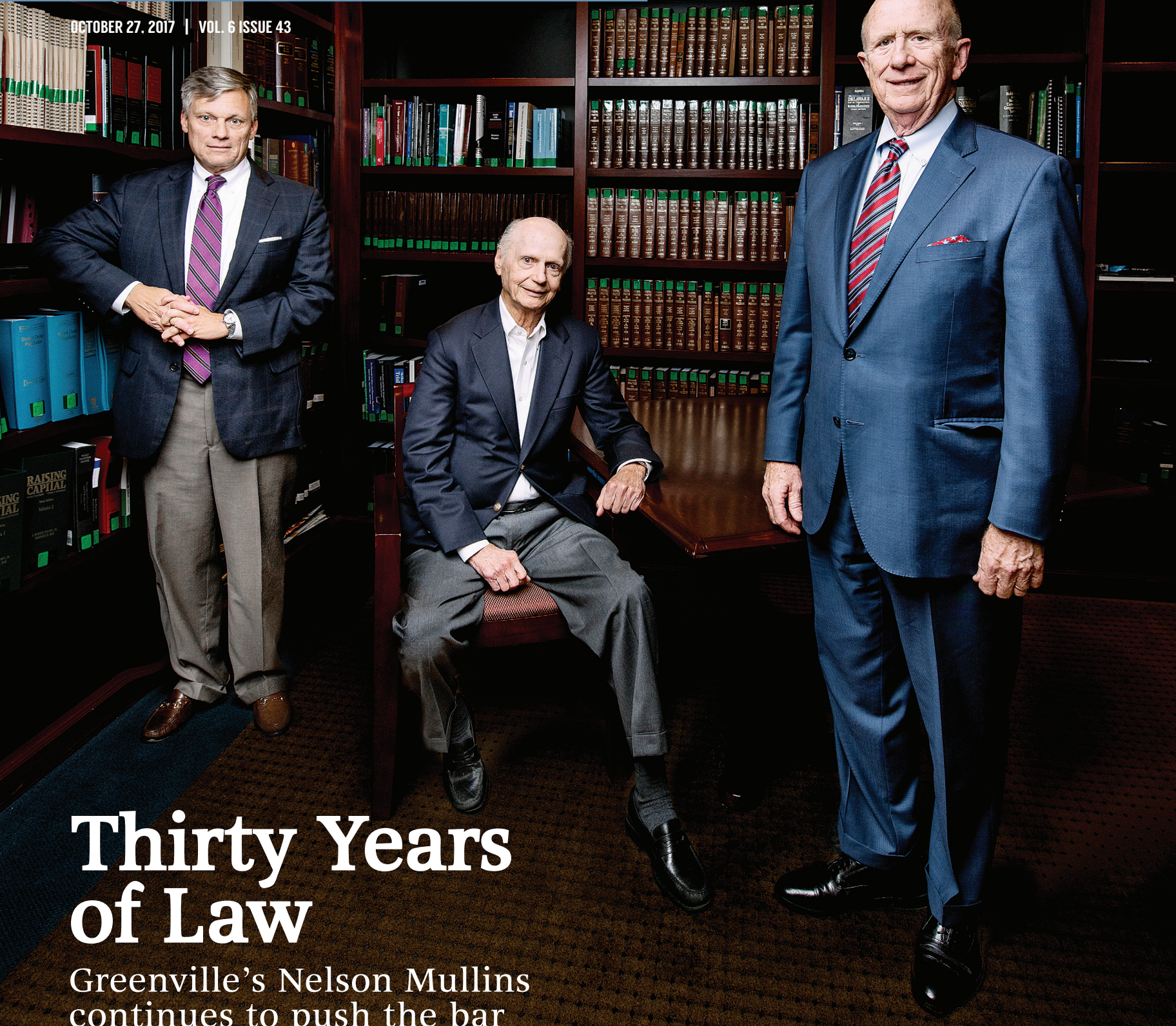


UPSTATE  
BUSINESS  
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OCTOBER 27, 2017 | VOL. 6 ISSUE 43



# Thirty Years of Law

Greenville's Nelson Mullins  
continues to push the bar



# LAWYERING UP



# Nelson Mullins

## celebrates 30 years in Greenville

WORDS BY CINDY LANDRUM PHOTOS BY WILL CROOKS

**W**hen the Nelson Mullins law firm opened an office in Greenville, downtown was deserted. Save for the first block where the Hyatt was located, Main Street was dotted by empty storefronts. The Peace Center was merely an idea, and Falls Park didn't exist.

But there were three good business reasons for the Columbia-based firm to open the office 30 years ago — former Gov. Dick Riley was returning to Greenville to practice law; the Upstate city was the industrial center of the state and offered a good opportunity to attract corporate clients; and the firm, which was almost exclusively a litigation firm, wanted to develop a corporate practice, said Tim Madden, the Greenville office's managing partner.

Today, if the office were an independent law firm, it would be among the top five largest in Greenville, with annual revenues in excess of \$20 million.

"We've had good success in this office almost from day one," said John Campbell Jr., one of the office's original partners. "And we still do it the same way as we did in the beginning. We find good lawyers wherever they are and we hire them."

### The beginning

When Riley left the Governor's Mansion at the end of his two terms in January 1987, he met with all the major law firms in the state. "Anybody coming out of the Governor's Office has opportunities," he said.

Riley had a good working relationship with the late Claude Scarborough, who was managing partner of Nelson Mullins. The two had worked together on court reform, Riley as a state senator and then governor and Scarborough as president of the South Carolina Bar.

"This firm had, in my judgment after analyzing firms around the state, clearly had the best lawyers in the state," Riley said. "It was not an exciting firm at the time, because it was a litigation firm at the time, but they attracted really good lawyers and they were very careful about that. It was a real stable, respected law firm."

A few months later, Nelson Mullins Riley & Scarborough opened its doors in the Daniel building.

The Greenville office was a pioneer for the firm in many areas. The opening of the Greenville office was a first for an out-of-town firm. Sheryl Ortmann, a partner in Columbia, moved to Greenville to manage the office, marking the first time in the firm's history that a woman managed an office.

Riley and Scarborough set out to identify established lawyers with growing practices to build the office and corporate practice. In January 1988, Campbell and Ken Young joined the firm, bringing with them several key corporate client relationships that fueled the growth and success of the office.

Campbell had planned to leave South Carolina to go to Raleigh, N.C., until he reluctantly met Scarborough at Alexandro's restaurant on Augusta Road, the vote for the North Carolina firm just a week away. "He pulled out a piece of paper, and I still have this paper, and said, 'Now, this is what we're going to be doing in the next five years.' Campbell looked at it, and Scarborough pushed the paper toward him.

"I remember sitting back in the seat and thinking, 'There's no way,'" Campbell said. "Well, we exceeded those numbers by 25 percent a year for the first five years."

### Different culture

Campbell said it was difficult to build Nelson Mullins when the firm first came to Greenville because lawyers didn't want to come in.

"Nelson Mullins is not for everybody," he said. "They were scared of it. They were scared of the culture. We've had a pretty intense bunch from the get-go. Standards are high. Goals are high, much higher than any other firm."

Operating on the foundation created by Campbell and Young, the firm recognized the opportunity for the Greenville office to grow and to operate autonomously. Some of the firm's most recent hires out of law school had Greenville roots and wanted to return to their hometowns to establish careers.

#### April 1987

Nelson Mullins Riley & Scarborough opens Greenville office in the Daniel Building

#### January 1988

John Campbell and Ken Young join the firm, bringing with them several key corporate relationships that fuel the growth and success of the Greenville office.

#### 1993

Dick Riley leaves the firm to lead President Bill Clinton's transition team and then serve as U.S. secretary of education. Around the same time, the firm assists BMW with economic development issues associated with the just-announced Spartanburg plant.

#### 2001

Firm relocates to its current home on the ninth floor of Poinsett Plaza

#### Early 2000s

Lawyers in Nelson Mullins' Greenville office begin working with Clemson in the development of CU-ICAR

#### 2004

Leo Hill, a past president of the South Carolina Bar, joins the firm.

#### 2006

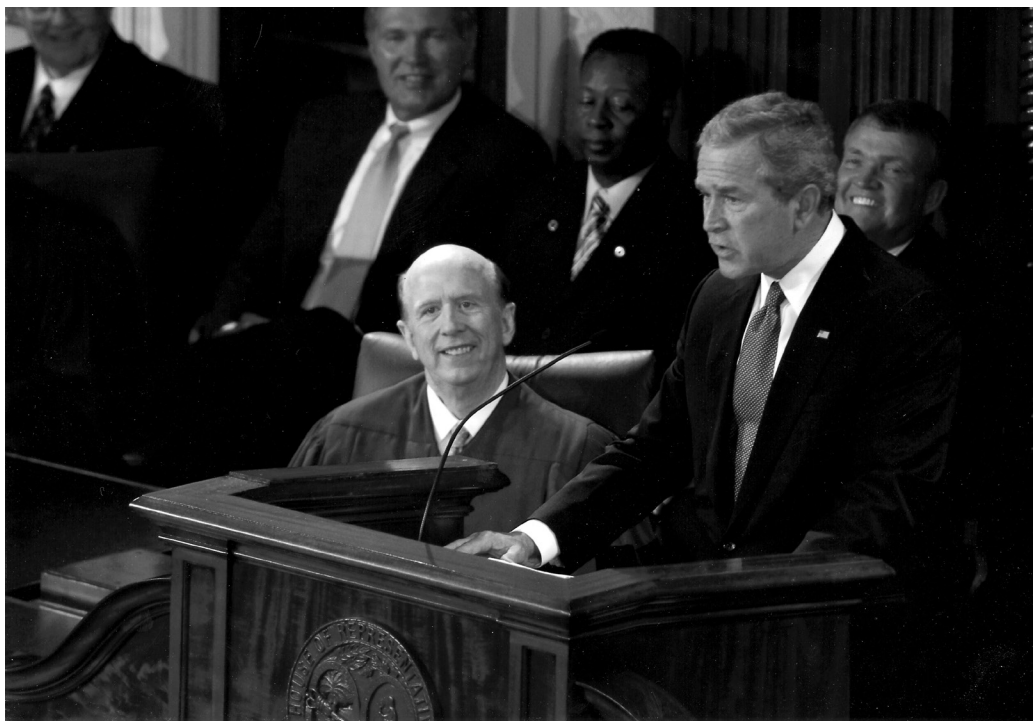
Members of the Wilkins & Madden law firm join Nelson Mullins

#### February 2009

With his stint as U.S. ambassador to Canada over, David Wilkins joins the members of his old law firm and chairs Nelson Mullins' government and public policy practice in both the Washington, D.C., and Greenville offices of the firm.

#### 2011

Marvin Quattlebaum becomes president of the South Carolina Bar.



David Wilkins and George W. Bush. Photo provided

“We’ve had good success in this office almost from day one. And we still do it the same way as we did in the beginning. We find good lawyers wherever they are and we hire them.”

Marvin Quattlebaum, who is President Donald J. Trump's nominee for a federal judgeship, returned to Greenville in the late 1980s to develop the office's litigation practice. Greenville native Rivers Stilwell, who leads the Greenville litigation team, returned home from Columbia.

Neil Grayson, a former Wall Street attorney who heads the firm's financial institutions practice group, was practicing in Atlanta when that firm merged with Nelson Mullins in 1992. “For me, it felt like I was coming home,” he said. “The others in the office were sort of embarrassed that we were a branch office of a South Carolina law firm that nobody's ever heard of.”

A year later, Riley left the firm to lead President Bill Clinton's transition team and then serve as U.S. secretary of education. About the same time, Nelson Mullins assist-

ed BMW with issues related to its newly announced Spartanburg plant.

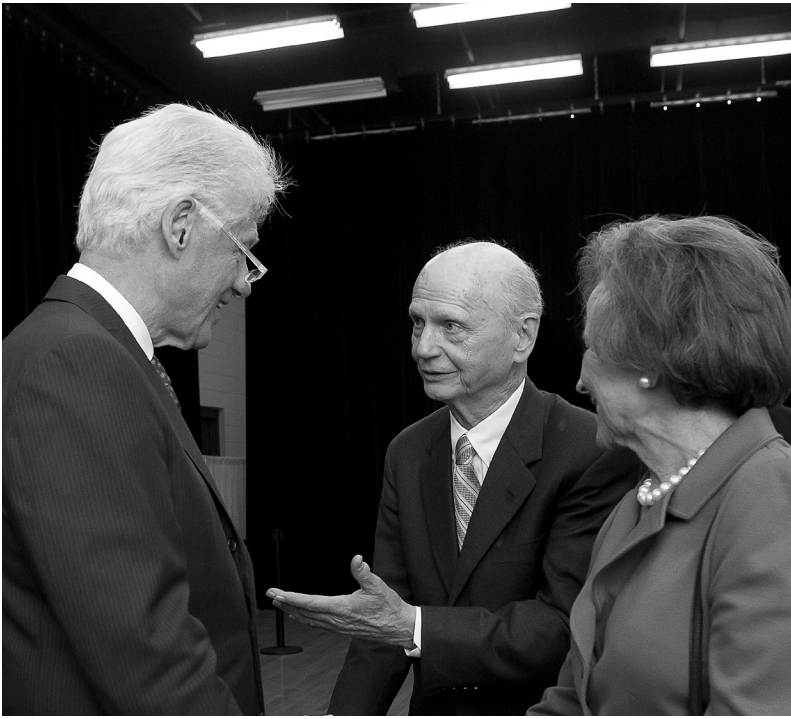
#### Continued growth

Greenville continued to grow, and the firm became one of the anchor tenants of Poinsett Plaza, the first new Main Street office tower built in years.

And another prominent public servant came into the fold in 2009, when former S.C. Speaker of the House and U.S. Ambassador to Canada David Wilkins joined Nelson Mullins, three years after the other members of the Wilkins & Madden law firm.

It created a reunion of sorts. Wilkins' and Riley's fathers were classmates at the Furman Law School, and Wilkins and Riley had shared office space and secretarial assistance in the early part of their careers.

“We've grown with Greenville,” Riley said.



Bill Clinton, Dick Riley, Betty Farr. Photo provided

**“We’ve had a pretty intense bunch from the get-go. Standards are high. Goals are high, much higher than any other firm.”**

The Greenville office has 77 employees, including 42 lawyers, 31 of whom graduated from high school or college in Greenville or another Upstate county. Other members of the management team with connections to the Upstate include managing partner Jim Lehman, who grew up in Pumpkintown, and chief operations officer Lee Dixon, who was born and raised in Laurens.

Madden said Nelson Mullins has doubled in size since he joined the firm in 2006 to more than 550 lawyers, and offices in 17 cities and 11 states. It practices in all types of law except defense of violent crimes. “A lot of legal work no longer needs to go to Atlanta,” Stilwell said.

Nelson Mullins is known for its pro bono work, including the two-decades-long “Corridor of Shame” case, where some of the state’s poorest school districts sued over funding. Some of the lawyers in the Greenville office worked on the case, Riley said.

Wilkins said the office’s lawyers serve on boards of Greenville’s nonprofit and civic organizations. “The office is more civic-minded than any group, and it’s not mandated by the firm,” he said.

As for the future, Madden said it continues to look bright.

“Everybody sees the future here as more of the same,” he said.

## THE FACES OF NELSON MULLINS IN GREENVILLE

### **John M. Campbell Jr., Partner**

John Campbell is one of the original partners in the Greenville office and served as its managing partner for more than 10 years. Campbell served as a certified contract advisor for the National Football League Players Association for more than 10 years. He earned his undergraduate degree in mathematics and graduated summa cum laude from Furman University.

### **Neil E. Grayson, Partner**

The former Wall Street attorney heads the firm’s financial institutions practice group. In 2011, he and the firm led the \$115 million financing and restructuring of The Palmetto Bank and its eventual sale to United Community Bank. He’s a board member for Public Education Partners and is currently working with the Hispanic Alliance to establish a scholarship fund for South Carolina Dreamers.

### **Timothy E. Madden, Greenville Office Managing Partner**

Timothy Madden became managing partner of Nelson Mullins in 2011. He has a statewide family court and appellate practice focused on high-conflict divorce-related issues, especially those related to money. He is the former chairman of the S.C. Education Lottery Commission.

### **A. Marvin Quattlebaum Jr., Partner**

Marvin Quattlebaum Jr. is President Donald J. Trump’s nominee to the U.S. District Court for the District of South Carolina. He had a hearing before the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee earlier this month. Quattlebaum served as managing partner for Nelson Mullins’ Greenville office from 2001 to 2011. He’s a former president of the South Carolina Bar.

### **Richard W. Riley, Partner**

Former South Carolina Governor and U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. “Dick” Riley is a senior partner of Nelson Mullins and EducationCounsel LLC, a mission-based education consulting firm he co-founded that combines experience in policy, strategy, law, and advocacy to drive significant improvements in the U.S. education system. Riley remains an ambassador for improving education.

### **Rivers S. Stilwell, Partner**

Rivers Stilwell, who leads the Greenville litigation team, is an original member of the City of Greenville’s Design and Preservation Committee and president of Project Care, a HUD-funded program serving the chronically homeless. He served as a U.S. Marine Corps infantry officer and was recalled to active duty for service in Operation Desert Storm during law school.

### **David H. Wilkins, Partner**

David Wilkins, who served as U.S. ambassador to Canada from 2005 to 2009, chairs Nelson Mullins’ public policy and international law practice group, with a special focus on U.S.-Canada interests. Since returning from Canada, he spent six years chairing the Clemson University board of trustees. He served 25 years in the state House of Representatives.