



The following section features attorneys who have demonstrated leadership qualities and have achieved the AV Preeminent rating by Martindale-Hubbell®.

Martindale-Hubbell®, the company that has long set the standard for lawyer ratings, has supplied ALM with a list of Top Rated Lawyers who have achieved an AV® Preeminent® Peer Review Rating, the highest rating in legal ability and ethical standards. To create this section, Martindale-Hubbell® tapped its comprehensive database of Martindale-Hubbell® Peer Review Ratings™ to identify lawyers who have been rated by their peers to be AV® Preeminent™.

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ELITE LAWYERS OF THE SOUTH

NORTH CAROLINA SMITHFIELD

ALLEN H. WELLONS

Allen Wellons has spent his career representing and serving those most in need. Graduating from UNC Chapel Hill in 1971, he soon thereafter married the love of his life, Cissie, and began law school at NC Central University. After passing the bar exam in August 1975, Allen, Cissie and their growing family moved to Asheville to begin his legal career. While in Asheville, Allen brought a class action lawsuit against the State of North Carolina to fight against unconstitutional overcrowding at the Craggy State Prison. The case was dismissed at the district court level, but Allen won a reversal in the 4th circuit court of appeals and the case ultimately led to institutional changes in the prison system.

The Wellons family returned home to Smithfield in 1979 where Allen founded Wilkins & Wellons. In 1984 he represented Citizens for Preserving Farmland Inc in a federal environmental action seeking injunctive relief from the condemnation of farmland for the future interstate I-40. These efforts helped to ensure that in the future prime farmland would be protected under the Environmental Protection Act of 1969.

In 1996 Allen was elected to the North Carolina Senate and worked tirelessly on behalf of underserved voices throughout the state. During his last term in office, Allen was the architect co-sponsor of the 2002 Judicial Reform Act, which successfully made judges in the state a non-partisan elected office and introduced public financing of their campaigns, ushering in a decade of judicial reform.

Since leaving the North Carolina General Assembly, Allen has returned to practicing law in his home of Smithfield, continuing to represent the people's voices who most needed to be heard.



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LOUISIANA NEW ORLEANS

MICHAEL L. ECKSTEIN

**Business/Corporate Law
Individual and Corporate Tax Planning
Estate and Gift Taxation**

Michael Eckstein is a Board Certified Tax Attorney and Board Certified Estate Planning and Administration Specialist whose practice includes individual and business tax planning, representation of high/tech Businesses and venture capital transactions, estate tax planning, closely held business law, entrepreneurial business law, mergers and acquisitions, real estate tax practices and tax controversy work. Mr. Eckstein has experience in the representation of professional athletes, radio and entertainment personalities. Mr. Eckstein is a certified agent for the NBPA, NFLPA, CFLPA and FIBA. Mr. Eckstein received his undergraduate degree at the University of Kentucky, a Juris Doctorate degree at Tulane University Law School and a LL.M. in taxation from Georgetown University. Mr. Eckstein has been AV rated by Martindale Hubbell for over 30 years. Mr. Eckstein has been selected a "Louisiana Super Lawyer" from 2007 to 2021 and recognized by "Best Lawyers" again for 2021. Eckstein Law Firm was also previously selected, by Super Lawyers as the top. law firm/sole proprietorship in Louisiana for Business and Transaction and recognized by Best law Firms for 2021.



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GEORGIA PEACHTREE CITY

TOM LACY

The Law Firm of Lindsey & Lacy, PC is dedicated to serving the legal needs of individuals and businesses throughout all of Georgia. We take pride in helping our client's get through difficult times in a caring and cost-effective manner. As a former Army officer, Mr. Lacy is dedicated to the highest levels of integrity and professionalism.

Mr. Lacy focuses his practice on insurance coverage, business litigation, antitrust, personal injury, and consumer class actions. Tom currently represents clients for financial losses caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and Government mandated business closures. He has tried cases to jury verdicts in both State and Federal courts. He also frequently arbitrates and mediates cases for his clients. Tom's experience varies from billion-dollar pollution suits to smaller first- and third-party coverage disputes. He has litigated national, as well as Georgia, class actions. Mr. Lacy has an AV® Preeminent rating by Martindale-Hubbell.

Since he began practicing law, Tom has served as the President of the Atlanta Chapter of the Federal Bar Association and on the State of Georgia Bar's business court and judicial selection standing committees. Tom served as the Vice-Chairman of the Georgia World War One Centennial Commission and currently serves as a board member for the Peachtree City Airport Authority and as a board member of the Federal Defender Program for the Northern District of Georgia.



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FLORIDA TAMPA

WILLIAM F. "CHIP" MERLIN, JR.

Attorney Chip Merlin has grown the Merlin Law Group into one of the largest national firms representing policyholders in disputes against their own insurance companies since its founding in 1985. Advising CNN, Fox News, Fox Business News, and local television outlets around the country, he's been dubbed "the Babe Ruth of Hurricane Claims" and "the Master of Disaster" by the press.

Former chair for the Bad Faith Insurance Litigation Group with the American Association for Justice, he is a preeminent insurance attorney and consumer advocate with a focus on commercial and residential property insurance claim disputes and bad faith insurance litigation.

Chip has been blogging about helping consumers with their claims for more than ten years in his *Property Insurance Coverage Blog*. He wrote his book, *Pay Up! Preventing A Disaster With Your Own Insurance Company*, to give policyholders advice on handling their property insurance claims.

When not taking on big insurance companies, the former marathon runner can be found racing sailboats.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Corey R. Chivers is a partner in Weil, Gotshal & Manges LLP's Capital Markets practice. He has represented corporations, investment banks, national governments and multinational financial institutions in a wide range of public and private securities offerings, including initial public offerings, major high-yield transactions and investment grade debt offerings.

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Tefteller Law PLLC is an East Texas trial firm representing Texans across the state who have been severely injured or killed in commercial vehicle accidents, oilfield accidents, auto accidents, or through dangerous conditions. In recent years, the firm has demonstrated an impressive level of expertise in brain injury cases.

As explained by Todd Tefteller, the founder of the firm, "My granddaddy taught me that 'a man should never forget where he came from, no matter where he ends up.' This philosophy has allowed our firm to achieve an impressive level of success. Staying true to our East Texas roots and being plugged into our local communities allows us to relate better with jurors anywhere and speak with them as people, friends and neighbors—not talk down to them from some legal ivory tower." The results have been seen in Tefteller Law's ability to go across Texas and obtain substantial settlements and verdicts in tough cases when insurance companies or big corporations refuse to do the right thing.

Tefteller states that "the firm's 'dig in and fight' mentality illustrates why some of our lawyers have been featured in numerous national and international publications, radio and television programs." Tefteller Law attorneys have appeared, provided commentary, or been featured on Fox News, CNBC, ABC's World News Tonight, NBC's Nightly News, and CBS' Nightly News, along with *The New York Times*, *Time Magazine*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, and National Public Radio, among others.

LEGAL LEADERS



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