



## Press Release

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### **KCMBA Spotlights 2010 Deans of the Trial Bar and Barons of the Boardroom Award Winners**

The Kansas City Metropolitan Bar Association (KCMBA) has selected John W. Cowden and R. Pete Smith as this year's recipients of the prestigious Deans of the Trial Bar Award; and John "Jack" C. Craft and Thomas W. Van Dyke for the Barons of the Boardroom Award. This year's recipients will be recognized at an awards dinner on Friday, May 21 during the 37<sup>th</sup> Annual Bench-Bar & Boardroom Conference to be held at The Lodge of Four Seasons at the Lake of the Ozarks.

**Deans of the Trial Bar:**

Presented annually, this award spotlights individuals whose superb litigation skills and professional demeanor are viewed as exemplary by their peers. Recipients of the honor must have practiced for at least 30 years or have reached age 60.

**John W. Cowden**

As a trial lawyer for more than 35 years, John Cowden has tried numerous major lawsuits involving product liability claims, aircraft accidents, commercial disputes and aircraft coverage issues. He has served as National Coordinating Counsel for various products and as Special Product Liability Counsel in Chapter 11 litigation. Cowden has served as lead trial counsel in precedent setting cases involving aircraft and insurance agent contracts.

Cowden was born and raised in the Ozarks region of Southwest Missouri. After attending public schools in the small community of Morrisville, Missouri, he received a B.A. degree in 1967 from Southwest Missouri State College, and his J.D. in 1970 from the University of Missouri at Columbia School of Law. Upon obtaining his law license, Cowden was hired by John C. Danforth as an Assistant Attorney General for the State of Missouri. His private practice was

interrupted by service in the U.S. Army where he was assigned to the JAG Branch.

After completing his Army duty, Cowden was hired as an associate with the Kansas City firm of Morrison, Hecker, Curtis, Kuder & Parrish where he practiced in the litigation department for 18 years. Since 1989, he has been a Member of Baker Sterchi Cowden & Rice where he serves as a member of the firm's Executive Committee and maintains an active litigation docket.

Always a loyal alumnus, Cowden is an Honorary Initiate of the Order of Barristers – University of Missouri at Columbia, and is a member of that school's Law Society. Cowden's active participation in organizations includes membership in the American College of Trial Lawyers, American Board of Trial Advocates and International Association of Defense Counsel. He has been a faculty member of the IADC Trial Academy and is a current Master of the Ross T. Roberts Inn of Court.

“We can all be very proud of our local bar,” Cowden continued saying. “I have been involved in cases throughout the country and routinely deal with attorneys from many different states and federal bars. None compare with our bar from the standpoint of quality, effectiveness, civility, professionalism and a positive culture for the practice of law.”

## **R. Pete Smith**

R. Pete Smith is the Senior Partner of McDowell, Rice, Smith & Buchanan, P.C., where he has worked for 45 years. He graduated from the University of Kansas, and the University of Missouri – Kansas City School of Law where he was first in his class and Editor-in-Chief of *the Law Review*. Smith did six months in the Army in 1970—he went to basic training and cook school at Ft. Leonard Wood. He was the only lawyer in his class at Cook School. He started working for his current firm on June 10, 1964 at the age of 18.

“When I was 18 years old, I got a job working in Claude Rice's Bankruptcy Trustee office dealing with debtors and creditors,” said Smith. “My previous job had been working on a section gang for the KATY Railroad. I liked the job and liked working in air conditioning as opposed to 100-degree heat by the side of the tracks—so I continued working for Rice. Now, nearly 46 years later, I am still here.”

Smith focuses his practice primarily on business litigation, commercial transactions, bankruptcy, financial restructuring, and labor and employment law. In addition to understanding the law, Smith has hands-on experience with how businesses work, owning several banks and co-founding a computer firm that provided data processing services in every United States Bankruptcy Court in the nation.

He has been listed in *The Best Lawyers in America* for more than 20 years and in *Missouri & Kansas Super Lawyers* for the past five years. Smith has co-authored three books on bankruptcy law: *A Bank's Rights in Bankruptcy*, published in 1982; *A Creditor's Guide to Bankruptcy*, published by the University of Wisconsin in 1990; and *Guide to Challenging Consumer Bankruptcy*, published by the American Bar Association in 1991.

### **Barons of the Boardroom:**

The recipients of the Barons of the Boardroom are John “Jack” C. Craft and Thomas W. Van Dyke. This award recognizes a distinguished career representing corporate and business clients.

### **John “Jack” C. Craft**

John “Jack” C. Craft is a Partner at Lathrop & Gage LLP in Kansas City. He graduated from the University of Nebraska in 1961 and Northwestern University Law School in 1965. Following law school, Craft joined Lathrop, Righter, Gordon and Parker before leaving in 1969 to serve as Assistant Missouri Attorney General—he then became Assistant U.S. Attorney in 1971. In 1973, he created the law firm of Park, Craft & Morgans. In 1980, Craft rejoined the then Lathrop and Norquist law firm, and seven years later left to create Craft, Fridkin and Rhyne, L.L.C. The law firm specialized in business and regulatory matters and merged its practice with Lathrop & Gage LLP in 2004. Currently, Craft practices in government relations, financial institutions, real estate and insurance law.

Craft has long been active in Kansas City politics and civic affairs. His participation includes being Chairman of the Public Improvements Advisory Committee of Kansas City; Chairman of the Kansas City Port Authority; member of the Board of the Kansas City Planned Industrial Expansion Authority; a director on the boards of directors for Research Hospital, the Research School of Nursing, Citizens for Missouri’s Children, and Family and Children Services of Kansas City; Friends of the Zoo; and the Executive Committee and the Board of Directors of the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce.

He has participated in several innovative approaches to civic matters in Kansas City. He is a member of the Local Investment Commission and was Co-Chairman of the FOCUS Kansas City Governance Work Team. In 1996, he was Chairman of the Missouri Task Force for the Bistate Initiative and the Missouri Chairman and Treasurer of Yes On Union Station. In 2004, he was the Vice Chairman for the Bistate II Initiative and the Campaign Chairman and Treasurer of the Missouri Think Big Committee. He is currently a member of the Hawthorn Board and the FACT Board.

“Sometimes lawyers are criticized for getting in the way of deals, said Tom Bender. “Not Jack. If you want a deal to get done and get done right—Jack is one of the lawyers on the short list.”

### **Thomas W. Van Dyke**

Thomas W. Van Dyke grew up in Kansas City, Missouri, attending Paseo and Southwest High Schools. He earned an AB Degree in 1960 from the University of Kansas, majoring in Economics. Van Dyke then attended the University of Michigan Law School on a scholarship, where he received Order of the Coif, was a member of the Barristers and served as an Associate Editor of *The Law Review*. Following graduation, he spent two years with the Securities and Exchange Commission in Washington, D.C., serving as legal assistant to one of the five Commissioners during his second year.

Van Dyke returned to Kansas City in 1965 to join Linde, Thomson, Van Dyke, Fairchild & Langworthy, where his father was a partner and a litigator. He was mentored by Albert Thomson and handled securities offerings, mergers and acquisitions and general business matters at the

firm. However, he did try securities litigation cases, including three securities class actions, as plaintiffs' counsel. Following 26 years with the same firm, Van Dyke joined Bryan Cave LLP in 1991, and currently is a Partner in the firm's Kansas City, Missouri office—where he is active in the Corporate Finance and Transaction Client Service Groups.

Service in the community has been a keen interest of Van Dyke's. He has served as President or Chairman of the Kansas City, Missouri Jaycees, the Mayor's Advisory Commission on Human Relations, Harmony in a World of Difference, Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Greater Kansas City and his church boards. Van Dyke and Bob Loyd—were the first Big Brothers in Kansas City in October of 1966.

One of Van Dyke's biggest passions is race relations and diversity. In the summer of 1961, he and Amalya Kearsse worked for the same professor at Michigan Law School. He was impressed by her drive to work for a Wall Street law firm—which back then was unheard of. Amalya was the first African American woman to make this giant step, and at the age of 42 was appointed to the Second Circuit Court of Appeals. Van Dyke held Kearsse in such high esteem that he and his wife created a scholarship in her honor to benefit future students at Michigan Law School. In 2008, Van Dyke and Judge Kearsse were able to meet that year's recipient of the Van Dyke Scholarship—who in turn said he hoped to "pay it forward" someday.

***Photo's available upon request.***

The Kansas City Metropolitan Bar Association serves approximately 5,000 members in the nine-county Kansas City metro area: Johnson and Wyandotte counties in Kansas and Cass, Clay, Jackson, Johnson, Lafayette, Platte and Ray counties in Missouri. The mission of this Association is to serve our members and our community by promoting justice, professional excellence and respect for the law.