



## Metro Business

MONDAY  
January 7, 2013  
Times-Dispatch.com

### African mission John Beardsworth works to bring energy to the continent

D8

## A power broker for African nations

Beardsworth helps countries  
from Richmond law office

BY LOUIS LLOVIO  
Richmond Times-Dispatch

John J. Beardsworth Jr. sits in a conference room on the 10th floor of Hunton & Williams offices in downtown Richmond and looks every bit the corporate lawyer. In the requisite dark suit and tie, the affable Beardsworth, 58, discusses complex, billion-dollar transactions with the casualness of someone looking over a lunch menu.

Despite the James River as his backdrop and his position at one of Richmond's most prestigious law firms, Beardsworth's mind is about 7,000 miles away in the heart of Africa.

Beardsworth, who didn't get a passport until he was 29, has spent a good part of his career working on complex legal cases around the globe. But over the years, he has built a lucrative practice helping African nations develop massive energy and infrastructure projects.

The work, according to experts, is extremely difficult because of the complexity of the deals and that he is working in one of the most volatile areas in the world, where civil wars are springing up on a seemingly regular basis, ethnic rivalries span centuries

and masses of the population suffer from crippling poverty.

Still, despite racking up hundreds of billable hours for the firm, Beardsworth is helping bring basic energy and infrastructure to the 1 billion people living in the cradle of civilization.

"One thing I really admired about John, and I've known a lot of lawyers, is that he always had a professional demeanor," said Karen Rasmussen, a former financial analyst at the World Bank who worked on several projects with Beardsworth.

"He was always balanced and fair, and I think really enjoyed his work. And I do believe he really made a difference in his relationship with Africans."

Beardsworth began working in the international sector in the late 1980s.

Margaret Thatcher, then prime minister of the United Kingdom, was working to privatize state-run industries.

"I have historically done a lot of work for electric utility companies, including Dominion (Resources)," Beardsworth said.

"When (Thatcher) announced that they were going to privatize the

electric system in England, we were working on a project here with an economic adviser who was also involved with the British privatization. (The adviser) said, 'You know, they are just having fits over the nuclear issue and what to do with decommissioning costs and what to do with spent fuel and many things on the back end of the nuclear cycle.' And we said we understand those things."

The adviser introduced Beardsworth, who had recently become a partner at Hunton & Williams, and George C. Freeman Jr., another partner, to members of the British government working on the issue.

The two traveled to England to help sell their understanding of privatization and the nuclear industry.

Freeman, who is now retired, remembers Beardsworth as a creative leader who was able to foster relationships with the officials they met.

"He really is a first-rate guy (and) one of the brightest guys I worked with," he recalled.

Their trip turned into a job. They were hired by the 12 area boards, which distribute electricity in England, to advise them on the nuclear issues.

That assignment kept Beardsworth in England working exclusively for the government for a summer and put him on the path to becoming an attorney working interna-

tionally. "Having worked for the British government on its privatization put us in a good stead for the privatization wave, which seemed to be sweeping the world," he said.

After England, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the humanitarian and economic development agency, got Beardsworth work with the Panamanian government on bringing in private-sector participation in a power plant in Panama.

His team came up with a long-term lease that accomplished what the government wanted. "It was very successful," Beardsworth said.

That deal brought him to the attention of the World Bank.

At the time, Beardsworth put Washington on his business card—even though his office was in Richmond—because he was doing a lot of business with agencies there. He also had put his name and Washington address on the front page of the Panama agreement.

Soon after, "I got a call out of the blue from a guy at the World Bank (who was in charge of energy), and he said, 'Mr. Beardsworth, I've got some documents in front of me. They're very interesting. Is there any chance you can pop by and discuss them with me?'" he said.

"Sure," he said.

"Right now Africa is energy-deficient," says John J. Beardsworth Jr., an attorney with Hunton & Williams in Richmond. "Only about 15 percent of people have electricity, and even that is sporadic."

#### John J. Beardsworth Jr.

**Born:** Nov. 10, 1954; Bridgeport, Conn.  
**Education:** University of Pennsylvania, bachelor of arts, 1975; George Washington University, law degree, 1979.

**Work history:** Grants administrator and volunteer firefighter, town of Newtown, Conn., 1975-76; Hunton & Williams LLC, 1979-present.

**Outside interests:** Vegetable gardening; boating; historic renovation; arboriculture; spending time at Lake Anna.

**Family members:** wife, Judy A. Beardsworth



DANIEL SANGUIN/MINUTES-DISPATCH



ZOE HUNTON & WILLIAMS LLP  
John J. Beardsworth Jr. stands near a turbine with Innocent Kihika of Uganda Electricity Transmission Co. Ltd. (left), and an employee of Bujagali Hydroelectric plant near Jinja, Uganda.



Turbines are installed in the powerhouse of the \$1 billion Bujagali Hydroelectric plant near Jinja, Uganda.

The man, who thought Beardsworth was in Washington, asked if he could come by the following day.

Beardsworth agreed. "I went up there and discussed the documents with him. It was really the beginning of a 20-plus-

year relationship with the World Bank."

That was about 1989, and Beardsworth, whose first project with the World Bank in Africa was in Nigeria, got a quick lesson on Africa: There was a government coup soon after he came on,

and the World Bank pulled its money out.

"Fortunately, on the next big project that they wanted to do they called me again," he said.

Beardsworth now runs a team of about 10 attor-

neys working from the law firm's offices in Richmond and London who handle the firm's business in Africa.

The firm represents many African nations as they work with the private

BEARDSWORTH, Page D10

#### Beardsworth From Page D9

sector to develop and build infrastructure and energy projects.

"Whenever a state and the private sector decide that they're going to work together to do something, you have to carefully document who does what, when they do it and what happens if they don't. And you have to do it in a way that ... will attract investment from international banks."

The attention to detail is incredibly important, he said, if a nation is going to attract banks that will think a project is worth funding.

"There can't be any holes. There can't be any slips between the cup and lip," he said.

One of Beardsworth's most recent projects was helping the Ugandan government develop and finance the \$1 billion Bujagali Hydroelectric plant on the Victoria Nile River, which opened in October.

That 250-megawatt power plant will supply electricity to millions of homes and businesses, which will help spur economic growth, he said.

The benefits of his work are untold for a continent where the "lack of access to energy services is one of the biggest factors limiting economic growth and reducing the quality of life of the majority of Africans," according to the 2012 Africa Energy Yearbook, which is put out by the Africa Energy Forum.

It's so bad that even in South Africa, with its abundance of natural assets and relatively advanced industrial development, 15 million people still aren't on the power grid and don't have basic access to electricity or modern amenities, according to the forum.



ZOE HUNTON & WILLIAMS LLP

The Bujagali project is expected to supply electricity to millions of homes and businesses, which will help spur economic growth.

#### "He's a great leader; he's a consummate diplomat; he's a team builder, a problem-solver."

Karen Rasmussen, a former financial analyst at the World Bank who worked on several projects with Beardsworth.

"Right now Africa is energy-deficient," Beardsworth said. "Only about 15 percent of people have electricity, and even that is sporadic."

Not only is it three governments, but also two of those governments, Rwanda and Congo, might be at war with each other, he said.

"The hostilities in that part of Africa are very sad, and they've got a very true human toll. And yet each of the governments recognizes that introduction of more power into the system is a net benefit, not a net loss," he said.

"And if for these limited purposes they have to work together, they do. It's in their own interest."

Beardsworth also is working with Tanzania on an expansion of its integrated natural-gas-to-

electricity generation facility as well working to revise its laws to encourage deep-sea oil and gas exploration.

Beyond those, he's working on two multibillion-dollar-plus projects in Nigeria.

But Beardsworth says one of his biggest accomplishments happened in 2006.

He worked with SEACOM, a company-based in the Republic of Mauritius, on a project to improve African broadband Internet networks.

The company was looking to develop and finance a \$650 million underwater fiber-optic cable system that would connect South Africa; Mozambique; Madagascar; Kenya; Tanzania; India; and Marseilles, France.

The project expanded bandwidth capacity for citizens and businesses in south-



DANIEL SANGUIN/MINUTES-DISPATCH

John J. Beardsworth Jr. now runs a team of about 10 attorneys working in Richmond and London who handle the firm's business in Africa.

ern and eastern Africa, enhancing Internet access and telecommunications and the rest of the world.

"I had a great deal of patience. I think a normal lawyer wouldn't have that kind of patience," she said.

The two worked together primarily on arranging and structuring private-sector energy programs.

The deals are particularly complicated given the inherent problems many African nations suffer. The big issues for anyone working in Africa are the un-credit-worthiness of the countries themselves and very weak utilities that are fraught with systemic problems, Rasmussen said.

Those have long been impediments for the African nations, inhibiting growth and progress.

But, Rasmussen said, thanks to projects Beardsworth has worked on, there are signs of improvement.

"The macro framework is changing and improving: people are becoming more educated," she said. "They are aware that in order to grow, they have to have good basic services, like electricity, water, roads."

LLovio@timesdispatch.com (804) 649-6348