

O.C. LAW FIRMS MOVE INTO the legal big leagues

Economically, Orange County is the global leader when it comes to the medical device industry, edgy urban style (Shepard Fairey's OBEY is based in Irvine), surfwear and mega-developers such as The Irvine Co. It is also headquarters for superstar tech corporations (think Broadcom and Blizzard) that could just as easily be based in Silicon Valley but chose to put down roots in O.C. And beyond the beauty of our coastal surroundings, there is substance, brilliance and a work ethic that puts to shame the provincials of San Francisco and New York, which tend to put down regions to their south and west.

Need proof of our academic stature? Check in with the nation's most prestigious science organization, the National Academy of Sciences. Former UC Irvine chancellor Ralph Cicerone runs it.

And the legal profession? Just as the economy and UCI and Chapman University have grown in strength and reputation, so, too, has the law. Top-notch legal talent fills the courtrooms in Orange County. After he won the Enron case for the Feds, John Hueston could have practiced law anywhere in the nation. He chose Irell & Manella, an elite firm with only two offices: Newport Beach and Century City. The former head of the Orange County Bar Association, Hueston serves as co-chair of the firm's Corporate Crisis and White Collar Criminal Defense practice.

A prolific constitutional scholar, Erwin Chemerinsky, a much-loved law professor at USC and Duke, was approached about

heading up an established top-tier law school in the Midwest. The Chicago native, no fan of winter, opted to return to Southern California to found the UC Irvine School of Law in August 2009. Often appearing in the national press, Dean Chemerinsky was quoted by *The New Yorker* at the beginning of its article on the fate of the Affordable Care Act, just before the dramatic 5-4 Supreme Court decision.

Chemerinsky is not alone. UCI Law ranks seventh nationally in scholarly output and influence; that's ahead of Berkeley and UCLA law schools (10th and 14th, respectively).

Corporations know they can find elite legal talent in Orange County. When medical device and pharma firms need help with a merger anywhere on the planet, they know that Charles Ruck at Latham & Watkins in Costa Mesa can guide them to their desired result. True, Latham is one of the most illustrious global law firms and excels at M&A (mergers and acquisitions), but Latham's elite talent in the bio realm is here. Similarly, Newport Beach-based Stradling Yocca Carlson & Rauth is well known, along with Wilson Sonsini in Silicon Valley, as a law firm that excels at helping emerging growth companies make it big.

Knobbe Martens, another large, locally grown firm, is the third-largest intellectual property law firm in the nation. Knobbe has a farm system that internally develops talent – superstar trial attorney Joseph Re, for example – and features dozens of lawyers with scientific degrees. Last year, Re

tried two patent cases before juries in the course of three months. The first trial was in New York City for Swiss company Schindler Elevator, and the second was in Beaumont, Texas, for Applied Medical of Rancho Santa Margarita. In both cases, the juries answered every question in favor of Knobbe's clients. Focused on intellectual property and corporate matters, Newport Beach-based WHGC has a knack for assisting American companies that want to do business in China. Led by Taiwan-born Jeffrey Wang, the multicultural firm also has offices in Mountain View, Taipei and Beijing.

Having practiced law in New York and L.A., litigator Michael Katz assists major corporate clients across the nation. He says there is a different mentality to Orange County that he enjoys. Instead of larger institutions being perceived to be "better," in Orange County there are more reservations about bigness for bigness' sake and a genuine respect for entrepreneurship and talent. This makes sense in the legal field as well as in business. It is about lawyers who close deals and win cases, not firms.

Why be based in Orange County?

John Murphy, one of the most respected eminent domain/real estate lawyers in California, puts it this way: "Lawyers based here can enjoy the best of both worlds: a less congested, less dense but still vibrant metropolitan environment; and one with transportation hubs like John Wayne Airport that enable us to reach the rest of the state quickly." –*The Editors*



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Dimetria Jackson, president of the Orange County Bar Association, weighs in on why O.C. has finally earned respect as a home to top-tier legal firms, the state of women in the legal profession, and the move by some law schools to limit enrollment in an effort to stem an overcrowded industry. Go to ocmetro.com/law2012.

