

Firms Add to Attorney Ranks for Fourth Straight Year

Patents, Deals, Strong Economy Spur Hires; Big Gain at Knobbe

By JESSICA C. LEE

Orange County's largest law firms saw a 5% gain in lawyers in the past year, boosted by work on patents, deals and the overall strong economy.

The 53 largest firms operating here added 91 lawyers in the past year for a total of 2,053, according to this week's Business Journal list.

The list ranks firms by the number of lawyers working in the county.

The gain outpaces that seen on last year's list, when the largest firms here grew lawyers at a 3% clip. This marks the fourth straight year of gains for firms here.

Managing partners chalk up the gains to growth in work on patents and other intellectual property as well as work on private equity investment deals.

Eight of the top 10 firms added lawyers in the past year, with one flat from a year earlier and another down 3%.

The big firms drove the list's overall gain. Among all 53 firms, there were 15 decliners, 33 gainers and five reporting no change.

Costa Mesa-based Rutan & Tucker LLP, long OC's largest law firm, held onto the No. 1 spot, despite reporting no overall growth in lawyers.

Rutan & Tucker had 144 lawyers, unchanged from a year earlier.

The firm did some hiring, though not enough to offset departures.

Rutan made lateral hires and brought on recent graduates from its summer class, said L. Ski Harrison, founding partner of the firm's education law practice.

Billings per attorney rose by \$25,000 in 2006 from a year earlier, he said.

Like other firms, Rutan is seeing a slowdown in real estate work with the shift in the housing market.

The change was expected, Harrison said. It's being partially offset by more work on apartments, he said.

Rutan is looking to expand.

In November, the firm expanded the lease for its Costa Mesa headquarters, adding 12,000 square feet for a total of 112,000

square feet.

The lease, which includes an option for more space, is through 2021.

"Milestones for 2007 include major renovations to our office space, continued sustained growth of the office both in terms of collections and the number of attorneys practicing here, and continuing our branding efforts to make Rutan more visible," Harrison said.

No. 2 Irvine-based Knobbe, Martens, Olson & Bear LLP saw the biggest gain in lawyers among the top 10 firms.



Rutan's Harrison: firm expected housing slowdown



Knobbe's Nataupsky: recently elected managing partner

It added 13 lawyers for an 11% gain to 129 in OC. In 2005, Knobbe grew its lawyers by 13%.

Knobbe's surge is one of the most notable trends playing out among the top 10 firms. If Knobbe continues to grow at double-digit rates, it could end up challenging

Rutan for the top spot.

The firm, which specializes in patent work, has hired to keep up with demand for its services, said Steve Nataupsky, who this month was elected Knobbe's managing partner.

"We expect all of our new hires to be key

to our continued success and growth," he said. "Each new lawyer has a special technical expertise, advanced degree, federal clerkship experience or industry work experience that will make them valuable to our firm."

Knobbe saw growth in litigation as well as in patent and trademark application and licensing work last year, Nataupsky said.

This year, Knobbe is looking to expand its offices, he said.

No. 3 Stradling Yocca Carlson & Rauth of Newport Beach grew its OC lawyer count by 7%, or seven people, to 108.

The gain reversed a 6% decline at Stradling a year earlier.

The firm recently opened an office in Santa

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LAW FIRMS

		Headquarters Web site E-mail	OC attorneys	% change from a year ago	Attorneys firm-wide	OC partners	OC employees	% change from a year ago	Partial list of areas of practice	Partial list of clients	No. of offices firm-wide	Top local official(s) Title Phone/Fax
22	30	Bremer, Whyte, Brown & O'Meara LLP 20320 S. W. Birch St., second floor Newport Beach 92660-1787 bwhyte@bremerandwhyte.com	30	11%	67	8	54	8%	General civil litigation Litigation Family law	Waste Management Inc. Toshiba Farmers Insurance	6	Nicole Whyte managing partner (949) 221-1000/(949) 221-1001
22	27	Greenberg Traurig LLP 650 Town Center Drive, Ste. 1700 Costa Mesa 92626-7025 gtrau@gtlaw.com	30	2%	1,567	14	61	0%	Corporate/securities Litigation Intellectual property	Taco Bell Corp. Dell Inc. Standard Pacific Corp.	28	Raymond Lee managing shareholder (714) 708-6500/(714) 708-6501
22	21	Merrison & Foerster LLP 19900 MacArthur Blvd., 12th floor Irvine 92612-2445 info@mfo.com	30	0%	1,092	11	58	-9%	Litigation Corporate Labor and employment	Toshiba America Information Systems Mercury Cos. Boyd Gaming Corp.	18	Dean Zisser managing partner (949) 251-7145/(949) 251-0900
25	33	Howrey LLP 2020 Main St., Ste. 1000 Irvine 92614-5200 howrey.com	29	21%	623	11	46	10%	Intellectual property Corporate/commercial litigation Securities litigation	BMW Verizon Communications Inc. Quaborn Inc.	18	Robert Gooding Jr. partner (949) 721-6900/(949) 721-6810
25	27	Jones Day 3 Park Plaza, Ste. 1100 Irvine 92614-8505 jonesday.com	29	4%	2,200	8	45	5%	Litigation Intellectual property Healthcare	Experian Information Solutions Inc. Tenet Healthcare Corp. National City Bank	30	Richard Grabowski partner-in-charge (949) 851-3938/(949) 553-7539
25	25	Woodruff, Spradlin & Smart 701 S. Parker St., Ste. 8000 Orange 92668-4760 woodruff-law.com	29	0%	WFO	14	53	-4%	Tort litigation Labor and employment Public law	WFO	1	M. Lela Babal/Kenneth Smart Jr./ Craig Farrington executive committee (714) 559-7000/(714) 835-7787
28	21	Callahan & Blaine 3 Hutton Center Drive, ninth floor Santa Ana 92707-6722 info@callahan-law.com	28	-7%	28	4	55	-4%	Business litigation, brain trauma/wrongful death, insurance bad faith	Beckman Coulter Mitsubishi Corp. Caterpillar Forklift America Inc.	1	Daniel Callahan principal (714) 241-4444/(714) 241-4445
29	21	Berger Kahn 2 Park Plaza, sixth floor Irvine 92614-8518 info@bergerkahn.com	27	-10%	50	19	53	0%	Insurance, business litigation, real estate	Securus Security Services USA Inc. Farmers Insurance Mexico Allies Inc.	4	Craig Simon managing partner (949) 474-1880/(949) 474-7265

Abbreviations: N/A, not applicable; WFO, would not disclose.
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Rutan's Costa Mesa building: added 12,000 square feet for total of 112,000, option for more