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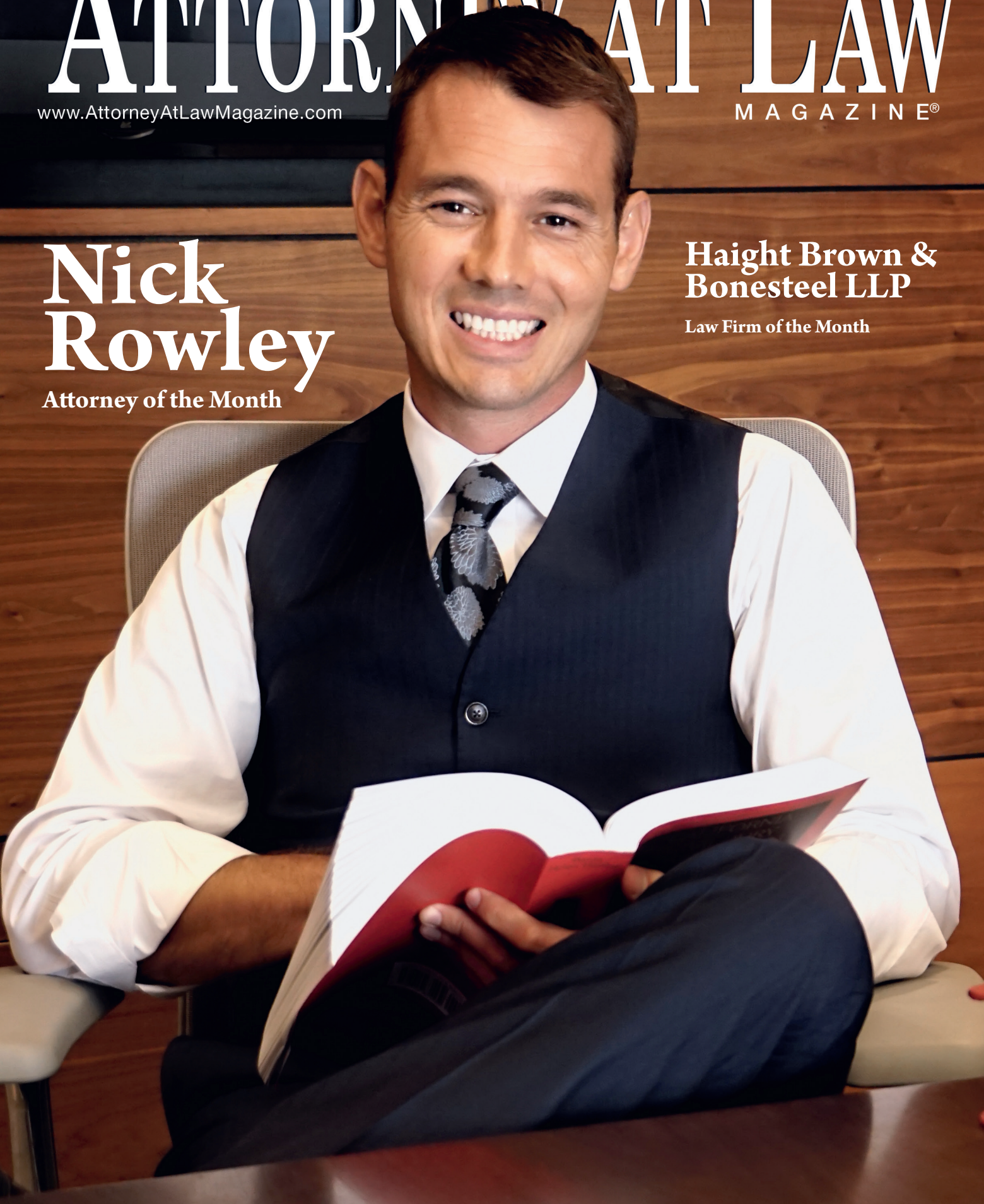
MAGAZINE®

Nick Rowley

Attorney of the Month

Haight Brown & Bonesteel LLP

Law Firm of the Month



LAW FIRM
of the
MONTH

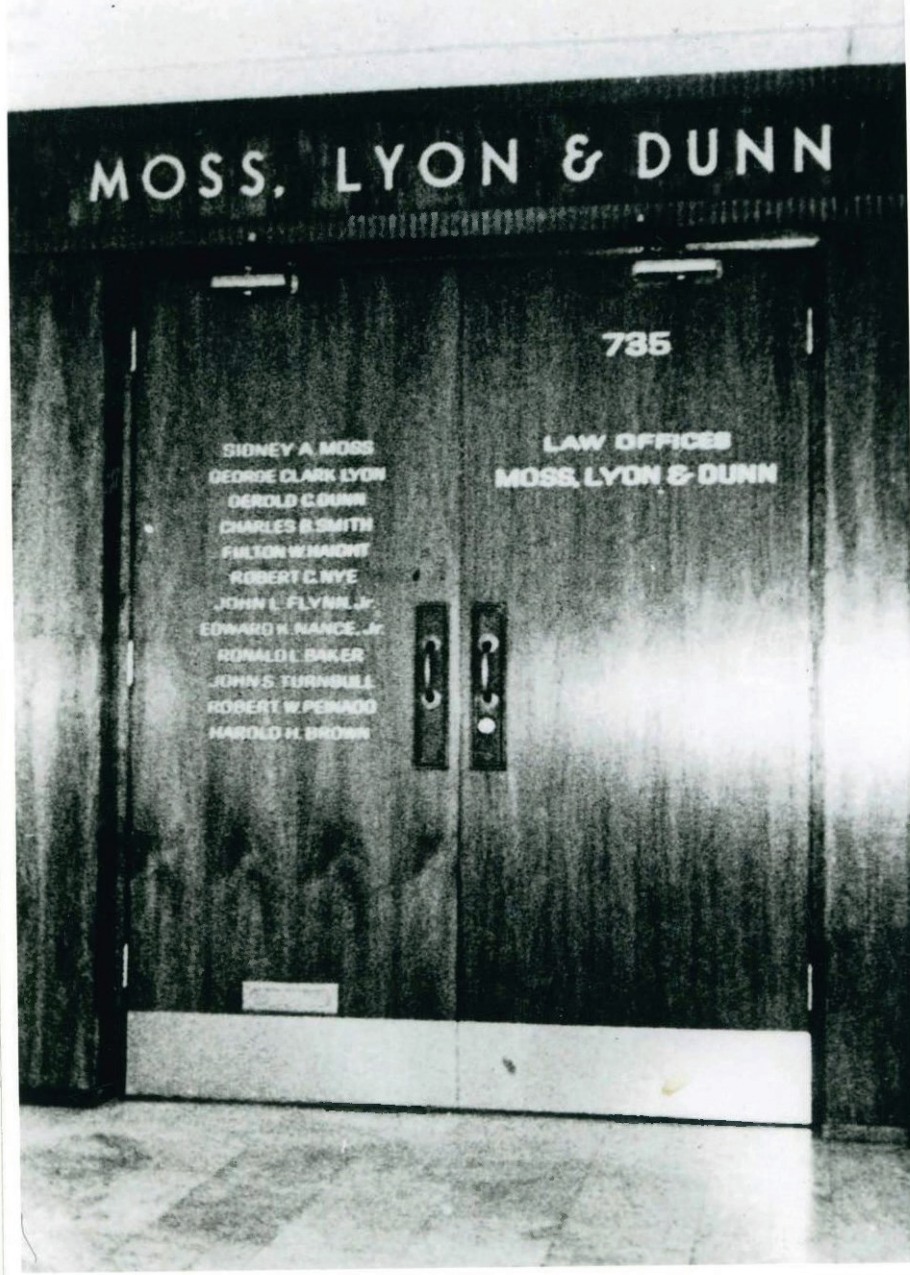


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Haight Brown & Bonesteel LLP

CELEBRATING
80 YEARS

By Susan Cushing



“ The founding partner of the firm was Sidney Moss, and the first client was the Fireman’s Fund Insurance Company. ... In 1949, Sid added two partners ... ”

One of California’s most prestigious and widely recognized law firms celebrates 80 years of service this year. Haight Brown & Bonesteel, referred to as simply Haight, celebrates eight decades of providing legal services in a variety of specialties. We spoke with Managing Partner Chris Stouder about the history of the firm and some of the notable events that have transpired over the years.

“The founding partner of the firm was Sidney Moss,” says Stouder, “and the first client was the Fireman’s Fund Insurance Company. Moss was a trial attorney and his nickname was Slip-n-Fall Sid. In 1949, Sid added two partners — George Lyon and Gerold Dunn. The firm name became Moss, Lyon and Dunn.

“In 1952, Bill Haight joined the firm,” he continues. “In 1967, Ronald Reagan asked Gerry Dunn to go onto the California Supreme Court. But, Dunn didn’t want to move to San Francisco, so Reagan appointed him to the L.A. County Superior Court and the following year to the California Court of Appeals. In that same year, Bill Haight became the managing partner.”

Stouder goes on to explain that in 1970, Bill Haight was elected president of the Association of Southern California Defense Counsel. One of his groundbreaking accomplishments that year, was to help move the defense bar in California from charging clients on a flat-fee basis to charging them based on the billable hour.

“In many respects, at least in California, Bill Haight was on the forefront of the billable hour,” Stouder points out. “He was certainly a pioneer.”

By 1972, the firm was growing significantly, and Haight recognized that new attorneys, fresh out of law school didn’t seem to have the practical skills necessary to practice law. In response to this deficiency, he created the Little Red Schoolhouse, which is a program that teaches attorneys the practical aspects of practicing law.

“In 1972, that was truly revolutionary,” notes Stouder. “Other firms were not doing that. Over the years, other firms did begin to copy this. But Haight was one of the first law firms, at least in California, to be designated as a certified provider of continuing education by the State Bar of California.”

The firm was also subsequently designated as a certified provider of continuing education for the California Department of Insurance. These designations allow the firm to provide accredited continuing legal education to its lawyers, alums and clients who are lawyers. And, the firm can provide accredited continuing education credits to its many insurance industry clients.

“The Little Red Schoolhouse, has now been in session for some 45 years,” Stouder adds. “It is an important part of the firm’s development of our lawyers.”

Haight continued as managing partner for 21 years, giving him the longest tenure in the history of the firm. Given his extended influence, Haight can be credited with much of the firm’s culture and philosophy. However, as Stouder explains, the founding partners set the path for what was to come.

“The firm was founded on the philosophy that number one, the practice of law is a profession,” he says. “Number two, running a law firm is a business. And, number three, success doesn’t just happen.

“With respect to the practice of law being a profession,” Stouder continues, “the firm has significant history with respect to leadership in the legal community.” Haight has had five of its attorneys serve as president of the Association of Southern California Defense Counsel. That includes Gerold Dunn in 1964, Fulton “Bill” Haight in 1970, Bob Dickson in 1975, Gary Otton in 1980 and Lori Behar in 1993.

“The firm has also had many attorneys appointed to the bench,” he adds. “As mentioned before, Gerold Dunn, as well as current jurists Mary Ann Murphy and Lori Behar and also Haight alumni, Dorothy Reyes and Lisa Sepe.”

INFLUENCE AND IMPACT

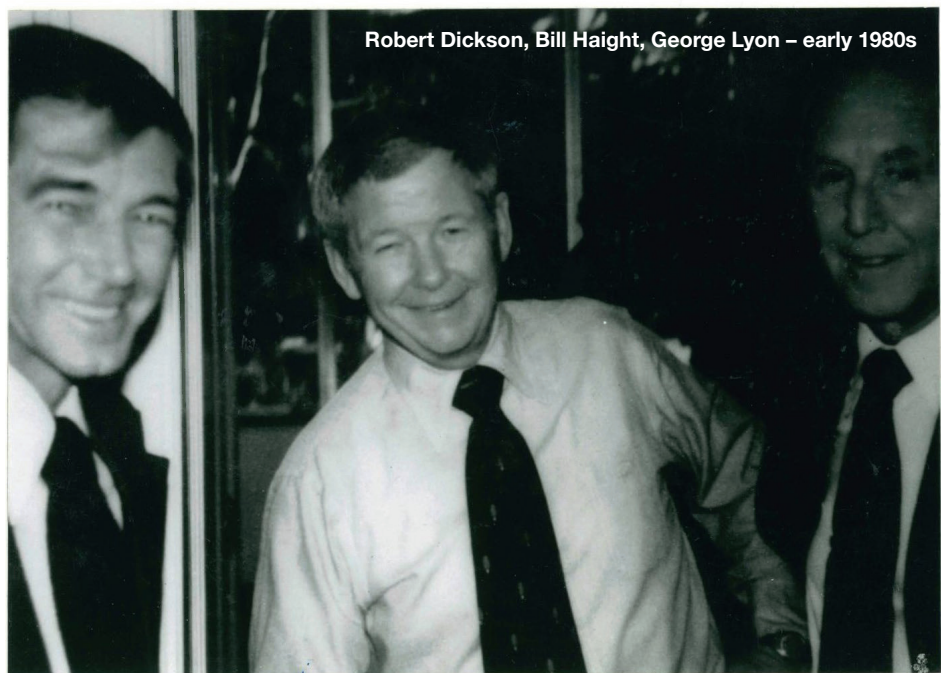
With 80 years of practice and by virtue of the fact that so many people associated with the firm have been influential men and women of law, Haight has left its mark on the laws and legal history of California. At one point in time, Haight had more reported appellate decisions than any other civil law firm in California.

“One case,” notes Stouder, “was *Sindell v. Abbott Laboratories*, (1980) 26 Cal.3d

588. That was a pharmaceutical case that established ‘market share’ liability where the product manufacturer could not be definitively identified.

“Another one I’ll mention,” he continues, “*Moradi-Shalal v. Fireman’s Fund Insurance Companies*, (1988) 46 Cal.3d 287. That was a landmark insurance case that eliminated third-party bad faith in California and significantly changed the terrain of bad faith law in California. Of course, there have been many more, but this gives an idea of the historical decisions we’ve achieved.”

““ In many respects, at least in California, Bill Haight was on the forefront of the billable hour. He was certainly a pioneer. ””



Robert Dickson, Bill Haight, George Lyon – early 1980s



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“... with respect to celebrating our 80th anniversary, we are in the midst of an initiative called ‘80 Acts of Kindness.’”

Stouder also discusses the fact that through the years Haight has been active and heavily involved within the communities it serves. Beyond landmark decisions and responsible, effective representation of its clients, the firm has always been cognizant of the community at large and has always sought ways to help and contribute.

“We’ve always been focused on giving back to the community at large in various ways,” he says. “Naturally, pro bono has always been an area where we are heavily involved and committed. I did want to mention though, with respect to celebrating our 80th anniversary, we are in the midst of an initiative called ‘80 Acts of Kindness.’”

As part of Haight’s 80th Anniversary, the firm made a commitment to perform a minimum of 80 Acts of Kindness which will benefit various charitable organizations and causes near and dear to the hearts of the firm as a whole and its individual professional team members.

What started off as a firm initiative to celebrate 80 years of dedicated legal

service, has morphed into something more — a campaign, which combines the efforts of the professional staff team members who have invested their own time, energy and effort into the campaign by committing random acts of kindness for people they encounter during their daily travels past street corners, at subway stations and various locations throughout the state. The activities range from small acts such as donating money and food to those less fortunate to sponsoring participants in various walks and cycling events that benefit worthwhile organizations such as AIDS/Lifecycle and the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure. Some of the Haight attorneys also provide pro bono legal services to organizations benefitting women and children in need and members of the armed services to name a few.

Haight’s 80 Acts of Kindness are being tracked on the firm’s home webpage which documents the various acts of multiple offices and professional team members which all count toward the overall number of acts that will be completed in 2017.

“As you can see by our tracker, we’ve supported a wide variety of causes, organizations and charities,” says Stouder. “We are very proud of our team members and how enthusiastically they have all been supporting this very worthwhile initiative.”

AN INDUSTRY OF SERVICE

The second tenet emphasized by the firm is the principle that running a law firm is a business.

“In order to succeed as a business in a service industry, you have to have basically four things,” says Stouder. “Excellent communication, excellent relation-

ships, excellent results and excellent value. If the firm doesn’t excel in each of those four areas, we would not and will not succeed as a law firm. One of the focuses of the firm from its inception until today, is that at the end of the day, it’s all about the clients.”

Supporting this statement, the firm’s unofficial mantra is that you can be the best lawyer in the world, but if you don’t have anything to do, then you’re not going to succeed in business. From the very beginning Haight has always been focused on clients. Another philosophy by which they live is, “find out what keeps your clients up at night, and do whatever you need to do to help them sleep.”

“... find out what keeps your clients up at night, and do whatever you need to do to help them sleep.”



Hugh Williams Photography

“ I guess to some folks I’m a dinosaur, but from my perspective, this is the only place I’ve ever worked. I’ve been here most of my life. I came here when I was 24 and have now been here 28 years. ”

“In other words,” Stouder recaps, “you learn your client’s business, you find out where they are trying to take their business, and you help them get there. You become a partner with your client.”

Stouder himself began at Haight in 1989 as a law clerk, and yet there are 10 attorneys currently with the firm who have been there even longer.

“I’m like a youngster to them,” Stouder jokes. “But I think that says a lot about the firm, that so many lawyers have been here 20 years and beyond. At the same time, we’re constantly on the lookout for new leadership for the firm. The more senior lawyers recognize that we aren’t going to be here forever. The firm has been in business for 80 years and we’d like it to be in business for another 80. So, we’re constantly looking to our younger attorneys to see who can take us to those next 80 years as well as looking for more great attorneys who want to join the Haight team. We’re hiring.

“I guess to some folks I’m a dinosaur,” he adds, “but from my perspective, this is the only place I’ve ever worked. I’ve been here most of my life. I came here when I was 24 and have now been here 28 years.”

Looking to the future, Haight asks all their attorneys to create marketing and business development plans. That includes first-year lawyers right out of law school.

“It’s important for them to understand that the law firm is a business,” says Stouder, “and a business needs clients. So, we as a firm will support marketing and business development efforts of all our attorneys. Not just the partners, not just the senior associates, but all of the associates. From the top to the bottom. We also review those plans and go over the progress with each attorney in the firm no less than twice a year.

“We’re not hoarding it at the top,” he adds. “Where we’re standing right now, we’re looking forward to the future and to the firm’s future leaders.”

WHAT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

A law firm of about 70 lawyers, Haight does many things that are more in line with what the mega firms are doing. One of these is the aforementioned commitment to associate marketing and business development.

“We also have a willingness to think outside the box and we are always looking for ways to improve our service delivery model,” says Stouder. “In 2010, for example, we recognized the critical importance of having cutting-edge technology. We also recognized the need to have cutting-edge IT folks to deliver on that technology. We outsourced our existing IT department to a company that specializes in IT. We are not in the IT business, and we felt that we could give much greater service by letting outside experts provide that.”

In 2010, that was revolutionary for a mid-sized law firm. Then, in 2011 the firm created its own private IT cloud. It accomplished this by centralizing all of the computer servers to the main office in Los Angeles, so all computers throughout the firm’s multiple offices were essentially monitors that were virtualized back to Los Angeles. This vastly improved the system’s reliability and security.

“We’re extremely proud of how our IT security is the gold-standard in law firms of any size, let alone mid-size,” says Stouder. “By virtualizing all our computers to our L.A. cloud, the computer system can also be virtualized to our attorney’s home computers, iPhones and iPads. This means, if you’re on the road and need to work on a document, you access our system and it’s as if you were at your desk in the office.”

Last year, Haight invested in new billing software that allows their lawyers to enter and release their billable time from their desktop at home, their laptop on the road or their iPhone. These changes help the attorneys be as productive as possible, re-



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ardless of where they are, but it also helps them with work/life balance.

Like some firms much larger than they are, Haight has become virtually paperless. Aside from the positive environmental impact, this ties back to their own cloud, allowing multiple people to be able to have access to and work on a file simultaneously, or individually as need be. By contrast, a paper file is singular and typically located in the main office which makes access extremely limited.

“Lawyers hate change,” Stouder adds, “but Haight has been successful in getting its attorneys to accept change. Sometimes kicking and screaming, but eventually embracing it.”

LEGAL FOCUS

According to Stouder, Haight has been primarily a litigation firm from its inception. Within that arena, they have several different practice areas including business litigation, product liability, insurance law, construction law, professional liability, employment and labor, appellate practice, transportation, public entity and workers’ compensation. They also have a robust transactional practice and real estate practice.

“The business transactional and real estate practices both really grew recently when we opened a Sacramento office a couple of years ago,” Stouder says. “The reason we opened that office was in response to requests from

our clients. They were asking specifically for transactional support as well as Sacramento-based litigation support.”

Just another example of how this firm has always and will continue to listen to and respond to their clients.

“That’s what it’s all about,” says Stouder. “Really, in this day and age, it’s critical. We have mostly corporate clients and work with in-house legal departments. They have folks they have to answer to and they look to us for answers and support, and as I mentioned before, you find out what keeps your client up at night and help them sleep. We have many, many long-term clients because we give them what they need. Not what we *think* they need, but what we *know* they need.”



AT A GLANCE

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MANAGING PARTNER

Chris Stouder

MOTTO

Success requires passion, preparation, a tireless pursuit of excellence and a thorough understanding of the challenges and competitive landscape. We're Haight Brown & Bonesteel. Put our knowledge and understanding of California to work for you.

DIVERSITY

Another source of pride for the firm, is its commitment to diversity. "We have an executive committee member, Valerie Moore, she's a partner in the firm and in charge of hiring, diversity and retention. So, we have someone focusing on that issue all the time. We have 70 lawyers; 40 percent are female, and one-third of our partners are female. Lori Behar was the firm's first female partner. She was elected to the partnership in 1985. Lori also happens to have been the first female president of the Association of Southern California Defense Counsel in 1993 and now she serves the community from the bench."

"Improvements in diversity do not happen overnight," says Stouder. "It's not like a light switch you can flip on, but we're out ahead of it and embracing it and improving all the time."

As they embark on their next 80 years, the men and women of Haight stand proudly at the forefront of innovative, wise and exceptional service to their clients and their community. With each new day, as the wheels of progress move ever forward, the people of Haight are ready, able and willing to review and embrace those things that will help them to continue to provide the level of representation that has been their hallmark for the last 80 years.