

Small Firm Size, Big Practice

Pasadena-based Cole Pedroza, formed by two former Thelen partners, combines trial and appellate expertise in handling a range of health care and insurance matters.

By Ameera Butt

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PASADENA — Cole Pedroza LLP may be a six-lawyer law firm, but it's developed a "big firm" practice style capable of handling trial, appellate and arbitration work, firm founders say.

Founded just more than six years ago by two former Thelen LLP partners, the firm had to overcome some initial prejudice. Co-founder Kenneth R. Pedroza recalls a comment from potential clients who were looking for appellate counsel: "But your firm is small, you can't handle big matters."

It's an obstacle most small firms face, he said.

"One of the struggles we had early on was making that name," Pedroza said. But the problem soon began to evaporate. "Almost instantly, we are able to overcome the size of our firm and compete on the highest levels for the very biggest cases."

Curtis A. Cole, the firm's other co-founder, pointed to an early boon. On the first day of business, he said, the firm got a phone call that turned into a huge case involving a new client, an insurer.

"Shortly after that, another big matter came in. We were able to step up to the plate," Cole said.

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— Kenneth R. Pedroza

At the firm's launch, both Cole and Pedroza already had clients in the health care and insurance industries, and those clients followed them to the new firm, according to Cole.

Today, Cole Pedroza represents clients in the health care, insurance, and construction industry. The firm

also consults with trial lawyers who turn to its attorneys for advice and assistance.

"I think [the trial lawyers] really like working with us because they value our judgment," said Joshua C. Traver, who joined the firm in 2007. "They trust us to be faithful to them and their clients, and we work unflinchingly hard to further their interests."

'I've never worked on things where more than one partner gives me input and everyone knows about the cases.'

— Tammy C. Weaver

In addition to Traver, the firm has added Matthew S. Levinson, Cassidy C. Davenport, Tammy C. Weaver, three legal assistants, a law graduate who assists in proofing briefs, and a part-time attorney since its founding.

Cole Pedroza's appellate practice, on which the firm was built, will always remain its "core," Pedroza said. On those matters, the firm is often consulted by trial attorneys, even before the verdict occurs, to help with case strategy and documents, according to Cole. But the firm has also expanded its practice areas over the years to accommodate new clients.

"Employment is one of those areas that, for us, has really taken off. It was something all of us had done, but it's become a much larger area of our practice, along with insurance litigation," Pedroza said.

Health care remains the firm's most active industry, Cole added. And while he expects work to come in the wake of the Affordable Care Act, he said its impact on the firm will be delayed.

"My guess is in the coming year, there will be a lot of questions put to us ... from clients," Cole said.

The firm prides itself on an "open" culture, and its lawyers regularly consult with each other on cases. "The



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Curtis A. Cole, Tammy Chow Weaver, Joshua C. Traver, Cassidy C. Davenport and Kenneth R. Pedroza of Cole Pedroza LLP in Pasadena

model of our firm is built around the marketplace of ideas, where everyone contributes to everything," Pedroza said.

That sense of cooperation was evident for Weaver, who joined in October.

"It's very collaborative," she said. "I've never worked on things where more than one partner gives me input and everyone knows about the cases."

The collaborative nature also signals to clients the firm will collaborate with them, too, Cole said.

The firm has also taken on notable cases, including the representation of

a doctor, Tony Tam, who was sued by a plaintiff who said her husband died as a result of the defendant's negligence and carelessness. *Stinnett v. Tam*, F057784 (Stanislaus Super. Ct., filed Jan. 3, 2007).

The case involved MICRA, the 1975 Medical Injury Compensation Reform Act, which caps damages in medical malpractice cases. It was adopted by lawmakers in an effort to address rapidly escalating malpractice insurance rates that doctors complained was driving them out of business.

"It was one of the most recent constitutional challenges to MICRA," Pe-

droza said. "We were ... defending [of] the constitutionality of MICRA, and *Stinnett* is the most recent published case on that issue."

Cole said the expansion of the firm will be in response to the needs of the clients.

"The size of verdicts [and] the severity of claims clearly has gone up, and that has had an impact on our practice. That inevitably is going to drive a demand for our services and will require us to grow," Cole said. "In other words, growth for growth's sake is not on our agenda."

When hiring, he said he looks for at-

torneys who understand trial practice and can help advise lawyers, health care providers and insurers.

Pedroza said he's working to get each of the firm's attorneys involved in trials, adding that experience handling trials pays dividends in appellate matters.

"Every trial makes me a better appellate attorney, and every appeal makes me a better trial attorney. It's critical we all stay involved on both ends of that," he said. "It really does distinguish us from other law firms."

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