

LAW



Zane Hill | zhill@labusinessjournal.com

Firm Focuses on Partition Litigation

Underwood enters L.A. with office in Brentwood.

By ZANE HILL Staff Reporter

The upstart **Underwood Law Firm P.C.** — which grew out of a dedicated focus on partition law — recently leased an office in Brentwood, which it aims to continue shoring up.

Founding attorney **Eli Underwood**, who launched the firm in Sacramento and expanded to Oakland and Newport Beach, entered the L.A. market along Wilshire Boulevard on July 5. His goal in founding the firm was to take the niche practice of partition law — which deals with properties owned by multiple people who differ on keeping or offloading it them — and make it the main purpose of his operation.

“There wasn’t really anybody that I saw who was really doing an excellent job with this,” Underwood explained. “I had a lot of calls in Los Angeles and started to do a lot of work here. We hired an L.A. lawyer in November, and we decided at this time to open an L.A. office to better serve our L.A. clients.”



Team: Sandy Sikavi, left, and Eli Underwood in their Brentwood office.

Partition law is meant to solve property co-ownership problems. One example might be when a nonmarried couple purchases a home together, breaks up and do not agree what to do with the home or mortgage. Another common scenario, Underwood said, is when siblings inherit a property together and differ about whether to sell or keep it.

“The real estate market in Los Angeles is constantly in motion, and more times than not people are buying or inheriting property with other people,” said **Sandy Sikavi**, who is the L.A.-based attorney for Underwood Law. “For example, we currently have a breach-of-contract dispute between two brothers regarding two single-family homes located in Los Angeles County. As our Los Angeles-based cases continue to grow, we thought an L.A. office would allow us to better attend to these clients.”

Underwood worked as a partner at a Sacramento firm before he left to form his

own practice, largely because he saw there was a growing demand for attorneys skilled in partition law.

“There are so many of these cases in California, and by focusing on one practice area, I can provide higher value for my clients than if I did 20 different types of law,” he said. “I just want to give my clients amazing value and amazing service and I felt like I could be a B-average real estate lawyer but an A-plus partition lawyer.”

Underwood Law is using a coworking space at 11755 Wilshire Blvd., where Sikavi maintains an office.

“My hope is to add a second attorney to L.A. office by winter and a third by spring,” he said. “You go where the people are. L.A. is just kind of the big fish in the pond.”

Sikavi said she thinks the market will grow and added that she’s confident Underwood can lead the firm to be a force in that market.

L.A. Lawyer Wins Record Defame Case

Venable’s Lee Brenner litigated case with Canadian attorney.

By ZANE HILL Staff Reporter

A Los Angeles attorney was instrumental in securing what is now, by a significant margin, Canada’s largest-ever defamation judgment against an individual.



Brenner

Lee Brenner, chair of the entertainment and media litigation practice at **Venable LLP**’s office in Century City, represented American clients in the Ontario, Canada, case that just had \$4.7 million ordered in damages to its 53 plaintiffs. Those plaintiffs, the judge found, were

significantly defamed by a Canadian man who for years systematically seeded the internet with claims that they were sexual predators, pedophiles or had venereal diseases, among other attacks.

The defendant is appealing the ruling and judgment.

Brenner was first contacted by a client about the posts in 2012 and eventually joined forces with Canadian attorney **Maanit Zemel**, who had been following a similar issue for other clients since 2014.

“We worked very well together. I could not be more proud of what we accomplished,” Brenner said. “It was a lot of teamwork. It was slow and arduous and there were setbacks. It was good lawyering and for a good cause. We didn’t have any illusions we were going to make a fortune on this case. Once we talked to our clients, we saw the damage to them was exceedingly real in how profoundly it affected their lives.”

Through their investigations, Brenner and Zemel determined that one man, **Tanvir Farid**, targeted his victims — most of whom were recruiters — after applying for jobs at the information technology companies they worked for. A judge ultimately ruled last year in favor of the plaintiffs. That judge awarded damages at the end of June, with each plaintiff due to receive between \$50,000 and \$110,000 based on the severity of the postings about them.

Farid’s posts were detailed, specifically accusing the plaintiffs of deviant sexual or predatory acts or of being unfaithful to their spouses, while often including other family members’ names. They were designed in a way to often become top search results on the internet and were frequently picked up by so-called extortion websites, which charged people to take down posts about them.

Andrade Gonzalez Gets New Office

Firm subleases entire floor of Figueroa Street asset.

By ZANE HILL Staff Reporter

Downtown-based **Andrade Gonzalez LLP** is celebrating its relocation to a new office.

The insurance litigation firm made the move this month as it prepares to celebrate its 10th anniversary, during which it grew from the two founding partners — **Sean Andrade** and **Henry Gonzalez** — to 11 total staff attorneys and two of counsels. The pair started the firm with **Los Angeles Unified School District** as its main client, and the district continues to use the firm for insurance coverage litigation issues.

“We hired an associate within two weeks

(of launch), another senior attorney in October and by the end of the year, we had **Steve Master-son** join us. Since then, it’s been great growing,” Andrade, the firm’s managing partner, said. “At first, we didn’t take on that many clients for our first four or five years, because we had such massive litigation we were doing for L.A. Unified. Once we were able to settle some of the liability litigation, we started getting out there and talking to other clients and taking on other clients.”

The firm’s new location, at 801 S. Figueroa St., represents several improvements for the practice. It boasts more than 9,000 square feet, while the previous location on Spring Street totaled around 7,500 square feet. The new office also brings the entire operation on one floor, after it was split between two levels at its former building.

Having recently added more paralegals, the firm looks to start shopping for additional associate and partner talent, which this new



Duo: Sean Andrade, left, and Henry Gonzalez in their downtown office.

space will help accommodate.

Though the firm is subleasing this current space, Andrade said he would like to shoot for a full lease when and if it became available. The move was completed in June.

“It’s a beautiful office space here and it’s been very inspirational for all of us and motivating for everybody to come in and be together and part of the team,” he added. “Since the pandemic kind of made things a little more difficult in that regard, people kind of felt separate, and I think this office space makes people connect well together.”

VENABLE LLP

VENABLE LLP
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