

# Big cases, big courtroom wins and a little Irish luck

*Litigation boutique Callahan & Blaine is known for its aggressive approach*

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**S**ANTA ANA — Maybe it's the luck of the Irish that has contributed to the success of Santa Ana-based litigation firm Callahan & Blaine.

That's what founder Daniel J. Callahan likes to joke when he looks back on the 30-year history of his firm — a boutique born on St. Patrick's Day and raised on hard work, big wins and a pinch of good fortune.

Since its debut, the 33-attorney firm focusing on business, insurance and personal injury disputes has handled some of the highest-profile cases in the state and boasts several of the most noteworthy and talked about verdicts in the nation.

"Pretty good for a firm that started on an Irish holiday," Callahan said.

Callahan started his legal career as an associate for a big Hawaiian law firm where he "didn't get to see much sunlight." He moved to Newport Beach and practiced at Allen Matkins Leck Gamble Mallory & Natsis LLP for a few years before deciding to strike out on his own.

"I enjoyed my work so much that I couldn't help but talk about it, and people could see my enthusiasm," he said. "Suddenly I found that I had

a lot of business and thought, 'Now would be a good time to open my own firm.'"

For a little more than a year, it was just Callahan and one secretary running his firm. Soon after, he started hiring associates and was joined by name partner Stephen E. Blaine in 1990.

As the firm grew, so did the wins. In 2003 Callahan won the largest jury verdict in Orange County history, a \$934 million judgment achieved after a three-month trial in a complex business litigation case. *Beckman Coulter v. Dowatron International Inc.*, 01CC08395 (Orange County Super. Ct., filed June 28, 2001).

In other record breaking wins, the firm received the highest insurance bad faith judgment — \$58 million — and the biggest employment law settlement — \$38 million — in Orange County history. Callahan & Blaine also secured a \$50 million settlement in a case against the city of Dana Point that is reportedly the largest personal injury settlement in the history of the United States.

Most recently, on March 6 the firm obtained a \$16 million judgment in favor of its client Vince Colarossi for the injuries Colarossi suffered in a bicycle accident in 2009 that rendered him a paraplegic. Colarossi and four other plaintiffs sued contractors that failed to properly resurface a public roadway in Malibu.

Partners say Callahan's charisma wins him the big bucks in court.

"Lawyers and jurors like him," said attorney Edward Susolik, who joined Callahan & Blaine from O'Melveny

& Myers LLP in 1993. "Everybody likes him."

The firm's attorneys have skirmished with a fair share of big dogs in the legal community.

In August 2008, Callahan went up against high-profile litigator Thomas J. Nolan of Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP & Affiliates in a wage and hour class action brought by Orange County Register carriers. The case settled later that year with \$22 million going to the newspaper carriers. *Gonzalez v. Freedom Communications Inc.*, 03CC08756 (Orange Co. Super. Ct., filed July 7, 2003).

When it comes to litigation, Callahan said the firm is aggressive but selective. He said the firm turns down roughly 80 percent of the cases that come to it.

"There has to be a fair amount of money in controversy in the cases we decide to take," Callahan said. "There usually has to be \$1 million or more in dispute in order for us to get involved."

For the cases they don't take, the firm refers them to other firms in the area, to lawyers such as personal injury attorney Eric J. Dubin, who has handled matters such as the civil liability action against actor Robert Blake, who was accused in 2002 of killing his second wife. That case resulted \$30 million wrongful death verdict against Blake.

"The firm is tenacious, aggressive and exceptionally well-prepared," said JAMS mediator Alexander S. Polsky, who has mediated cases for lawyers at Callahan & Blaine for more than 20 years. "They approach mediation as if



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Daniel J. Callahan, left, and Stephen E. Blaine are partners at litigation boutique Callahan & Blaine.

it were a trial. They are comfortable showing the cards, and trying cases that do not settle."

Callahan doesn't view the firm as something that succeeded only because of him. The firm's reputation is due to the work of attorneys like Marc P. Miles, a civil litigator who's logged more than a decade there. Miles represents clients such as energy drink manufacturer Monster Beverage Corp., which is currently involved in litigation in five states.

When it comes to picking talent,

Callahan & Blaine has a couple of rules: Candidates must have no less than eight years' experience and they must be willing to learn.

"We are looking for people at a level in their career where they still have something to learn," Susolik said, "and we can teach them the Callahan & Blaine approach to being aggressive and thorough."

About a month ago, the firm hired 12-year attorney Brendan M. Ford from K&L Gates LLP in Orange County. Two other lawyers are slated

to join the boutique's ranks starting next week, bringing the firm's headcount up to 35.

Perhaps someday the firm will have offices throughout California, the East Coast and even overseas, but that will take a little more of that Irish kismet.

"We certainly are looking forward to the future," Susolik said. "We can't wait to see where the next 30 years will take us."

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