

# Biggest Firms See Overall Gain in Ranks of Lawyers

## Reversal from recession; most based here post gains

■ By KARI HAMANAKA

Orange County's largest law firms got back to hiring in 2010.

The 52 largest firms here saw a 1.5% rise in the number of local lawyers to 2,101 in the past year, according to this week's Business Journal list.

That's a big turnaround from a 4.3% decline the largest firms here saw in 2009.

Firms sustained themselves on practices that remained busy during the downturn, primarily intellectual property, labor and employment and general litigation.

As 2010 wore on, lawyers saw some revival in mergers and acquisitions along with real estate work,

much of it related to finance or litigation.

Many firms with local headquarters believe they have a leg up on national and regional



**Callahan: locals have a leg up**

firms that operate satellite offices here, with attorneys who aren't necessarily mining their own work.

"Sometimes larger firms come and think 'Well, we'll just open an office in Newport and then be fed work by the New York or L.A. office,'" said **Daniel Callahan**,

founding partner of No. 32 **Callahan & Blaine** in Santa Ana. "That's been pared down significantly. I think it's the firms that have established relationships within the county that will do the best."

Litigation specialist **Callahan & Blaine** in Santa Ana also added lawyers during the downturn, picking up three in the past four months and growing the office from 22 to 28 in the past year.

The firm is seeing three areas generating more business: contracts, real estate and labor and employment, according to founding partner **Daniel Callahan**.

On the real estate side, Callahan & Blaine is representing a local shopping center developer who is facing allegations of misrepresentation about future anchor tenants.

When those tenants never moved in to the center, shoppers didn't materialize and smaller retail tenants shuttered their doors.

Similar to real estate-related litigation, Callahan said labor and employment cases have shot up.

"Because of the downturn, there are more layoffs," Callahan said. "With layoffs, come discrimination claims, wrongful termination claims, and we're also handling a lot of class action defense on wage-and-hour claims."

Claims by former employees that they didn't get their rest breaks, lunches or overtime are "mushrooming," Callahan said.

The firm is representing a national fast food company being sued for wage and hour violations in a class action lawsuit involving some 75,000 plaintiffs.

The case still is in the early stages and a trial date has not yet been set.

"It's a sign of the times, these wage-and-hour suits," Callahan said. ■