

LOS ANGELES

Daily Journal

TUESDAY,
APRIL 14, 2009

— SINCE 1888 —

Jenner & Block Is Latest to Open a Los Angeles Outpost

By Amanda Becker
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LOS ANGELES — The Chicago firm Jenner & Block is the latest to open a Los Angeles outpost in the middle of a recession that has forced firms to lay off attorneys and slash salaries. The office, which will be led by two former Kirkland & Ellis partners, opened Monday.

“This has always been part of our long-term strategic plan for the firm,” said Managing Partner Susan Levy. “Jenner & Block has been conservatively managed and this year we have a healthy revenue stream ... and it’s given us the resources to continue growing in challenging times.”

Jenner & Block isn’t the only firm that has taken advantage of the economic climate to snag high-profile partners and establish a West Coast presence. Philadelphia-based Blank Rome; Chicago-based Wildman, Harrold, Allen & Dixon and Phoenix-based Snell & Wilmer all picked up attorneys from the now-defunct Dreier firm to open offices in Los Angeles in the first quarter of this year. Atlanta-based Alston & Bird and Kansas City-based Lathrop & Gage merged or absorbed firms in Los Angeles at the end of 2008.

Firm leaders say the recession has not derailed plans to add offices in Los Angeles because it is a long-term goal prompted by client needs.

“Jenner & Block has always been interested in opening up a West Coast office and in recent years, our clients have encouraged us to open an office on the West Coast,” Levy said.

The founding partners of Jenner & Block’s office in the Library Tower will be appellate attorney Rick Richmond, who will act as its managing partner, and litigator Brent Caslin. Both attorneys will be members of the firm’s litigation, creative content and intellectual property practices. Caslin’s practice will also focus on the Asia-Pacific region.

Richmond says his interest in Jenner & Block dates back to when he clerked at the 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in 1987.

“The best lawyer I saw when I was a law clerk was a Jenner & Block lawyer named Barry Sullivan,” Richmond recalled. “I can still remember certain things he said ... I had an epiphany. I said, ‘Wow, that’s how lawyers make their argument.’ I was totally transfixed.”

Sullivan is still with the firm, as a litigation partner in the Chicago office.