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CURIOUS PRACTICES

By **STEPHANIE HENKEL** Staff Reporter

For attorneys, uncommon expertise attracts clients. These Valley lawyers help startups file for a patent, athletes charged with doping or horse owners facing accident liability.

With so many lawyers in Los Angeles, how can practitioners set themselves apart from the crowd?

Many specialize their services and become experts in a complex corner of the legal field. Of course, there are large practice areas such as family law, real estate or business litigation. But to succeed in a narrow and uncommon practice, attorneys typically must establish their credentials to lure clients.

"In L.A., it's almost impossible to distinguish yourself as a general lawyer," said **Howard Jacobs**, a sports anti-doping attorney who practices at his

namesake firm in Westlake Village. "From the consumer side, you're either going to choose someone you know or someone, through research, who you've determined is an expert in the type of problem you have."

Just as entrepreneurs should avoid "following their passion," attorneys can't pick a specialty unless there's a market to support it. Luckily, the Valley has such a diversified economy that there are plenty to choose from.

Kira Masteller, president of the **San Fernando Valley Bar Association**, has



Masteller

noticed an uptick in legal work in the region because of its improving business climate.

"It seems to me businesses are relatively healthy based on the amount of work many of the lawyers I have talked to have," she said. "I see a lot of attorneys at events, and I don't think there is an attorney I've run into this year that hasn't told me they were swamped."

In the Valley, she has seen a greater need for transactional work like contract negotiations; employment law services to comply with the ever-changing California labor laws; franchising needs whether

buying, selling or starting outlets; as well as intellectual property services as everything moves toward digitization. She has also noticed a decline in bankruptcy, which she believes is another result of the economy growing stronger.

This Special Report looks at three specialties – biotech, sports and equine law – emerging as potential future hotspots for firms in the Valley. Short profiles on the following pages showcase firms currently working in these niche practices.

Lab lawyers

Brent Reinke, partner and biotech attorney at **Musick Peeler & Garrett's** Westlake Village office, has seen growth



Practitioners: From left, Brent Reinke of Musick Peeler & Garrett in Westlake Village; Michelle MacDonald at Gray Duffy in Encino; and Howard Jacobs at Law Offices of Howard L. Jacobs in Westlake Village.

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in the life sciences sector since the end of the Great Recession. He thinks as the region gets more established, it could attract new law firms to the area or spur local firms to develop larger biotech practices in response to market demand for intellectual property, patent, trademark and business services.

He currently represents a number of biotech companies in the region, which has been named the "101 biotech corridor," due to the cluster of companies forming in the West San Fernando and Conejo valleys along the 101 freeway. Many of these businesses were started by ex-employees of larger local biotechs including **Amgen Inc.** of Thousand Oaks and **Shire** in Westlake Village.

One of the region's greatest success stories was the acquisition of homegrown **Kythera Biopharmaceuticals Inc.** for \$2.1 billion by drug giant **Allergan** of Dublin. **Kythera** was started by a group of ex-Amgen executives, who have now founded a new endeavor, **Sienna Biopharmaceuticals Inc.**, which they hope will have the same repeat success as **Kythera**.

"You want more and more of these situations, where the management team leaves one company and branches out and starts five other companies," Reinke said. "That's where you start to see some real traction."

He said this proliferation has attracted investments from Asia and elsewhere outside the region. Ideally, Reinke would like to see the biotech industry develop to the point where established companies move to the area to take advantage of local talent and the resources the cluster provides, further accelerating growth.

"I'd say there has been an increase in the (biotech) startup space," said **Lauren Schneider**, a partner in **Lewis Roca Rothgerber Christie's** intellectual property group in Glendale. "But while many researchers earn their degrees here and may wish to remain in the region, they tend to leave for more established, supportive environments, like San Francisco, San Diego or Boston, when it comes time to start their own companies."

Reinke is in discussions with the city of Thousand Oaks, Simi Valley and other local governments, who are expressing interest in growing the sector through potential advertising campaigns, expedited permit pulling as well as funding and grants for future facilities. Those deals will require extensive legal work if green-lighted, he said.

Sports litigation

Los Angeles has seen a recent spike in sports with two football franchises now in town, a \$2.6 billion football stadium in the works, a 2024 Olympic bid in review as well as a new expansion team from **Major League Soccer** kicking off its new \$350-million stadium in 2018.

"Sports law in L.A. consists of a pretty small group of people, who are truly sports lawyers," said attorney Jacobs. "Certainly, there will be a lot of new opportunities (for lawyers) with the Rams being right down the street, the Chargers moving to L.A. and the new stadium that's being built."

Jacobs said the new teams and their related construction needs open up a plethora of legal work including naming rights deals, contract negotiations and real estate services.

The same applies to the **Los Angeles Football Club**, which paid a record \$110 million to join Major League Soccer a little over two years ago. The team's \$350-million stadium next to the L.A. Memorial Coliseum will include more than 10,000 square feet of retail space.

Also, if the International Olympic Committee chooses Los Angeles for the 2024 Summer Games, the city will need to update its infrastructure in a big way.

"I would expect you'll see the Metro going into the areas where the stadiums and athlete villages are going to be," Jacobs said. "There is also a lot of talk about redoing LAX, and I think they would have to for the games."

In the Conejo Valley, the Rams' temporary headquarters are currently located at **California Lutheran University** in Thousand Oaks. The team is searching for a permanent headquarters nearby. In addition, **Sports Academy**, a 96,000-square-foot sports and fitness facility, just opened in the Conejo Valley, bringing even more opportunity to local law firms looking to specialize in sports.

Horse matters

Compared to sports attorneys, there are fewer lawyers in Los Angeles who focus on equine law. However, the Valley has several known horse regions – around Griffith Park in Glendale and Burbank as well as in Chatsworth, Calabasas, Hidden Hills and Lake Sherwood. In addition, the L.A. Equestrian Club in Burbank provides boarding, training and horse show services, providing a central location for equine enthusiasts and events.

In fact, one Valley attorney who specializes in equine law, **Michelle MacDonald** at **Gray Duffy** in Encino, owns seven race horses and is licensed to race.

Individuals who own and board pleasure horses typically require legal services in relation to purchase transactions, stable contracts, veterinarian malpractice as well as related insurance and liability issues. For race and show horses, attorneys deal with many of the same legal matters as pleasure horses but also take on business-related needs such as training, payment contracts and commercial disputes.

The local horse business has received attention in recent years as more high-profile competitions have taken place in the area.

In 2015, the Longines Masters decided to make Los Angeles one of the three international hubs to hold its annual series of equestrian events. The other two cities in the competition are Hong Kong and

Paris. The first year the Masters series came to Southern California, the event was held at the L.A. Convention Center with last year's competition taking place at the Long Beach Convention Center.

"The Masters is the largest, most prestigious hunter-jumper show in the world," said **Randolph Catanese & Wells**, founder of equine law firm **Catanese & Wells** in Westlake Village. "Every year it hosts the best riders and horses."

In 2016, the Breeders' Cup World Championships, the annual series of top thoroughbred horse racing, was held at Santa Anita Park with record attendance of close to 46,000 racing enthusiasts. This year it will be held at the Del Mar racetrack in San Diego, further solidifying Southern California's presence in the equine industry.

"Having these events would be like having the World Series or Super Bowl here," Catanese said. "There are lots of people in L.A. that participate."

With more racing professionals, horse owners, trainers and expensive livestock coming to the area for these events, the more horse-related legal issues will arise, creating an in for lawyers pivoting into equine law sector.

As the future of business looks bright in the Valley, so does its related legal services. **Bob Baradaran**, managing partner of **Greenberg Glusker** in Los Angeles, agrees specialization is essential to a successful law practice but thinks firms need to take it a step further.

"We are probably returning to the era of hiring lawyers as consiglieres, trusted advisors or counselors, who act as the point person for solving problems for clients," he said.

Musick Peeler's Reinke is already providing these types of services for his clients and considers himself an attorney as well as a business consultant. On one end, he is trying to grow his clients' industry and on the other, their businesses.

"It's really about providing both legal and business advice, at least personally, based on the experience I have and also making connections for them with former executives that could help advise them," he said. "I think the most effective lawyers I ever come across are ones that are not just lawyers but are business-minded people."