

SEARCH/BACK to search results

Bookmark Reprints

Wednesday, April 22, 2015

Plaintiffs' firm Panish, Shea & Boyle celebrates 10th anniversary

In its first decade, Panish, Shea & Boyle won clients \$1.4 billion in more than 30 trials

By Melanie Brisbon

In 2005, well-known litigator Brian J. Panish split from the firm now known as Greene Broillet & Wheeler LLP after 17 years and with two attorneys in tow to form his own personal injury firm in West Los Angeles.



From left, Brian Panish, Adam Shea, Kevin Boyle and Rahul Ravipudi of Panish, Shea & Boyle celebrate the firm's tenth anniversary this month.

Little did he know that his five-person outfit would in a decade grow to more than 20 attorneys and become feared and revered throughout the region for its aggressive pursuit of high-profile matters that frequently lead to multimillion dollar verdicts. Celebrating its tenth anniversary this month, attorneys at Panish, Shea & Boyle LLP have tried more than 30 cases, securing 26 verdicts of \$10 million or more. By firm estimates, juries have awarded their clients more than \$1.4 billion since its inception.

"We basically started with almost a full case load and we had to create an infrastructure for the firm at the same time, which was made even more challenging [because] we had the trials going on at the same time," said Kevin R. Boyle, a former federal law clerk who helped start the firm. "I think Brian and I did three trials in the first year and we didn't have trash cans in the office then."

In one of the firm's first cases in 2006, a jury awarded two families more than \$27 million for a two-car accident that resulted in the death of a 4-year-old girl in 2003. The plaintiffs alleged that the child's death was caused by a negligent Municipal Railway worker. To date, the verdict is the highest ever awarded against the city of San Francisco. *Dominguez v. San Francisco*, CV03-CGC422963, (S.F. Super. Ct., filed July 31, 2003).

Many of the firms' cases often result in change for the better. In 2011 a jury awarded \$17 million for the 2009 death of a visually impaired man who mistook the gap between rail cars for a door and fell between the cars when the train began to move. *Cuthbertson v. Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority*, BC413070, (L.A. Super. Ct., filed May 5, 2009).

"As a result of that case, they put up these barriers in between the cars so that's not going to happen to anyone else," Panish said. "For blind and handicapped people, mass transit is critical for them to live their lives."

Panish, who once had dreams of becoming a professional football player, often channels his athletic side in court.

"Being in athletics, it's all about discipline, hard work and preparation - the same things you need in trial work," Panish said. "You're competing on every play and in a courtroom you're competing every day."

Another of the firm's high-profile cases centered on the 2009 death of Michael Jackson, in which the jury found that concert promoter AEG Live LLC was not negligent for hiring the doctor who prescribed medicine for Jackson at the time of his death. *Jackson et al. v. AEG Live LLC*, BC445597 (L.A. Super. Ct., filed Sept. 15, 2010).

"In the end, they didn't believe that AEG should be responsible for his death," said Panish, who represented the Jackson family. "They found even though AEG hired the doctor, they didn't believe they should be held liable for his use of [anesthetic] Propofol to perform."

Panish attorneys immerse themselves in big cases, but they also take on big opponents: They've gone up against big firms like Lewis Brisbois Bisgaard & Smith LLP and O'Melveny & Myers LLP.

"One of the challenges we face is the battle against the Goliaths - whether it be the big insurance companies or big corporations with unlimited resources," said Rahul Ravipudi, who joined the firm in 2006 and became partner two years ago. "So in a lot of our cases it's us against gaggles of lawyers with unlimited resources to pay for experts and everything else they want. That will always be one of the biggest fights and the biggest struggles we have."

Undeterred, Panish attorneys have faced the challenge head on by being very selective in the cases they take so that they can devote both time and resources to every matter.

"For every 100 times that we get contacted about a new case, we take less than five of those cases," said Adam K. Shea, also a founding name partner. "We want to do a top notch job for every client."

They make a priority to get to know their clients so that they can accurately tell their stories in trial, but doing so can pose another challenge.

"We deal with some very emotional circumstances and it's going to be emotional but you've got to balance it out," Panish said. "You've got to be an individual and you've got to relate to these people and develop that bond and trust."

Another part of the firm's strategy for trying cases involves using technology to simplify complicated issues.

"Technology is important because it allows us to give jurors cutting-edge information in a dynamic way that is understandable and clear cut," Shea said, "whether that's through showing animations and reconstructions, showing crash testing, or presenting medical illustrations - and doing it in a way that doesn't bore the jury."

"It's very important that we keep them captivated," he added.

The firm has also developed a reputation with both attorneys in the plaintiffs' and defense bars.

"They're a very competent firm," said Sean O'Doherty, partner at Gates, O'Doherty, Gonter & Guy LLP who has served as the firm's opposing counsel on many occasions. "You can expect professionalism, courtesy, and you're up for a hard fight."

Joseph M. Barrett, a senior trial lawyer at Kabateck Brown Kellner LLP and current president of the Consumer Attorneys Association of Los Angeles, made his first appearance in court alongside Panish in 1989 when he was a young attorney at Greene Broillet.

Barrett describes his firm and Panish Shea & Boyle as "peers."

"They're one of the leading plaintiffs' law firms in California," Barrett said. "They're people that I fought with and I've always respected them."

The firms' attorneys continue to juggle a heavy caseload, and while they're not opposed to adding more attorneys in the future, the primary goal is to continue providing high-quality services and favorable results to their clients.

In looking back at the last decade and ahead to the firm's future, Panish hopes to leave a lasting legacy.

"I want to be remembered for lawyers that have been on the cutting edge that have advanced techniques and strategies for trying cases and for being nice people."

melanie_brisbon@dailyjournal.com

: : : : : : : :