

Building Up for a Boom in Construction Defects

LITIGATION: Contractor firms bracing for litigation as filing deadline nears.

The housing boom of the last decade ended up as a disaster for both homeowners and builders alike when it all went bust. But years later, it probably will mean some good business for lawyers.

State law stipulates that construction-defect lawsuits must be filed within 10 years of a building's construction, and with many boom homes approaching that age, both plaintiffs and defense attorneys are girding for an uptick in such suits.

Paul Bauducco, an attorney and shareholder at **Lewitt Hackman**, a 24-attorney firm in Encino, who represents contractors in construction defect suits, said plaintiffs' attorneys have begun circulating letters in certain housing tracts, noting common flaws and "putting residents on notice" that they may lose their rights if they don't take action.

He recently saw such a letter making the rounds in a Moorpark development.

"We haven't seen (an uptick) yet, but my partners and I have discussed it," he said. "We are ready to go when it happens."

The most common alleged defect is water intrusion through the roof, windows, doors or foundation slab.

The second most common is soil movement, especially for buildings on slopes or near hills.

Michael Parks is a partner at **Schimmel & Parks**, a Sherman Oaks firm with three attorneys who spend between 30 and 40 per-



Nice Digs: LightGabler has expanded its offices at 760 Paseo Camarillo.

cent of their time on construction defect lawsuits representing homeowners.

"Tens of thousands of homes and condos were built in the construction boom," he said. "As people regain the value in their homes, they will want to protect it. We are anticipating more activity in the residential construction defect practice."

Big Footprint

LightGabler LLP has expanded its footprint but stayed in the same place.

Since its launch in 2011, the Camarillo firm has grown to eight attorneys from its original four, and has added paralegals and support staff. To accommodate that growth, the employment law firm moved to offices with 4,300 square feet, a big boost from its original 2,900 square feet.

"We went from 207 original clients to 940 in two years," said Founding Partner **Jon Light**. "We had to move because we were sitting on top of each other."

But the firm only moved downstairs, staying in the same building at 760 Paseo Camarillo owned by **Equity Office Management** of Chicago and managed by **Hines** of Houston.

Light said the firm remained in the same building because it had five years on its lease. In order to convince Hines to pay for tenant improvements, Light signed a new 10-year lease. Financial details were not disclosed.

Light and **Karen Gabler** formed the firm 19 months ago after they left **Nordman Cormany Hair & Compton LLP**, an employment law firm in Oxnard.

Health Care Expert

Jenna Murphy, the new associate attorney at **Michelman & Robinson LLP** in Encino, brings a healthy outlook to her new job.

Murphy is a litigator specializing in health care cases. Specifically, she focuses on securing reimbursements for providers such as doctors groups and clinics, while also ensuring

the California Department of Healthcare Services complies with the law in setting its rates.

Previously, she was an attorney at the firm **Foley & Lardner LLP** in downtown Los Angeles, where she worked on business litigation cases involving consumer product liability, employment litigation, trademark and trade-secret infringement and white collar crime.

A graduate of UCLA Law School, Murphy serves as regional representative of the university's Young Alumni Development Council, which fosters alumni involvement within 10 years of graduation. In her pro bono work, she has handled Holocaust reparations cases through **Bet Tzedek**, a Jewish legal non-profit in Los Angeles.

Coastal View

Northrup Schlueter in Westlake Village has opened a second office in Santa Barbara in response to client requests.

The firm mostly represents construction contractors and developers in litigation or mediation proceedings. The catalyst for the move occurred when one client offered to rent the firm space in one of his buildings.

"All the pieces fell together," said Founding Partner **Linda Northrup**.

The firm's seven lawyers use the 1825 State St. office as needed. "It's only an hour away, so we all go up there frequently," she said. "It's a beautiful drive up the coast so we don't have trouble getting people to volunteer for assignments up there."

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