

Daily Journal

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Top 20 Under 40

Sorting... Navigating... Leading...

- Sorting out a pharmaceutical company's duty to monitor off-label use of its drugs
- Putting together contracts for the largest construction project in the nation in five years
- Working to overturn California's gay marriage ban
- Leading the equity practice of one of the world's largest law firms

• Navigating the legal rights of cancer patients
These are a few of the issues being tackled by those on our 2010 list of top California lawyers under age 40.

Finding standouts among a group of exceptional people is never easy. We reviewed 150 eligible nominations this year.

There were many impressive candidates; these 20 were a cut above. They found a way

to make an impact on the world outside their sphere. One didn't just defend a lawsuit for a client but works to change the law so that other companies wouldn't face a similar suit. Another takes time from his practice putting together marquee transactions for corporate clients to help a non-profit start a grocery store in an underserved area of Oakland. This is exceptionalism at its best. We urge you to read on and get to know these people.

— The Editors

David Willingham 38

CALDWELL LESLIE & PROCTOR
LOS ANGELES

LITIGATION

White-collar criminal defense

When David Willingham parted as deputy chief of the major frauds unit in the Los Angeles U.S. attorney's office in 2007, his firm Caldwell Leslie & Proctor had a niche carved out for him: co-chair of the white-collar crime and corporate compliance practice group. His decision to join a small, yet prominent firm ensured Willingham a helping hand in developing his practice.

He quickly proved his mettle by helping one client after another out of a tight spot. Most notably, Willingham turned heads when he persuaded Securities and

Exchange Commission lawyers not to file charges against his client Stanley Kurland, the one-time president of infamous mortgage lender Countrywide Financial.

Kurland's rise at Countrywide - from auditor to president - coincided closely with the company's increasing involvement in subprime and risky loan products. And the SEC eventually charged three other former top Countrywide executives for misleading investors about the company's true risks during this same time. Remarkably, the SEC never brought charges against Kurland.

Willingham is national co-chair of the American Bar Association's National Securities Fraud Committee, a position that no doubt has helped him tap into a network to receive client referrals. Recently, Willingham defended Illinois insurance executive Michael Barrett, who pleaded guilty to stalking ESPN sideline reporter Erin Andrews and videotaping her through a peephole in her hotel room. He and his partner Michael Proctor, also represented a Hasidic rabbi who faced a sentence of 10 years on criminal charges of tax evasion and money laundering. But they convinced prosecutors to recommend a more lenient sentence based on various mitigating factors.



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— Gabe Friedman