

Former U.S. Prosecutor Joins Caldwell Leslie

By Robert Iafolla
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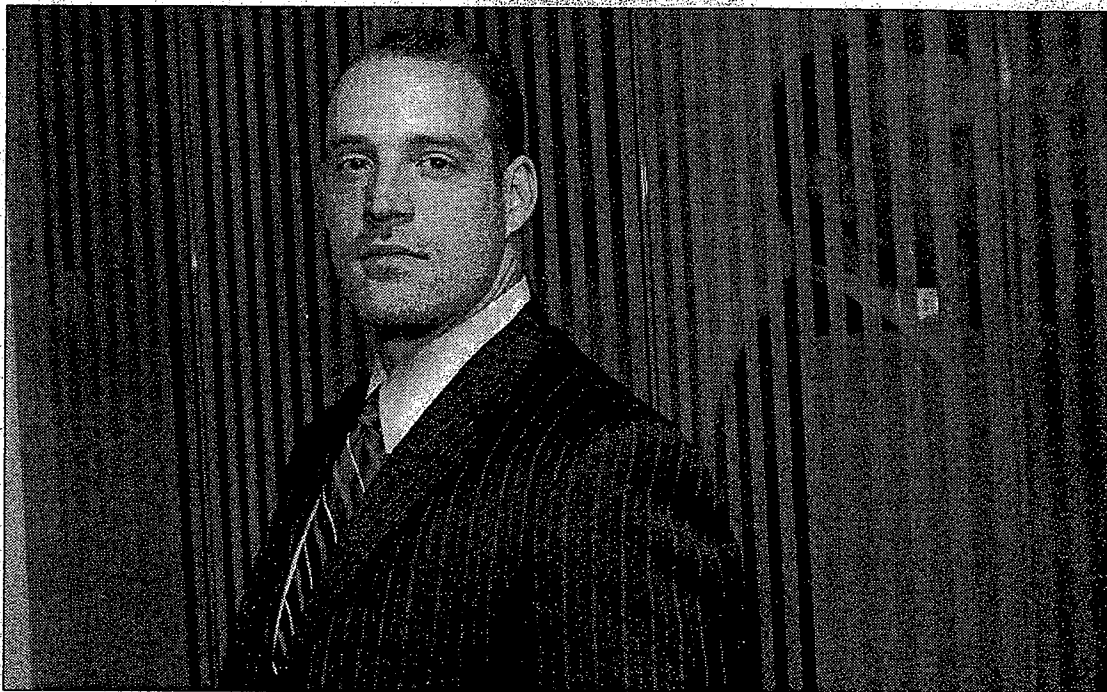
LOS ANGELES — The litigation boutique Caldwell Leslie & Proctor continued the expansion of its white-collar practice by adding former federal prosecutor David K. Willingham, who joins the firm as the co-chair of that practice group today.

Willingham, a six-year veteran of the Los Angeles U.S. attorney's office, most recently was deputy chief of the office's major frauds section, where he prosecuted Ralphs Grocery Co. for illegally rehiring locked-out employees. The case ended with a \$70 million plea agreement in November.

Willingham's hiring bolsters Caldwell Leslie's emerging white-collar practice group, which began when Michael Proctor joined the firm from the Los Angeles federal public defender's office in 2002. The firm has since represented prominent clients like Bruce Karatz, the former CEO of KB Home; L. Dennis Kozlowski, the former CEO of Tyco International; and Patrick Coughlin, name partner of Lerach Coughlin.

Legal industry observers said the firm is a rising star in Los Angeles, moving toward the elite echelon of litigation boutiques that include Beck, De-Corso, Daly, Kreindler & Harris; Bird, Marella, Boxer, Wolpert, Nessim, Drooks & Lincenberg; and Lightfoot Vandavelde Sadowsky Crouchley Rutherford & Levine.

Founding partner Christopher G. Caldwell said the white-collar practice is "a large and growing aspect" of the firm's overall business, which



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David K. Willingham is the new co-chair of the white-collar practice at Caldwell Leslie in Los Angeles. Formerly the deputy chief of the L.A. U.S. attorney's major frauds section, he most recently prosecuted Ralphs Grocery Co. for illegally rehiring locked-out employees. The case ended with a \$70 million plea agreement.

also covers general commercial litigation, entertainment, intellectual property, environmental and land use.

The firm added Proctor's name to the letterhead in October, in part to emphasize its white-collar practice.

Proctor, who continues to co-chair the white-collar group, had faced off against Willingham in court several times and pursued him after learning he was looking to leave the U.S. attorney's office.

"He has instant credibility and stature in the white-collar community," Proctor said. "We feel like we

won the lottery with Dave."

Richard Kolodny, president of the partner placement firm Portfolio Group Inc. who was not involved in the move, said for small, elite litigation boutiques like Caldwell Leslie, "there's always a premium placed on acquiring laterals with extensive trial experience, and the U.S. attorney's office is probably the best place in L.A. to find them."

Although Willingham described the decision to leave the U.S. attorney's office as "the hardest in my career," he said that, "after 6½ years, it was time to move on."

Rather than practicing at a larger firm where he likely would spend most of his time in the boardroom working on internal investigations, Willingham chose Caldwell Leslie because it affords him the opportunity to be in the courtroom representing clients, he said.

Before his tenure as a U.S. attorney, Willingham practiced at Lightfoot Vandavelde for three years. He earned his law degree from the USC Gould School of Law.

Caldwell Leslie has 18 attorneys in its sole office in downtown Los Angeles.