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Changes at top for law firms

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The largest law firm in the Tri-Counties has a new managing partner.

Scott Samsky is taking the reins at Oxnard-based Nordman Cormany Hair & Compton after Tony Trembley held the managing partner position for six years. The shift marks a continued changing of the guard in Ventura County, whose growth in the last 30 years has generated demand for more sophisticated services from the county's legal profession.

A lot has changed since Nordman Cormany was founded in 1939, but the firm has kept some clients for decades, even as the law has grown more complex and required attorneys to become specialists, Samsky said. The firm now has 38 attorneys.

"Not one of us is really a jack of all trades that tries to do everything for our clients," he said. "But we'll all use our expertise to try to lend the client a hand. I think that's key to our success."

Though new crops of attorneys join Ventura County's legal profession each year, Trembley and now Samsky

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represent a changing of the guard in the industry's leadership as a generation of lawyers retires. And Samsky said Nordman Cormany is already focused on developing the firm's next group of leaders.

"My generation, we're in our fifties right now. We were the generation that the practice was turned over to in the last 10 years. I think it's very important to plan and to manage the law firm forward that way and bring on new young leaders."

For Michael Bradbury, who served as a Ventura County's District Attorney for 25 years before moving into private practice, this isn't the first generational change in legal leadership he's seen. When he first came to the county, Ben Nordman, who founded Nordman Cormany in 1939 in Port Hueneme, was just preparing to retire. Something similar has happened over the past few years.

"I think we're probably seeing a changing of the guard," Bradbury said. "Our generation is passing the torch."

Bradbury said the county's legal needs have become much more sophisticated as land use, intellectual property and labor laws have become increasingly complex and, for some plaintiff-side attorneys, lucrative. A shift also took place on the criminal bar where he spent most of his career.

"When I started, you were typically a generalist," Bradbury said. "You tried anything and everything, and through a process of maturation and being there long enough, you got to try murder cases and death penalty cases. The average length of service when I got there was three years. That began

to change, and there was more interest in making a career of prosecution."

At Nordman Cormany, specialties have taken off, Samsky said. While the firm's bankruptcy practice has been booming during the recession, labor and employment law have quietly grown into the firm's largest-growing practice.

"You see more and more businesses needing that kind of counsel," Samsky said. "With more laws and regulations, they just need more advice."

At the same time, younger lawyers are coming out of law school with spe-

cialties already in mind and, in some cases, practically developed. Bradbury recently moved to the 14-attorney Ventura-based Anderson Kill Wood & Bender, a firm that has successfully carved out a niche in representing businesses against their insurers in disputes.

"These are very, very bright young men and women. I couldn't hold a candle to them when I was their age," Bradbury said of his new firm's younger attorneys. "Their education is much more diverse."

At Ventura's Ferguson Case Orr Paterson, the generational shift took place about four years ago, when Doug Kulper took the managing partner position. That position is now held by Michael Velthoen, also part of a younger generation at the firm.

"The older folks yielding to the younger folks is something you think through," Michael Case said. "Even though we may have done some good things to get our firm in a spot where we grew from three to 25 [attorneys], that doesn't mean the good things we did in the past are going to keep us at 25 or take us beyond 25."

For his part, Samsky is looking to be a good steward and keep Nordman Cormany's legacy in place for the next generation of lawyers at the firm.

"We've been here for 70 years, and we hope to be here for another 70 years and then some," Samsky said.

At a glance
Several tri-county law firms have had major leadership changes.