

After a slow start, Dechert gains firm footing in LA

East Coast corporate firm banks on litigators in Los Angeles and finds success

By **Kylie Reynolds**
Daily Journal Staff Writer

LOS ANGELES — Edwin V. Woodsome knew there would be challenges when he launched Dechert LLP's Los Angeles office.

The former head of litigation at Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP took the leap in April 2011 with three other Orrick litigators. Philadelphia-based Dechert is known on the East Coast for its corporate and finance practices but hadn't enjoyed the same name recognition in Los Angeles.

"It really hadn't made a big impression in terms of the litigation market or obviously the L.A. market," Woodsome said. "That has been a challenge for a lot of large firms based outside the city."

Three years later, the office's partners say it's gained momentum. With steady growth and new practices, the office is turning Dechert into a Los Angeles success story.

"It seems as though we've reached a sort of tipping point here," Woodsome said. "We're seeing more and more folks interested in coming on with us in a variety of different practice areas."

Los Angeles was one of the firm's final frontiers in the state. It has had an office in San Francisco since 2002, as well as offices in Mountain View and Irvine. Dechert was looking to break into the city for some time, Woodsome said, and the Orrick team — which included William W. Oxley, Christopher S. Ruhland and Andrew S. Wong — provided local ties and an expertise that paired nicely with the firm's existing client base.

With steady lateral acquisitions, the firm now has 15 attorneys. The expansion has



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Edwin V. Woodsome, who started Dechert LLP's L.A. office in 2011

been strategic, Oxley said, and much of the growth has occurred in the last year or so.

Woodsome attributes the growth spurt in part to Dechert's increased visibility in the city. The partners started out attending bar events to keep the Dechert name circulating in Los Angeles. That's become less of a need as more attorneys come on board, creating a "snowball effect" of sorts, he said.

Legal recruiter Larry Watanabe, who brokered the deal that launched the office, said its gradual growth reflects the more measured approach firms are taking nowadays. It's less about quickly reaching a critical mass and more about expanding in strategic practice areas, he said.

"Dechert's a firm that doesn't enter the marketplace and say they need to be 100 lawyers or 150 lawyers," Watanabe said. "Their strategy has been fruitful. They've been successful."

While the four founders are trial attorneys, they never intended to restrict the office's

work to litigation. They've added corporate and finance practices to more closely mirror those in the firm's other locations. The office snagged energy project development and finance partner Lloyd J. MacNeil from Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP in December. In February, real estate and corporate partner Philippe Phaneuf moved over from Greenberg Traurig LLP.

"Now that we have a couple of folks in these groups integrating, it'll make it easier," MacNeil said.

The office hopes to add white collar and bankruptcy attorneys soon. But Woodsome is cautious about setting growth goals.

"We're twice the size we were a year ago, and will we be twice the size we are next year? I really don't know," he said. "But in three years time, I should think we'll be significantly more of a legal presence than we already are."

kylie_reynolds@dailyjournal.com