

Dechert's LA Managing Partner On The Firm's Calif. Growth

By Rachel Rippetoe

Law360 (August 31, 2021, 3:16 PM EDT) -- Dechert LLP welcomed two lateral hires to its San Francisco office last week, continuing a string of recent additions in the Golden State.

The firm hired Hartley West, a former federal prosecutor, and Rick Horvath, a corporate governance litigator from Paul Hastings LLP. The pair were just the latest to join the BigLaw firm in California in recent months.

The firm added a product liability trial team led by partners Kim Branscome and Jay Bhimani to the Los Angeles office in 2020. And in January, it hired IP litigator Jennifer Swan away from Finnegan Henderson Farabow Garrett & Dunner LLP to join the firm's Silicon Valley office.



Kim Branscome

Law360 Pulse caught up with Branscome, who is now the managing partner of Dechert's Los Angeles office, to chat about the firm's strategic growth on the West Coast. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

You guys have been adding several attorneys to the Bay Area offices, and also to the Los Angeles office. Why now in California? And what are some of the ways you're looking to grow even further?

The expansion of the California offices of Dechert are sort of just a natural extension of the firm's existing client relationships. What we're trying to do is capitalize off of strong areas where we have either relationships, or the practice itself is very active in California. For example, I have clients that are always getting sued in California for a variety of reasons. And so, you know, it's a really natural fit to expand out here.

We've had the opportunity to bring on some really top flight talent in San Francisco. And we're in discussions with people in Los Angeles. It's an exciting time. And from the firm's standpoint, we view the West Coast fairly holistically, because we see a lot of interaction between Southern and Northern California. We have active cases, both in Los Angeles and in my own practice up in Alameda County.

It's a time when we're looking at: What are Dechert's core strengths? And then we're looking for people who fit that model and can help us grow and expand and bring more of a presence to the West Coast.

Are there any trends in particular going on in California right now that are making the region attractive to firms? Or increasing the client demand for litigation or corporate governance?

There are a number of statutes and provisions in California procedure that have always made it an attractive venue for plaintiff lawyers suing companies. When they're looking at, do they have enough plaintiffs to make a litigation worthwhile? The California population provides them sufficient numbers, but then there's also things like consumer protection statutes that make it appealing to sue here.

There are two things that are particularly interesting at the moment. One is, what is the effect of the backlog from the pandemic on the California court system?

For the most part, California courts had a fairly strict view of COVID protocols and actions, and so they're facing a significant backlog and trying to deal with, how do you get high volumes of cases through the court system as it's gradually opening up?

But then they're also looking at the impact of the Delta variant and have actually closed back up again, to some degree. I think you're seeing the effect of that backlog and courts having to get creative about how they move the case of dockets right now, which makes California a very interesting place to be a litigator.

And then the other thing that you're seeing, and this is something that really kind of took off with the opioid litigation, is the concept of government entities actually bringing suits against large private companies with the assistance of private plaintiffs lawyers. I wouldn't say it's a new area; it's always had some existence, but it's becoming increasingly something we look out for on behalf of our clients. And there are certain provisions in California that make this an attractive place to do it.

A lot of firms are expanding and making inroads in California. As you guys have been making lateral hires, what is that hiring market like? And how do you stand out in the crowd when you're looking for talented hires?

The best kind of lateral hire is one that is exciting on both ends, meaning there's something about Dechert that makes us a very attractive place for someone to build their business, and then we find a candidate who has an interesting business or skill set and fits our culture.

You could think of the lateral market as just a competitive marketplace, but I actually think what we're looking for is a really good fit, not just kind of competing with everyone else who's trying to get talent right now.

The addition of Rick, and even the partners that we've moved internally out to the West Coast — and then we brought on Jennifer Swan earlier this year — everyone is carefully selected, and they're selecting us in a way that we really see it fitting in with the national platform and with the ability to grow in the West Coast. The goal is to find a mutually beneficial relationship rather than just competing with higher offers or things like that.

In the pandemic in particular, are there challenges with creating synergies between practice groups and integrating all these new hires into the firm?

It's interesting because I actually joined the firm at the beginning of the pandemic. So I am someone who was integrated and someone who is helping integrate others. I have to say that Dechert did a

phenomenal job of integrating my practice. And I'm taking a bunch of those tools and tips, and we're making sure to use them with our incoming partners.

A lot of it was just having contact with our partners and learning about each other's business. And in some ways, having the pandemic made that a little smoother because everyone was interacting over platforms like Zoom and Teams.

So even if you're the new kid on the block, you're joining the practice group meeting in the same way that everyone else is. I actually found that it was really natural and nice. I got to know a lot of our overseas partners in a way that, if you were having to go there in person, would be much more limiting to do with a very busy practice.

Everybody who comes in, they have some pre-existing relationships, but then the firm really makes a concerted effort to reach out and identify where its incoming practices are synergistic with ones that already exist. There's cross-staffing, a lot of repeated contact, and the next thing you know, you feel like you've been here forever.

--Editing by Alyssa Miller.