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LAW FIRM BUSINESS

Soccer field encounter forms lasting relationship

By Saul Sugarman and David McAfee
Daily Journal Staff Writers

LAGUNA BEACH — For William S. O'Hare, a chance encounter at an opportune time led to a meeting with a corporate client with whom he would work for the next 19 years.

O'Hare, a partner with Snell & Wilmer LLP in Orange County, met Patricia Mansur-Brown, vice president and in-house counsel for the franchising arm of Prudential Real Estate Affiliates, on a soccer field in Laguna Beach where his kindergartened son was facing off against hers. The somewhat unconventional, grassy networking venue helped strengthen the bond between the two lawyers.

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— William S. O'Hare

"Holding a couple conversations on the soccer field didn't quite solidify the relationship, but it motivated Patti to set up some introductions at Prudential," O'Hare said.

For O'Hare, meeting a new business connection at a family function in Laguna Beach is almost commonplace. The tiny Orange County community is teeming with residents who would rather do business with friends than through more traditional networking channels, he said. But the chance meeting was a standout one for Mansur-Brown, and she said it's gone a long way to keep the partnership going over the years.

"I thought it was very serendipitous," she said. "At the time, Prudential was very young in the franchising business, and the company's small stable of approved counsel



Ben Adlin / Daily Journal

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didn't include someone knowledgeable on franchising matters."

Mansur-Brown said she knew O'Hare was a keeper almost immediately following their first meeting, which happened to be at a time when her department was embroiled in a trademark infringement battle. At the same time, Mansur-Brown was desperate to find a firm that specialized in franchise-

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focused litigation; the boutique firm that had handled Prudential's casework had "imploded," she said.

Firm Lawyer: William S. O'Hare, Snell & Wilmer LLP, Orange County

Client: Patricia Mansur-Brown, vice president and corporate counsel, BRER Affiliates, Inc. (formerly Prudential Real Estate Affiliates), Irvine

Practice Area: commercial litigation, franchise litigation, intellectual property litigation

Length of Relationship: 19 years

Key Cases for Client: Prosecution and defense of actions in state and federal court throughout U.S. against franchisees, competitors and others to protect client's franchise system, trademarks and contract rights.

"I needed to find another firm right away," she said.

Mansur-Brown sent O'Hare to handle a trademark case in California's High Desert

and he achieved a positive result. The experience was a good one for the attorneys at Snell & Wilmer, too, according to O'Hare. He said his team was given a chance to work with many executives at Prudential, not just the in-house attorneys, an important step to forging bonds with in-house departments.

"Patti made sure we got vetted with everyone [at Prudential]. It's very important to her that a firm has not just a compatibility with a law department, but a compatibility with business people and support staff," O'Hare said. "That's something we certainly strive to have at Snell & Wilmer."

Their partnership has survived for two

reasons, according to the lawyers. The first is simple: they won the case. The second, Mansur-Brown said, is O'Hare's continued commitment to Prudential.

"Bill is always there for me," she said. "I don't know how his family feels about it, but even when he's traveling abroad, if I reach out, he reaches back. That's important."

Over the last two decades of partnership, Mansur-Brown and O'Hare have had their fair share of obstacles, too. In the early 2000s, the two attorneys were arguing a case against a company in Pittsburgh, PA, that had "deposition after deposition after deposition" that forced them to spend countless

days away from their Southern California homes, according to Mansur-Brown.

"Travel is never pleasant under any circumstances, and in many ways, it really tested our personal relationship," she said.

Through thick and thin, however, their dynamic relationship has continued and flourished. According to O'Hare, the work coming in from Prudential and Mansur-Brown remains steady even today.

"The needs of Prudential are fairly continuous," O'Hare said. "There has certainly never been a month that's gone by without some interaction on some item, whether it's legal advice or a lawsuit."