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L.A.'s Top 100 Lawyers

LOS ANGELES is known as the capital for lawyers. After all, “L.A. Law” was the name of a television series years ago. But which of L.A.’s many lawyers are regarded as stand-outs? To find out, the Business Journal’s legal affairs reporter, Alexa Hyland, surveyed local recruiters, various legal experts and, of course, lawyers themselves to help her distill a list of the Top 100 Lawyers. They are presented on the following pages, grouped in 12 practice areas, such as litigation, real estate and (appropriately for L.A.) media and entertainment. Besides listing the requisite name, age and law firm, the Business Journal took the extra step of asking what’s on each lawyer’s bucket list and what their colleagues don’t know about them, among other questions. We discovered, for example, that Jeff Modisett prosecuted volatile boxer Mike Tyson, that Richard de Bodo once ran a career counseling program in Eskimo and Aleut villages in Alaska, and that Susan Fowler-McNally was one of the original Boogie-Boarders – and still rides one. Many more details of L.A.’s legal life emerge in this Who’s Who in Law section, which profiles local lawyers who are highly regarded by their peers.

▶ Government Affairs

GEORGE KIEFFER, 61

FIRM: Manatt, Phelps & Phillips, LLP
www.manatt.com

LAW SCHOOL: UCLA

CLIENTS: AT&T, Goldman Sachs, Toyota Motor Sales Corp., Burlington Santa Fe Railway, Forest City Development, Applied Materials Inc.

George Kieffer has presented arguments in front of the Los Angeles City Council, California Coastal Commission and the Metropolitan Transit Authority of Los Angeles County, among other agencies. But the toughest crowds he said he’s faced actually came at gigs while a struggling singer-songwriter.

“I remember playing the Troubadour club and being so nervous,” said Kieffer, who in 1976 at age 28 took a year off from practicing law to attempt going full-time as a musician. “Music has been the only competing interest to law in my life. I always felt comfortable practicing law in front of judges following some objective framework, but in art, it’s all subjective and there aren’t laws.”

Kieffer has been with Manatt, Phelps & Phillips since graduating from UCLA law school 36 years ago. Hired when the firm only had eight attorneys, he is now a partner in a



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West Los Angeles firm that has grown to 300 lawyers. He serves as chairman of the government and regulatory policy division.

Manatt has allowed him to take periodic breaks for, as he puts it, “good behavior” to write a book, study musical theater, and serve as chairman of one of two committees responsible for revising the Los Angeles City Charter

in 1999 – the first such reworking in 75 years.

“That’s my proudest moment, seeing something I helped craft approved by the voters to help the government function better,” Kieffer said. “When I was a kid I was always fascinated with the U.S. Constitution, so this was, in a very small way, getting to live the process myself.”

Although he’s a Democrat, he maintains ties on both sides of the aisle. This summer, Kieffer was appointed by Republican Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger to the University of California Board of Regents. It wasn’t entirely surprising: Kieffer has been a personal attorney for Schwarzenegger’s wife, Maria Shriver, both before and since she became the first lady.

The UC post has special meaning for Kieffer, who did his undergraduate studies at University of California-Santa Barbara before going to law school at UCLA.

Kieffer marched in rallies opposing hikes in tuition in the 1970s but now is set to vote in November on possible fee increases amid the state’s economic crisis.

“It’s a little ironic but I know what it’s like to be on both sides of the issues the university system is grappling with and I care about its well-being,” he said. “That’s the perspective I’m hoping to bring in.”

– Francisco Vara-Orta