

## Veteran trial attorneys form new firm

### Chapin and Wheeler will focus on plaintiffs

*Special to The Daily Transcript*

At a time in their lives when most attorneys would not want leave the comfort of an established law firm, veteran trial attorneys Edward Chapin and Joseph "Jay" Wheeler have formed their own firm: **Chapin Wheeler LLP**.

The new firm will focus on the representation both of individuals in traditional plaintiffs' matters, as well as of businesses as plaintiffs in complex business disputes.

"Ed and I have been practicing law for a substantial amount of time," Wheeler said. "We recently started talking about building our own firm that would center on the type of work that we want to do and the way we want to practice. For example, in addition to representing individuals, we want to represent businesses as plaintiffs in cases that aren't appropriate for big firms with fixed hourly rates, but which instead are better suited for more creative and result-oriented fee arrangements. In addition, we will still do some defense work, but we are going to be more selective in that area."

Wheeler was previously with Latham & Watkins, where he was a senior partner and chaired the San Diego Litigation Department from 1996 to 2000.

Chapin echoed Wheeler's comments.

"We want our new firm to stay small, focus on serious and complex litigation, and be economical for our clients," he said. "Both Jay and I have had trial experience in lots of different areas. We are not so much focused on particular legal areas, but rather certain types of cases -- those that are significant to the client and which have a good chance of ending up being resolved in a courtroom in front of a judge or a jury."

Chapin was most recently a partner at Gordon & Rees in San Diego.

Chapin came to San Diego in 1972 to join the city attorney's office after graduating from the University of Missouri School of Law. He eventually went into private practice and built a reputation as a strong, solid litigator. Other attorneys have taken note of Chapin's litigation skills and expertise -- he has been voted by his peers as one of The Best Lawyers in America every year since 1989.

In addition, in 2001, he received the Daniel T. Broderick III Award for epitomizing the highest standards of civility, integrity and professionalism. Throughout his career, Chapin has litigated in a variety of legal areas ranging from business litigation, toxic torts and product liability to insurance coverage and bad faith, unfair business practices, and professional negligence of attorneys and health care providers.



The newly established Chapin Wheeler team:  
Ed Chapin, left, Jill Houlahan and Jay Wheeler

He has tried a significant number of cases to verdict, including serving as lead counsel for the chemical manufacturer featured in the movie "Erin Brockovich." In his "spare time," Chapin stays active in several law-related associations, including the American Board of Trial Advocates and the San Diego County Bar Association.

Wheeler also has a well-earned reputation as a winning litigator. He has tried numerous cases in both state and federal court and has achieved many significant recoveries on behalf of his clients in amounts as high as \$15 million.

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After attending West Point, serving time in the military and attending the University of Virginia School of Law, Wheeler began his career with Latham & Watkins in Los Angeles in 1979, but moved to Latham's San Diego office in 1982 to help build the office's litigation practice.

He has tried cases in many substantive areas, including insurance bad faith, intellectual property, business torts, real estate and construction disputes, partnership disputes, securities claims, employment claims, breach of contract, franchise disputes and environmental claims.

Wheeler has put his engineering background to good use, not only in the courtroom in cases involving intellectual property, environmental, medical and health care, engineering and construction, and warranty/products liability issues, but also in the office. The firm features state-of-the-art technology that streamlines the management of cases, allowing the firm to do more in less time and with less staff.

Chapin and Wheeler have been friends and neighbors in Point Loma for years. Their status as both Army and Vietnam veterans has strengthened their bond. The idea for Chapin Wheeler LLP evolved over numerous discussions about the practice of law in the current legal environment.

Rounding out the Chapin Wheeler legal team will be senior litigation associate Jill Houlahan, a Harvard Law School *cum laude* graduate who Wheeler worked with while at Latham & Watkins. Houlahan, who has practiced for seven years, has an impressive record as a litigator. Experienced paralegal Amy Smith has also joined the firm.

Chapin Wheeler has set up shop in One American Plaza.

"We're looking forward to building our firm and getting the best results for our clients," Chapin said.

"And we'll enjoy doing it our way," Wheeler added.

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