

# Full Palette

*Sauer & Wagner litigates, counsels and mediates employment and other matters.*

By Shane Nelson

Special to the Daily Journal

When his former partner decided to move into full time private neutral work elsewhere, attorney Gerald L. Sauer found himself at a crossroads.

"If I couldn't find someone to take over that part of the practice, which had been profitable. What was I going to do?" Sauer said, referring to the robust book of employment counseling business his partner was leaving behind. "Was I just going to allow that to evaporate?"

Los Angeles based Sauer & Wagner LLP celebrated its 25th anniversary last spring, but the five-attorney civil litigation firm did so without co-founder Eve H. Wagner, who left in 2019 to join Signature Resolution.

A longtime litigator — who still focuses frequently on commercial, real estate and entertainment disputes — Sauer had also tackled employment litigation matters over the years, but he said he wasn't well positioned to take on the day-to-day counseling work with employers Wagner had built up for the firm.

In late 2019, meanwhile, Sauer met attorney Sonya D. Goodwin, a 2011 UCLA School of Law graduate who began her career handling plaintiff-side employment litigation before she moved to defense work for larger firms, including Littler Mendelson PC.

"I met Gerald for lunch, and it seemed like a great fit just personally wise as well as what he was looking for and what I was looking for," Goodwin recalled. "Afterward, I just was like jumping for joy. It just seemed like it was just the perfect opportunity for me."

Goodwin joined Sauer & Wagner in December 2019 and now heads



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Seated are Gerald L. Sauer and Sonya D. Goodwin; Standing, from left, Amir A. Torkamani, Robert S. Chapman and Gregory P. Barchie,

its employment practice, a role that includes litigation and compliance counseling.

"Some of my clients I talk to almost on a daily basis if they have employment issues or there's an employee complaint or there are questions about paid sick leave, COVID issues — basically everything," she explained. "Then I also litigate — both on the employer and employee side. I do mostly defense work, but we're building our plaintiff practice as well. At any given time, I have maybe two or three plaintiffs' cases."

Sauer noted that he and Goodwin

have worked on some of those litigations together since she joined, and her addition to the firm has been an overwhelming success.

"She took over Eve's practice, and we didn't lose a single client. The clients love her," Sauer said. "And my relationship with Sonya is certainly collaborative. ... She is very quick to pick up the phone and ask me for advice."

Another compelling component about the chance to join Sauer & Wagner was that Goodwin would also have an opportunity to pursue a mediation practice. Goodwin has

taken part in more than 40 employment mediations as a volunteer settlement officer through the Los Angeles Superior Court's Resolve Law program, and she recently launched a private mediation practice at Sauer & Wagner.

"I really, really enjoy feeling like I'm more a part of the resolution of cases and helping parties move on with their lives," she explained, "whether it's an employee or a company that wants to continue to run its business without having to worry about litigation."

Litigator Frank E. Marchetti

is really what got it done. And to be that persistent on a volunteer basis really impressed me."

Employment and the recently launched mediation practice are, however, still only a part of what Sauer & Wagner focuses on overall. The firm continues to handle commercial, entertainment, real estate and intellectual property litigation as well as appellate work. And Sauer — who was an equity partner at Greenberg Glusker Fields Claman & Machtinger LLP before he decided to hang a shingle with Wagner — noted the firm's objectives remain very much in line with those they started out with in 1997.

"The goal was not to build a big firm," Sauer said, "but to build a firm that was doing the same work but in a different environment."

Litigator Kyle Kveton has opposed Sauer on some cases, including what he described as "a messy and contentious" employment dispute that eventually ended up in trial. Kveton said Sauer has always been a well prepared, formidable and trustworthy attorney.

"He is in the best sense of the word a zealous advocate," Kveton said. "He fights for his clients, and he fights for claims he believes in. We may be on the opposite side of things, but I've never seen him advance a claim that I thought was not something he firmly believed was a righteous one."

Kveton added that he's enjoyed his cases against Sauer, in part, because he's an opponent who knows what he's doing.

"Trials are always difficult," Kveton said. "But I always feel like it's a good fight when I fight with him."

worked recently with Goodwin to settle a discrimination and wage-and-hour dispute through the Resolve Law program, and he said she was tremendously well prepared and extremely knowledgeable about employment law. He also noted that Goodwin's follow-up after the initial session ultimately played a big role in getting the case resolved.

"She went above and beyond what I usually see," Marchetti said. "I've had judges who let a case like ours go an hour into a mediation because we were so far apart. But she was very persistent, and that persistence