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TOP BOUTIQUES IN 2020 CALIFORNIA

LITIGATION

Sanders Roberts LLP

LOS ANGELES

Justin H. Sanders and Reginald Roberts Jr. met as freshmen at Morehouse College in Atlanta, Ga. Their destiny as law partners seemed set when they realized each was headed west to USC Gould School of Law.

“We’ve grown a friendship into a partnership,” said Sanders, who founded the firm in 2008 after working as an associate at Sheppard, Mullin, Richter & Hampton LLP, as a Los Angeles deputy city attorney and as a senior associate at Sidley Austin LLP. Roberts had gone to work at the business law firm now known as AlvaradoSmith LLP, and who joined Sanders in 2011.

“We were law school roommates and we kept in touch,” Sanders said. Added Roberts, “We have always bounced ideas off each other. It was a natural fit for us to come together to work as law partners.”

The two complement one another, finishing each other’s thoughts in an interview and demonstrating a unity of purpose. “Reggie and I are committed to trying to be the best,” Sanders said. “We weren’t satisfied with being just another law firm in town. We wanted to show we could run a top-flight firm where all our people enjoy their work. We’ve become one of the more diverse firms around.”

By 2016 Sanders Roberts’ attorney roster had grown to seven. Today it stands at 20 lawyers.

“We’ve doubled and redoubled



Justin L. Stewart / Daily Journal

Sanders Roberts LLP attorneys from left to right, Melvin L. Felton II, Sabrina C. Narain, Reginald Roberts Jr., Cynthia Y. Sun and Justin H. Sanders.

in size,” Sanders said. “We’ve had some big trial victories and greatly expanded our client base.”

The firm served as lead trial counsel for a major municipal client in defense of an employee whistleblower case. The city retained Sanders Roberts after five years of litigation with extensive media coverage and pending discovery and evidentiary issues. After four weeks of trial at which the plaintiff’s lawyers asked the jury for \$30 million, the verdict was 12-0 for the defense.

“We frequently get called in after cases are worked up by others and the defendant realizes there are significant trial risks,” Sanders said.

Client Southern California Edison retained Sanders Roberts as lead trial counsel in the successful defense of a federal whistleblower and Sarbanes-Oxley employment case. “We narrowed the scope of the complaint through an anti-SLAPP motion and a motion for summary adjudication,” said Roberts, who tried the case with law partner Melvin L. Felton and R.

Anthony Young, a special counsel to the firm. *Wagner v. Southern California Edison Co.*, 2:16-cv-06259 (C.D. Cal., filed Aug. 19, 2016).

Plaintiff Thomas H. Wagner claimed he’d been wrongly fired in retaliation for reporting alleged Sarbanes-Oxley Act violations. Roberts contended that Wagner, a longtime SCE employee had been properly terminated for submitting falsified timesheets after a long history of documented insubordination, workplace hostility and disciplinary actions.

At trial before U.S. District Judge Otis D. Wright II of Los Angeles, Roberts secured a defense verdict on the remaining employment claims, though the jury returned a nominal \$300 award on a portion of a defamation claim. “We also filed a motion to recover fees and costs associated with the anti-SLAPP motion, which was granted in full,” Roberts said.

The plaintiff appealed; the matter is currently before a 9th U.S. Circuit

Court of Appeals panel. “As was his practice, Plaintiff apparently believed that reporting an unsubstantiated SOX violation would insulate him from disciplinary action for his own misconduct,” Roberts wrote in court papers.

Another recent case settled on confidential terms after a public agency retained Sanders Roberts to defend against claims by a motorcyclist injured in an accident. Sanders said he and his team were able to investigate and highlight defects in the plaintiff’s case. “I got brought in 120 days before trial was set,” he added. “I located and deposed witnesses who had not been identified; they made admissions devastating to the plaintiff’s case and he came to the table for a deal.”

Sanders and Roberts said they’re determined to maintain high-quality representation of clients and to continue to expand. “We’re proud of what we’ve built, but we’re not slowing down,” Roberts said.

— John Roemer