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TOP CALIFORNIA LAW FIRMS

Logging a String of Big Wins in Labor & Employment

By Sara Randazzo
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When wage-and-hour class actions strike — and in California, they often do — Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton LLP's labor and employment group is poised to defend them.

Los Angeles-based practice group co-chair Kelly L. Hensley said wage-and-hour class action defense is the department's strong suit. One of its rainmakers, Richard J. Simmons, actually wrote a treatise on the subject, now in its 14th edition and used by employers and attorneys throughout the state.

But like many of the firm's practices, the labor and employment group has worked over the past few years to expand its scope.

Last November, the team gained five members from Littler Mendelson P.C. in

San Francisco, led by partners Ronald J. Holland and Ellen M. Bronchetti, both of whom Hensley said boosted the firm's expertise in traditional labor work. Earlier in the year, it added Richard W. Kopenhefer from McDermott Will & Emery, who brought an entertainment-focused labor and employment practice to the firm, as well as a group of eight labor and employment lawyers from Seyfarth Shaw LLP.

The group has also bolstered its use of compliance training to help clients prevent future problems. A frequently updated firm blog on the latest developments in labor and employment law is part of that pre-emptive strategy.

"Our clients really like our blog; they find it very helpful," Hensley said, adding that San Diego partner William V. Whelan is constantly on the lookout for updates, making sure they get posted right away.

The past year brought a string of

successes for clients, who range from transnational corporations to local hospitals.

The state Supreme Court ruled in favor of longtime client Hawaiian Gardens Casino, represented by Los Angeles partner Tracey A. Kennedy, in a wage-and-hour class action brought by more than 5,000 dealers seeking to recover tips in excess of \$25 million.

Teams of attorneys obtained complete defense jury verdicts in a sexual harassment case for client Costco Wholesale Corp. and a case for Hyundai Information Services North America that initially had 12 causes of action but got whittled down to claims for overtime pay and meal- and rest-break violations.

The labor and employment team also scored successful outcomes for clients McKesson Corp., CalPortland Co., Chipotle Mexican Grill and Cox Petroleum Transportation, among others.