

Costume Change

When longtime trial attorney Douglas DeVries sought a role change in the career he loved, mediation fit the bill.

By Susan McRae
Daily Journal Staff Writer

LOS ANGELES — Douglas DeVries said he didn't get burned out or tired of litigating, and he definitely wasn't ready to retire.

ADR Profile

But after 35 years, he said he was looking for a different outlet — something that would keep him involved at the same level of mental activity and interaction with the law but at a slower pace than his plaintiff-side practice focusing on personal injury, insurance coverage and bad faith.

"Something starts to change in your mind," said the 66-year-old DeVries, tapping his temple. "I don't know what it is. You get to the point in life where your attitudes tell you, 'You know, I think I'll do something different.'"

He said he'd always had a pas-

sion for helping people and sharing knowledge, something he said is essential to being a mediator. And he'd been a participant in hundreds of mediations during his years of practice.

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So he signed up for a course at Pepperdine University School of Law's Straus Institute for Dispute Resolution. He also bought books on mediation and sought advice from mediators he'd used in the past.

By December 2010, he wound down his Sacramento and San Francisco offices and began embarking

on his new career as a neutral. He devoted the first six months to organizing and doing outreach to let lawyers know he'd made the switch.

But it wasn't until he joined Judicate West in September that he began the work full time.

In the short period he's been at it, plaintiffs' and defense lawyers who've used his mediation services said they're impressed with his skill in dealing with parties and their lawyers. They said his years of experience in the insurance industry and in handling personal injury cases gives him trust and credibility with both sides of the bar.

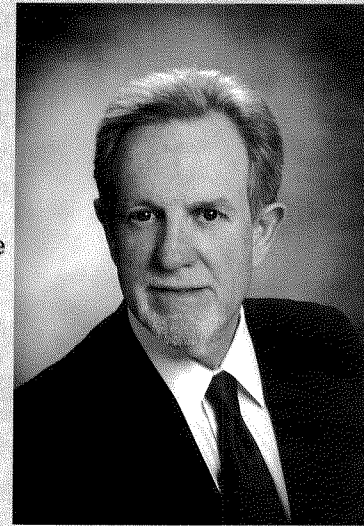
Defense lawyer Horace Green of San Francisco's Green & Humbert said he worked opposite DeVries on many cases during the past 20 years in which DeVries represented

Douglas DeVries

Judicate West
Statewide

Specialty: Insurance coverage and bad faith; commercial; employment; major personal injury; products liability; professional malpractice

Age: 66



plaintiffs and found him a "tenacious litigator but honest, reasonable and fair." He said DeVries displays those same qualities as a mediator.

Green said DeVries' years of experience representing claimants gives plaintiffs' lawyers and their clients the confidence that he understands what they're going through. From the defense side, he said DeVries has a sense of a case's value and the odds of prevailing at trial.

"It helps to have gone through the process a number of times as Doug has," Green said.

Plaintiffs' lawyer Anthony Poidmore of Roseville, who didn't know DeVries in his premediation days, said he used him to mediate a medical malpractice case and was so impressed that he recommended him for an employment sexual ha-

arrassment claim. He said both cases settled.

"I'd use him again in a minute," Poidmore said, "because whether a case settles or not, you know you're getting your best shot."

While DeVries so far has handled only mediations, he said he's open to presiding over arbitrations and working as a discovery referee. He's also on Kaiser Permanente's arbitration neutrals list and the state and federal court mediation panels in Sacramento and San Francisco.

Born in New York City, DeVries moved with his family to Pasadena when he was 14. After earning an undergraduate degree from UCLA, he enrolled in graduate school at California State University, Long Beach with the idea of teaching. But the draft intervened. Though

he never went to Vietnam, he served stateside as a counterintelligence agent, a job he described as "mostly dry, not spy novel stuff."

After his discharge in 1971, he completed his master's degree at California State University, Northridge but found it difficult to land a teaching job. On the suggestion of his father, who grew up during the Great Depression and believed in pursuing a profession such as medicine or law, and advice of a professor who thought he'd be well suited to the legal field he decided to enroll at McGeorge School of Law in Sacramento.

His first job on graduating in 1976 was with a Sacramento firm with a high volume of personal injury, prod-

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uct liability and medical malpractice cases going to trial. During his first six months at the firm, he said he tried four cases to verdict.

It wasn't long before he opened his own plaintiffs' practice in Sacramento handling cases involving catastrophic personal injury, wrongful death, medical malpractice and products liability, as well as various insurance coverage and business cases. In 1990, he began limiting his practice primarily to handling insurance coverage and bad-faith litigation, including some class actions.

In 1994, he was elected president of the California Trial Lawyers Association, now Consumer Attorneys of California, an organization of more than 3,000 attorneys representing consumer plaintiffs.

Although he lives in Sacramento, he said he's available for work statewide and recently conducted several mediations in Los Angeles.

The most important thing he's learned about the process so far, he said, is that it's dynamic and varied and that you can't approach it with a one-size-

fits-all formula.

"Every side in a mediation is different," he said. "Even in the room, people on the same side are different from one another. People process information differently, make decisions differently, react to input from a neutral differently. Some people are risk averse. Some people embrace risk. And that's just the beginning."

Here are some of the lawyers who've appeared before DeVries in mediations: David Lillenstein, DL Law Group, San Francisco; Alice Wolfson, San Francisco; Arnold Levinson, Pillsbury & Levinson LLP, San Francisco; Anthony Poidmore, Roseville; Linda Lawson, Meserve Mumper & Hughes LLP, Los Angeles; Horace Green, Green & Humbert, San Francisco; Francis Torrence, Wilson Elser Moskowitz Edelman & Dicker LLP, San Francisco; J. Russell Stedman, Barger & Wolen LLP, San Francisco

susan_mcrac@dailyjournal.com