

# History

RWG is proud of its longstanding commitment to helping California shape its future and the role we have played in the state's legal history for 70 years. The firm was formed as Richards, Watson, Smith & Van Petten in 1954, by the merger of the Law Offices of Richard Richards, and the firm of Watson & Beverly. Richard Richards was a successful Los Angeles trial lawyer and was also the Democratic nominee for the California State Senate from Los Angeles County – and thus the presumptive Senator-elect. Glenn Watson was a successful trial and appellate lawyer, specializing in real estate litigation. They had represented opposing parties in a commercial trial the previous year, and each had developed a respect for the other's skills as a lawyer.

Watson, Richards, and colleague Robert G. Beverly opened the firm's first offices in downtown Los Angeles in the fall of 1954. At the time, the firm maintained its founders' focus on real estate and business litigation. The attorneys were joined from the first day and for the next 43 years by Beth Donald, who served as both a Legal Secretary and Office Manager. From the early 1970s until her death in 1997, she was the Municipal Law Administrator – responsible for assisting City Clerks in preparing their meeting agendas, assisting City Attorneys in drafting resolutions and ordinances, handling the billing for most of the Firm's cities and maintaining (in her head) an encyclopedic database of California municipal law.

In 1956, Richard Richards was the Democratic nominee for the United States Senate. He was narrowly defeated in the 1956 general election by the Republican candidate, Thomas Kuchel. In 1958, Senator Richards easily won re-election to the State Senate – he represented the entire County of Los Angeles, with a population of more than 3 million. He worked closely with Democratic Governor Edmund G. "Pat" Brown, elected in 1958.

The earliest surviving firm invoice for legal services is dated February 7, 1955, and is addressed to a real estate client, Albert Veldhuizen. Watson and Beverly's work for Veldhuizen would prove to be a relationship that would change the course of RWG's history, and the course of local government in California. After assisting Veldhuizen with various real estate transactions for years, Glenn Watson and partner Robert G. Beverly helped Veldhuizen and other Dutch dairy farmers in the area negotiate the unfamiliar and treacherous path of municipal incorporation. The group of farmers feared that Los Angeles County would zone their agricultural land out of existence. So, the City of Dairy Valley was incorporated April 24, 1956, and proudly announced that it had a population of 3,500 persons and 100,000 cows. Veldhuizen served on the first City Council, and Watson was the first City Attorney. As the City's official history puts it, all was not smooth sailing in the early days: "Ensuing court battles kept City Attorney Glenn Watson busy, . . ." Dairy Valley changed its name to Cerritos in 1967, and there are now more people than cows in Cerritos.

After some transitions in personnel, in 1960 the name of the firm changed to Richards, Watson, Smith & Hemmerling. Also in 1960, the Democratic National Convention convened at the Los Angeles Sports Arena. As the City's most prominent Democrat, Sen. Richards served as official host for the Convention, delivered the welcoming address to delegates, and worked tirelessly to nominate Sen. John F. Kennedy for the Presidency. In 1962, Sen. Richards gave up his state Senate seat and was again his party's nominee for the United States Senate – and again he lost the general election. Richards returned to Los Angeles and resumed his career as a successful trial and

appellate lawyer. But he was always addressed as “Senator Richards” within the firm and he remained active in politics in Los Angeles County for much of the rest of his life.

In 1964, founding partner Robert G. Beverly, who had served for nine years on the Manhattan Beach City Council, took a leave of absence from the firm after he was elected to a seat in the California State Assembly. He would spend the next 30 years in Sacramento, serving first in the Assembly, and later in the State Senate until he was forced to retire by term limits in 1996. Known as a moderate Republican and praised by colleagues on both sides of the aisle for his legislative skills, Beverly’s legislative career is probably best-remembered for the Song-Beverly Acts, landmark bipartisan consumer protection laws that served as models for similar legislation in other states and later evolved into California’s “Lemon Law.” He often recounted that his favorite piece of legislation was a bill he authored that allowed diners to take home their un-finished bottles of wine from restaurants. He told the Los Angeles Times that he persuaded then-Governor Jerry Brown to sign the bill by characterizing it as a law that would encourage “temperance” among restaurant diners.

In 1968, Sen. Richards was working hard to elect Sen. Robert F. Kennedy President. He spent considerable time that year working with a long-time friend, Beverly Hills lawyer Harry L. Gershon. In the Fall of 1968, Richards persuaded Gershon to join the firm. Harry brought his antitrust, entertainment, and franchise litigation practice to the firm and spent the next 35 years with the firm as a partner, adding his name to the firm’s in 1973.

Also in 1968, Glenn Watson helped incorporate the City of Carson and became its first City Attorney. The firm represented the City in all its legal matters for decades.

The 1970s were characterized by big cases and big business deals. Harry Gershon handled antitrust, franchise, and unfair competition litigation in California and throughout the country. Glenn Watson emerged as one of the state’s leading authorities in the field of municipal law. Senator Richards was special litigation counsel to the State of Alaska, handling all the State’s larger condemnation cases. And newly arrived partner Mark L. Lamken brought the firm its first major work for developers and savings & loan associations.

In 1971, a tumultuous recall election led to the seating of a new City Council in the City of Seal Beach, a city the firm still represents today. The recall campaign also spawned protracted libel litigation by the ousted councilmembers, in which the firm represented the leaders of the recall effort. In 1972, James K. Herbert and Glenn Watson were victorious in *Curtis v. Board of Supervisors*, a landmark municipal law case that guaranteed all residents – as opposed to only property owners - the right to vote on municipal incorporations. The litigation led directly to the incorporation of the City of Rancho Palos Verdes in 1973, which the firm represented for over 40 years.

As the firm’s public law practice expanded rapidly, the firm hired its first associate who worked exclusively on municipal law matters in 1973. That same year, partner Ronald M. Greenberg argued and prevailed (in part) before the United States Supreme Court in *Moor v. County of Alameda*, a civil rights case arising out of the civil disturbance at People’s Park in Berkeley in 1969. In 1975, the firm moved its offices to the 38th floor of the brand-new Security

Pacific Plaza, located on Bunker Hill in Los Angeles, which would be the main office for over 25 years. 1976 marked the expansion of the firm's practice into public finance and municipal bond law. In 1978 the firm reorganized from a partnership to a Professional Corporation. The name remained unchanged.

The 1980s saw significant growth in the firm, particularly in the representation of public agency clients, and our lawyers made significant contributions to the development of public agency law. In 1982 we assisted in the incorporation of the City of Agoura Hills, and Gregory Stepanicich was named the first City Attorney. In 1983, we represented the City of Carson as the California Supreme Court unanimously upheld the constitutionality of the City's mobilehome rent control ordinance in *Carson Mobilehome Park Owners' Assn. v. City of Carson*. The firm's lawyers would subsequently defend mobilehome rent control decisions for various cities.

The City of West Hollywood was incorporated in 1984, and the firm was appointed to represent the City as City Attorney. Our lawyers also were appointed City Attorney in Westlake Village, Beverly Hills, Palmdale and Norwalk. The firm also became special counsel to the Redevelopment Agencies in Blythe, Coachella and Manteca. By the end of the decade, more than half of the firm's revenue came from public sector clients and that percentage has continued to grow over the years.

In 1986, partner Gilbert Dreyfuss retired, and the firm's name changed to Richards, Watson & Gershon, a Professional Corporation. In 1988, Senator Richard Richards passed away after an extended battle with cancer. In 1989, the Firm was retained to represent 29 cities sued for contribution and remediation cost recovery in a Superfund case arising out of the toxic clean-up at the Operating Industries, Inc. landfill, a massive piece of litigation that would last for over a decade.

Responding to political change, in 1991 the firm helped incorporate the City of Malibu and was appointed to represent the City as its first City Attorney. Also in 1992, RWG lawyers drafted landmark open space protection ballot measures for the City of Monrovia which, once passed by the voters, helped lead to the acquisition by the City and preservation of over 200 acres of hillside wilderness property. It would be the first of several open space and historic preservation laws RWG drafted for its clients.

In 1993, Glenn Watson and a team of RWG attorneys prevailed in the California Supreme Court in *Roberts v. City of Palmdale*, one of the most important public agency law cases in decades. This unanimous decision established that the attorney-client privilege as applied to public agencies and their legal counsel prevails over provisions of the Brown Act and the Public Records Act. The Supreme Court affirmed that public agency lawyers have the right to provide confidential legal advice to their clients, in a case where a member of the public was attempting to force the disclosure of a privileged memo from the city attorney to that attorney's clients.

1996 also was a landmark year for ballot measures that impacted local government. The voters passed Proposition 208, which created a comprehensive system of campaign finance laws, and Proposition 218, which expanded voter approval rights for local taxes and assessments. RWG lawyers were at the forefront of helping public entities

understand and respond to these new measures.

In 1996 and 1997, veteran municipal lawyers James Markman and Peter Thorson joined RWG, bringing eight new city clients to the firm along with a substantially expanded geographic footprint. Also in 1997, RWG opened offices in Orange County and San Francisco. The City of Fairfield became the firm's first city attorney client in Northern California in 1997. The firm's practice in redevelopment, public finance and environmental law expanded throughout the 1990's.

In 2000, RWG became legal counsel to the Los Angeles County Children and Families First, Proposition 10 Commission, a new kind of public entity formed to spend Los Angeles County's share of tobacco tax revenues. In the years since, RWG has helped First 5 LA (as it has come to be known) invest over \$1 billion for the benefit of children aged 0-5 in Los Angeles County. In November 2001, the firm moved its Los Angeles office across the street on Bunker Hill to the South Tower of the Wells Fargo Plaza. The move proved to be energizing for the firm, which continued to expand its public agency practice. In 2002, RWG successfully defended an Alameda County gun-control ordinance which was challenged in the California Supreme Court in the important Second Amendment case *Nordyke v. King*.

In 2000, the City Attorneys Department of the League of California Cities recognized Glenn Watson for his contributions to the field of municipal law, with a gathering attended by the dozens of California city attorneys Glenn trained and mentored during his career. Glenn retired from the practice of law in 2001 and passed away in 2010.

RWG lawyers helped form, and served as counsel to, the Metro Gold Line Construction Authority, a unique Joint Powers Authority, which built the light rail transit extension from Union Station to Pasadena. The Gold Line extension began full-time operations in July 2003, and then further extension was constructed from Pasadena to Azusa. This was just one of RWG's contributions to transit improvements in Southern California over the years, as we have represented the Burbank-Glendale-Pasadena Airport Authority, and we also represented the I-5 Consortium of Cities in connection with I-5 improvement projects, among other clients. In June 2003, seven of the firm's lawyers co-authored chapters in the newly-published C.E.B. treatise, *California Administrative Mandamus*, evidence of the depth of the firm's experience in this area.

As we celebrated our 50th anniversary in 2004, RWG became City Attorney for the Cities of Highland, Calimesa, and Yucaipa, increasing the firm's presence in the Inland Empire. In 2004 the United States Supreme Court granted RWG's petition for certiorari filed in *City of Rancho Palos Verdes v. Abrams*, a case about cities' authority to regulate radio antennae. The case was argued in 2005 and the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the City. In 2005 and after, in response to the Legislature's adoption of AB 1234, RWG became one of the leading providers of state-mandated ethics training sessions for local government officials.

Harry L. Gershon retired from the practice of law in 2002, and passed away in 2007.

In 2008, RWG Lawyers led by litigator Robert Ceccon won a huge victory for the County of Ventura in *Alvis v. Ventura County*, two lawsuits brought by over 80 plaintiffs seeking damages from the County as a result of the massive La Conchita landslide. Despite 10 unfortunate deaths in the incident and the destruction of 16 homes, the County prevailed against all liability theories under the design immunity offered by California State law. It was the first design immunity case in over two decades to address the approval element of design immunity.

2011 marked a seismic shift in local government, as Governor Brown's budget deal inexplicably included the dissolution of California Redevelopment Agencies, one of the most successful economic development and community improvement tools in history. This change led to a re-tooling for redevelopment lawyers, who were forced to become dissolution lawyers. RWG helped dozens of redevelopment agencies to form successor agencies, and start the lengthy process of winding down RDA business. This led to extensive, and continuing, work for the City of Los Angeles, among many other cities.

Also in 2011, RWG became City Attorney in Indio, adding to the firm's extensive presence in the Coachella Valley. In 2013 and 2014, RWG lawyers negotiated and drafted development agreements with Goldenvoice that retained the world-famous Coachella and Stagecoach music festivals in Indio for the long term, and provided for the City to be compensated for City services and impacts. In 2011, RWG lawyers helped to incorporate California's newest city, the City of Jurupa Valley in Riverside County. In 2013, RWG lawyers prevailed in *Conejo Wellness Center v. City of Agoura Hills*, the first reported case to hold that cities could ban medical marijuana establishments.

In 2012, the firm became City Attorney in Moorpark, our first city attorney client in Ventura County. In 2015 RWG began to represent the City of Covina as City Attorney. Also in 2015, RWG lawyers prevailed for the County of Ventura in a significant environmental protection case, *Fishback v. County of Ventura*. In a huge illegal dumping case, RWG Attorneys successfully convinced the court to order a complete clean-up by the property owner, as well as a \$21.7 million fine payable to the County. It was the first California case ever to end in a judgment imposing significant statutory penalties for the illegal disposal of solid waste.

In 2016, RWG helped the City of Agoura Hills close a long effort to preserve the large property known as "Cheseboro Meadow," once slated for development as a large school and later for residential development, as permanent open space. That same year, RWG attorneys helped the City of Monrovia culminate a decades-long project with the opening of the Monrovia Hillside Wilderness Preserve.

Also in 2016, the firm helped the Burbank-Glendale-Pasadena Airport Authority to end a long disagreement with the City of Burbank and local residents, through a complex agreement to provide for limited expansion of the airport. The agreement was later approved by Burbank voters through a ballot measure.

The history of RWG is long and diverse. It continues to be written every single day, by new generations of RWG lawyers. The constant, however, between current RWG lawyers and staff and those who founded our firm in 1954, is the unyielding commitment to quality, integrity and zealous advocacy on behalf of our clients.