

## Sheppard Mullin's big shift

BY BILL LASCHER

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As the Santa Barbara branch of Los Angeles-based Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton reshuffles its roster, the firm's local leaders are looking forward to a new space at which associates and clients can feel a little more comfortable.

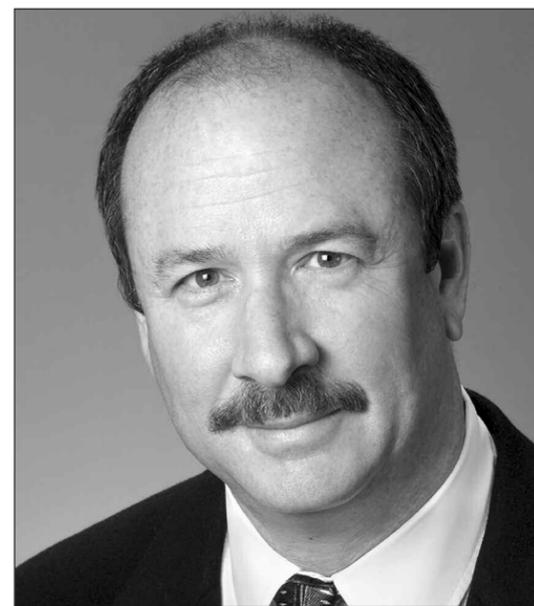
On Nov. 20, Sheppard Mullin's nine Santa Barbara attorneys and their supporting staff will begin a 7-year lease at a Chapala Street location that was previously occupied by a company that provided insurance for missile manufacturers. The airy third story office includes three conference rooms, a patio with a view of Downtown and the Riviera, underground parking and secure access.

"This is an unsurpassed space in Santa Barbara," Jeff Dinkin, a labor and employment practice partner and the office's managing partner, said. "We were blown away the minute we walked in. The functionality of it and our ability to house lawyers who want to have a space that is appropriate for their practice, you can't beat it. Our other space, we just outgrew it, not necessarily in terms of the size of it, but in terms of the quality of the space that we wanted."

The move will also offer a fresh start, as the firm, which employs 490 attorneys nationwide, welcomes Brady M. Bustany and Scott R. Lindley to its Santa Barbara office.

Lindley and Bustany will help Sheppard Mullin make up some lost ground when two of its Santa Barbara partners, Joe Nida and Joehl Ohlgren retire Jan. 1, 2007.

Sheppard Mullin policy requires that attorneys retire by Jan. 1 of the year following their 65th birthdays. Nonetheless, Nida and Ohlgren are both likely to continue to make contributions to the local legal community. Nida, a corporate practice partner with Sheppard Mullin and a founder of its Santa Barbara office, is expected to go into private practice. Ohlgren, a partner in the firm's finance and bankruptcy practice group, on the other hand, will remain "of counsel" at Sheppard Mullin, where he will



From left, Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton partners Tom Hopkins and Jeff Dinkin.

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offer legal services but not handle specific cases.

Sheppard Mullin first came to Santa Barbara in 2001 when it acquired Nida & Malone. Since then, it has operated from offices on the corner of Anacapa and De La Guerra, that, despite its location in the heart of the downtown area, was impractical for a national law firm that handles major corporate deals.

With the lease expiring this year, the firm enlisted broker Steve Hayes to find a location that would maintain a strong Santa Barbara identity while offering facilities more on par with other Sheppard Mullin offices in places such as Los Angeles, New York and Washington D.C.

"Office space in Santa Barbara is tough," Mergers and acquisitions team leader and corporate practices partner Tom Hopkins said. "To find something of this quality is a no-brainer."

Having office space comparable to more metropolitan locations is important because it allows Sheppard Mullin attorneys to offer comparable services and support its growth. Where it once handled purely corporate issues, the Santa Barbara firm now can offer other services such as labor and employment practices.

"We do work that I wouldn't have been able to handle at the firm I was with previously or the firm I could have been with because of the level of support we get from having a national firm with 50 labor lawyers," Dinkin said. "When we do labor work with our clients, we're able to access the work product and thoughts of 50 of the top labor lawyers in the state."

The depth of support from Sheppard Mullin's nationwide operations adds value for clients, Dinkin said, but the Santa Barbara location gives the firm access to the client base of the tri-county business community. The new location also leaves open the possibility for the firm to expand its Santa Barbara practice in the future.

Areas that may expand include commercial litigation and real estate practices. Intellectual property and a high end trust and estates practice are also capabilities Sheppard Mullin hopes to keep strong.

"We don't expect that we will ever diversify the office to the point that we're offering every single practice area that the firm has," Hopkins said. "But we think that there are certainly areas that we'd like to add to the local office that are a good fit for the business community."